



DENISE  
HALL

JUDGEMENT

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

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**To my readers:**

Once upon a time, a long, long time ago, I was fifteen years old, green as a twig, very interested in CP and I wrote this book. I have since grown up and experienced some of what interests me the most in this, my chosen genre. Having taken the rights to my book back from the now defunct Blue Moon Books, I have now revised the hell out of it. This is the re-written version, which I can now claim, with pride, as being mine. I wouldn't even line the kitty litter pan with the original.

Enjoy!

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## CHAPTER ONE

*His over-sized hands were hard and callused, yet strangely gentle as they rubbed the soap over mine, lathering my arms in a coat of bright pink bubbles. Steam rose from the running tap water to fog the dirty tin mirror. It made little difference as, obscured by dents and rust, a reflection could scarcely be seen. But I studied my impassive face anyway, and he spoke to me softly, taking great pains to keep his voice even and calm, as though he were trying to coax a frightened doe to his hand.*

*"That's the way. Good girl, let's get the other hand now. Okay, we're almost done."*

*I stood still and straight beside him, my immobility leaving him lightly holding my hands, washing them in his. Through unrevealing eyes, I watched the lather change from pink to gray as it soaked the ink from my fingertips. My prints had been taken when first I was brought to the Los Angeles Police Department. To identify me, they had said. But I couldn't understand why. I already knew who I was. My Master named me Mischief years ago.*

*The detective was nice. He was not a tall man, but more of a medium build. With his graying head bent over my hands and the sink, I could see he was becoming slightly bald on top. He had combed his hair over to hide the spot.*

*He was not paunchy, as older men generally became. He still had the lean, muscular figure of a man much younger than the lines on his weathered face suggested. And his voice*

*was gentle and low as he spoke nonsensical words of comfort to me. Were I not already so frightened, I probably would have enjoyed the calming ministrations that were so closely akin to my Master's own touch.*

*"Good." The Detective gave a satisfied nod. "Now we rinse."*

*He passed both our hands under the steady stream of water, cupping tepid pools in the palm of his hand to wash all the way up my elbows.*

*Good.*

*I was momentarily startled and quickly glanced in the mirror to see if my face retained its appropriate degree of impassivity. It had.*

*Good. My Master said that word a lot, too. I wondered, and not for the first time, if Daymon Tane, the Master of the Masters, had begun to look for me yet. Would he even know where to find me? Tears threatened, but I blinked them back. Struggle though I did to smooth the fear from my expression, my mouth started to tremble and quiver as so often happened when I was scolded.*

*Wetting a coarse, brown washcloth, the Detective rubbed it over a piece of the cheap pink soap until froths of bubbles foamed up again. He passed it over my face and neck, then chuckled ruefully. "Well, what do you know. There's a woman under all this dirt."*

*I held perfectly still, letting him move my head as he wished. I closed my eyes, feeling the comforting touch pass across my cheeks, my forehead and eyelids. If I shut out his voice, I could almost pretend it was my Master who cared for*



*me and not this stranger—kind though he was—who had taken me under his wing.*

*Then came the questions.*

*"Who put the welts on you, honey?" the detective quietly asked me. He wiped the soap away with the freshly rinsed washcloth, starting me from my thoughts. "You don't have to tell me, if you don't want to. But—" he shrugged, feigning a nonchalance which the tightening of his mouth contradicted. "—if it were me, I wouldn't want anyone to hurt me like that. I could help you, you know. Honey, I could fix it so nobody ever hurt you again. If you talk to me, I guarantee you'll never have to go back to the one who did this."*

*My mask of indifference broke and fell away, revealing naked terror. Though I struggled to keep silent as a Personal should, a low keening wail rose up from my throat. The welts criss-crossing my bottom pulsed and throbbed as I sank to my haunches, forcing them to stretch over bruised, discipline-damaged flanks.*

*Hugging my shoulders, I rocked myself. I tried to pretend my Master was there to keep me comforted with familiarity. I needed him to keep me disciplined and safe. I did not want to go with the Detective, I wanted to go home.*

*"Missing," I sobbed.*

*Why didn't he understand? I tried to enunciate clearly, but it was so hard to remember how English sentences pieced together. I know I got half the things I tried to say wrong, but it had been so long since I'd had any need for the language of my birth that, but for a stray phrase here and there, most of*

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*it was faded from my mind. All replaced by my Master's words, in my Master's tongue, now that I belonged to him.*

*So how to tell the detective that my Master had brought me with him when he came to this awful city for a meeting with the other masters? How could I tell him that, through my own foolishness, we had gotten separated and I was now lost?*

*I loved Tane! I did not want to leave him. I did not want to leave Judgment. I was tired of the city with its loud noises and strange people. I was tired of being frightened. I buried my face in my hands, remembering my home and my Master.*

*Oh, how I wish I was there...*

\* \* \* \*

My one memory from my free life was of the gypsies. I was betrayed by Hollywood. All the movies portrayed them as brightly clothed people, who worked for Dracula, wore gold earrings, stole children and traveled in packs, dancing for money to the jingle of tambourines in front of rickety wooden caravans. In not one movie did I ever see gypsies driving taxi cabs and picking up tourists at the airport. My particular gypsy didn't even wear an earring. If he had, I might not have climbed so readily into the back of that cab.

I don't remember losing consciousness. My next waking remembrance was of the three days I spent in the back of that dirty van on my way to Judgment. The incline up the mountainside was steep and the road unpaved. Every bump and jostle clanked our chains and tossed us haphazardly about in that great iron cage, which was built into the backs

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of the gypsies' very old vehicles. There were fifteen of us; coughing, weeping, shivering and nude. All terrified beyond belief and huddled up against the bars as we strained to catch glimpses of our destination between the fluttering window curtains.

Judgment, a great dark fortress from a long ago age, impregnable, built back into the rocky earth to hide its immense size within the mountain itself. And the portcullis, black iron teeth surrounded by arching stone walls, crowning the top of that narrow, unpaved road and barring the way to intruders. The gypsy vans, three in all, drove undeterred straight to it.

The girl next to me whispered superstitions in broken, Russian-tainted English. This was Hell's Mountain. Mothers threatened their children with tales of this place and of the Devil, still reputed to live within. Though I did not know it then, I was to become intimately acquainted with him.

The manacles on my wrists clanked as I moved to grip the bars, pressing my face to the cold metal as we reached the portcullis. The vans paused here, idling but a moment before a groan sounded from deep within those walls. There was a squeal of metal scraping metal and then the iron teeth began to rise, allowing us entrance into that dark, gaping maw.

The Russian girl broke down, weeping, but I hardly spared her a glance. She and others like her had been crying since I first came back to awareness three days ago. The rest of us all shivered in abject silence, helplessly wondering which of us—or if all of us—would be sacrificed to the mountain Devil's cruel intentions. All I could think was: oh please, dear God,

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not me! I was an American. Things like this weren't supposed to happen to me. Another Hollywood betrayal. But one which I had been loathed to let die as easily as my first misconception. In my stubbornness, I had fought my captors at every resting stop along the way. Looking back, my efforts were pitiful, to say the least, resulting only in my obtaining a belt-stripped back and much harsher treatment from the gypsies than any of my sisters in suffering.

I turned my head, shifting to the back of the cage to watch as the heavy, wrought-iron gate fell shut behind the last of the vans. The entire mountain seemed to tremble with the force of that closure. I felt the vibrations of it within me and the awful finality was more terrifying than anything I had experienced in all my twenty years.

The vans came to a stop in a vast, empty, stone-cobbled courtyard. I felt the vehicle rock as, in the separated front, the gypsy men stepped outside. After only the slightest of pauses, the back doors swung open. One at a time, my companions were taken from the cage and led around the van, out of sight. They went almost docilely—I think they had quite given up—until the only one left in that first cage was me.

While my sister captives had been escorted each to her fate by two gypsy men a piece, all four men from my van now appeared at the mouth of the cage. They stared at me in silence, studying while I cowered in the very back, my every instinct screaming for me not to make this easy for them. It was a lost battle from the beginning. Eventually, they would

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crawl in after me and then, as this morning, I knew I would be whipped.

As if on cue, one of the gypsies removed his belt. His dark eyes bored into mine, holding little patience for me and even less pity. He beckoned me to a spot on the cobble-stone ground before him. If I was going to cooperate, then this was the only chance I would be given to do so without pain-filled consequences.

My legs failed me. So did my courage and, after three dry-eyed days, tears of hopelessness filled my eyes. There was no escaping this. Even if by some miracle I did manage to dodge my captor's grasping hands, how could I possibly get past the portcullis. I sank to the bottom of the cage, sobbing in rage and despair.

In the end, it took all four of them to drag me from the back of the van, kicking and screaming as only the doomed can. Nine vicious swipes of that belt struck my shoulders and back, and the courtyard sang with the echoes of each blow. But not my screams. I bit them back, refusing to give him that satisfaction.

By the time I, too, was led around the van, the fight had all but been whipped from me.

At least until I saw the racks.

All forty women from the vans hung from them, side by side, gagged and blindfolded, their wrists tied high above their heads, their legs splayed wide apart, ankles tied to metal rings hammered into the stones beneath them. Like meat hanging in a butcher's freezer, we were a market of wares set out for buyers as not yet in attendance.

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I began to struggle all over again, sheer panic winning from me the screams that I had denied the belt. I was dragged to the end of that long display line. The gag was forced past my teeth; the blindfold over my eyes. No matter how I twisted or fought to pull away, I was made to take my place among the others. My manacles were removed and abrasive ropes took their place. Impartial hands forced my ankles apart and I was hoisted up by my wrists until my toes barely touched the cold, stone ground.

Then the wait began.

If I concentrated, I could keep on my tiptoes, which lessened the painful strain on my shoulders and welted back. But when the icy mountain air swept through the courtyard, shivering us in our bonds, I couldn't even do that much.

Not far away, the gypsies talked and laughed. The smell of sweet pipe and cigarette smoke filled the air as they passed the time. I don't know how long I hung there, immobile, with arms aching. I kept trying to shift in my bonds, hoping to find a position that hurt a little less than the rest. By tipping my head between my shoulders and relaxing completely, I found a brief respite from the hurt. But then that position too quickly became excruciating, and I had to shift again.

The pain slowly swallowed me in its embrace, clouding my senses. Not far away, I heard a soft sniffing as another woman sobbed around her gag. Others groaned. I think, by now, that I was one. And then, a sound different from the rest....

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Somewhere down the display line, I heard footsteps and a low, guttural voice mingling with a familiar gypsy one.

Whatever was going to happen here, was now taking place.

My muscles spasmed. I trembled as the waves of agony rippled through my limbs, washing over and through me, all consuming and hot. The rack vibrated as a girl was taken down and the voices drifted closer.

Did I lose consciousness or did the pain just devour my awareness of all else? The girl next to me whimpered once, then suddenly I felt a gloved hand roving from my belly, to my hip and down the outside of my left leg. By now, the pain had weakened me so that I could barely move as the assessing fingers drifted back up the inside of my thigh and stopped at the slight tuft of curls found there.

"Americano," the gypsy said.

And another voice, low and laughing, came back in English, "Really?"

I lifted my head when I heard it, mewling through my gag.

"A natural red-head," the low voice admired. "Lovely. High cheekbones, full lips. Her face alone should bring a good price. Mm. Firm buttocks."

The gloved hand gripped me there, jostling me in my bonds as he felt the firmness of my hind quarters. Agony exploded up through my arms and down into my legs, radiating from my joints until I thought my limbs would be pulled from their sockets. The voice dimmed as my head lolled.

"Her bonds are too tight," someone else said.

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The low voice said something in another language. When the gypsy answered, he walked around to my back.

"You've damaged the product," he said mildly.

What the gypsy replied, I don't know. But the man behind me leaned closer, the warmth of his breath caressing the shell of my ear as he murmured, "Are you going to be troublesome, Red Hair?"

I jerked my head away from him when he pressed the most unwanted of kisses to the back of my nape. He laughed, the sound of a man indulging a favored but unruly child. Then either he moved on, or I passed out.

In the next instant I fell into the cradle of someone's arms as I was cut down from the rack. Even then there was to be no relief. Neither blindfold nor gag was removed. My throbbing wrists were unbound only to be tethered in a gentler but no less restricting bond behind me. With a supporting hand at each of my elbows, I was slowly led away on legs that shook so badly that every third step buckled my knees; it was a wonder I could walk at all.

The icy stones under my bare feet gave way to an equally chilled tile floor. I was cold all over and shivering from it, but a sudden lack of wind convinced me that I was now within the dark fortress itself. Voices sounded periodically around me, the deep rumbling of masculine tones, all speaking in a language that was guttural and hard and impossible for me to recognize. With a hand at each of my elbows, my knees occasionally failing to hold me upright, I was slowly guided down a flight of stairs into a slightly warmer room.



"Confine the rest for the night," commanded a deep voice near me. A hand cupped my chin, lifting my blindfolded face. "This one will stay the evening with me."

It was pure and simple horror that gripped me as I was released into the grasp of the same broad fingers that had examined me upon the rack. I panicked, fighting my gag and the ropes that bound my wrists, stepping back as if I could get away. But his gentle touch was also unyielding and he kept me, blind and fettered, easily in hand.

"Bit of fight still in that one," another man behind me said. There was amusement in his voice, which only deepened my panic and sparked in my breast a tiny fire of outrage.

"Stay," the low voice softly whispered, but it was a command nonetheless. Unable to do aught else, but for my trembling, I stilled my struggles. To the other, my captor answered, "I believe I can manage."

As the second man walked away, laughing, I heard him call, "Let me know if you need help. For a turn, I'd be happy to hold her for you."

I was to be raped. I moaned my horror through the cloth bindings.

"Relax," my captor told me. He must have removed his gloves, for in the next instant I felt the heat of his bare palm close over my naked breast. My nipples, already peaked from fear and the chilly air, were easy targets. He teased and rolled them between thumb and forefinger, feeling the weight of my breast in his warm hand. Again, his low voice rumbled, "Lovely."

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Helpless to protest, I could do nothing but move in the direction to which he led me. I felt the minute breeze of an opening door, and the cold tile floor was replaced by the feel of plush carpeting beneath me. Oh, and the warmth. I heard the familiar pop and snap of a well-started fire before me and the soft latching of the door as it was closed somewhere behind. I lifted my head, listening hard, but his footsteps were no more than bare whispers as he came back to me. I jumped his caress, the warmth of his hand gently parted my unbrushed hair from off my back, sweeping the carrot-colored mass until it all hung over my shoulder, the feathered tips tickling my naked breast.

"What mischief did you cause to merit such treatment, I wonder."

As I remained gagged, I know he was not concerned with receiving an answer.

Careful not to touch the welts—now beginning to burn as I gradually heated in the warmth of the room—those unseen hands explored me, caressing down my arms, lingering at my bound wrists, then continuing on to the very tips of my fingers. He circled me, his touch smoothing over my shoulders, down between my breasts to my belly. It was my exhaustion, I told myself, that made his touch seem so soothing, and that was almost frightening in and of itself. I trembled as he circled my waist, my hips, caressing my bottom, my thighs and then between.

My shivers now had absolutely nothing to do with cold. No part of me was left untouched. His hands even drifted down

to stroke my feet. It wasn't until I felt the pain there that I realized the gypsy's bonds had cut into my ankles.

"Shh," he said when I stiffened in reflex. "It's just a small abrasion where the ropes were too tight."

When he stood again, his hands wandered again, up my shivering body to my face and around to the back of my head. As the gag was removed, my teeth began to chatter. I shook all over.

"P-please," I stammered and his hands upon me paused. What gypsy brutality had failed to do, his gentleness accomplished within mere minutes. I could not keep my mouth from quivering or the desperate sobs from choking their way out of my chest. The blindfold soaked up my tears. "Please, I want to go home." My knees failed. I sank into a heap on the carpet at his feet, rocking myself as I wept. "I want to go home!"

"I am your home," he said above me. "You belong to me now. You just don't know it yet."

There was victory in his voice and absolutely nothing I could do about it. I was nothing. An object that had been bartered and sold, and would now be used to another's satisfaction with no regard for my own.

I bowed in my misery, pressing my forehead to his booted foot as I wept. "Please ... please..."

"You have a lot to learn, Red-hair."

My new life, which I personally believed for the next three years to be an unspeakable Hell, began in a night born of torment.

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## CHAPTER TWO

*Panic welled inside me. Hugging the robe to my chest, I stood in the detention cell exactly as the Detective left me. My room for the night was ice cold and no bigger than the space required for a small cot to fill. Lights Out had been given over an hour ago when the caged door behind me was slammed shut and locked from the outside. And though I knew it was wrong, I still held the robe the female detention officer had given me. That it should be in my arms at all was a crime that I knew my Master would not painlessly forgive. And I trembled because this had been a day full of crimes on my part. I feared the retaliation I knew I deserved.*

*Why, even the Matron officer was angry with me. Though it boggled my mind to believe it, she had all the airs and authorities of any master at Judgment. Perhaps, female though she may be, perhaps she was a master of the Outside. In which case, she must know me for the disobedient Personal that I was. Maybe she even thought me a runaway. Maybe that was why she punished me now. Forcing me to stand at attention for so long, with me all but swaying on my feet with exhaustion, and still she did not return to undress me for bed or to lay me down so I could sleep.*

*My stomach rumbled and clenched; I was so painfully hungry! Tears spilled over my cheeks but I, a model Personal, did not move to wipe them away. Oh how angry Tane would be were he to witness this lack of self-composure. I forced the sobs within me to still, smoothing my features back into*

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*an expressionless mask. But now and then my shoulders still shook, making it impossible to retain my stance of perfect posture unbrokenly.*

*I hated this place. They were so cruel here. Even during the worst at Judgment, even the lowest female among us was never starved. When we did wrong, when the masters were angry, they punished us, then forgave and let our misbehaviors be forgotten. Bed time was always a constant. They never left us standing at attention for hours on end. My legs shook, the muscles panging with fatigue and still I remained as I had been left. I knew better than to disobey.*

*"Hey!" A female officer with a voice I did not recognize rapped upon my cage door with a club-like stick.*

*For one brief, glorious moment, I felt a surge of relief. Another female master. Surely she must be here to put me to bed. Finally now I would be allowed to rest. I stood perfectly straight, as still as could be on such wobbly knees, and waited for her to assume command of me.*

*"Lights Out was an hour ago, Miss High-N-Mighty. Get your pajamas on and get in that bed!"*

*My relief died hard within me, slaughtered by shock. Get in bed? I almost forgot myself and turned around to stare at her.*

*"Did you hear me?" the woman demanded, rapping again upon the bars of my cell. "I said get in that bed. Go on! Right now! If I gotta come in there, you're gonna be in a world of hurt, girl!"*

*It was a Personal's duty to obey the orders of the masters—any master. More than duty, it was her pride. But*

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*never in all my time as a Personal had I ever been given a command so contradictory to the edicts of my Master, Tane. Or so contrary to the edicts laid down for all Personals housed at Judgment.*

*I shivered as I took two tiny steps, my knees bumping up against the cold metal bar just beneath the thin mattress of the cot. I lay the pajamas in a small but tidy stack to one side of me. Then I stared at them, a new surge of dismay rising in my breast.*

*Put them on, the officer had ordered, and I had to obey. I had to.*

*But how, a voice inside me wailed.*

*Swallowing hard, I reached down to lift the thin, white fabric with trembling fingertips, and in a flash of memory, heard again my Master's shout of fury, "No. No! NO!"*

*So vivid was the image that I all but felt again the vicious sting of his belt, lashing once more across my buttocks and thighs.*

*With soundless sobs of despair, I snatched back my hands and clutched them to my chest. Sinking to my haunches, I rocked myself, raspy gasps breaking free of my tightly constricted throat.*

*Where was my Master? When would he come for me? To dress me for bed; to lift the blankets and allow me the precious luxury of sleep? I needed him to be here, rocking hard and strong between my thighs, taking his pleasure from my willing body in all the ways that he desired. I would not even mind if he allowed me no other satisfaction then that of feeling him within me and knowing that he was contented.*

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*"You think you're the only one ever spent a night in jail?" the woman snapped impatiently. "This is the last time I'm gonna tell you! Get in that bed!"*

*Shaking, hardly able to see through my tears, I crawled onto the edge of that worn and well-used cot. Tense, halfway expecting Tane to melt from the shadows, the buckle of his fearsome belt wrapped about his hand, ready to punish me, I cringingly leaned back. In doing so, I accidentally knocked the bundled pajamas on the floor.*

*As though bored, the female officer said, "You're gonna get cold unless you use the blankets. Cover up."*

*Another contradictory command, even worse than the last. A Personal's pride was obedience, and my fingers fumbled to peel the edge of the blankets back from the wall. As the officer moved off down the hall, I managed to draw a small square of coarse cloth up over one shoulder. Curling onto my side, I crossed my hands up between my breasts and drew my knees to my chest.*

*Cold air poured down on me from a ceiling air conditioner. Miserable, lonely and afraid, I closed my eyes against further tears. The pillow was already damp enough from my sorrow. I pretended to cough so no one would recognize my sobs for what they were.*

*I wanted my Master...*

\* \* \* \*

*I stood in water about six inches deep. Although no longer tied behind me, my wrists were now bound to thick leather straps buckled tightly round each of my thighs. Running like*

this was difficult, as I discovered almost immediately, but even worse this new method of restraint made it impossible for me to rip the blasted blindfold from my eyes and gain at least a half a chance at fighting this man, my captor, and his roving hands.

My gag had been removed, but only until, as my captor had told me, I proved that I could not keep a civil tongue or unless I tried to bite. Either, he had warned, would be met with more severe consequences than simple bondage.

Truth be told, I was too tired for defiance. So I stood as he bade me in the warm water, basking in the heat of the crackling fire, and I let him bathe me.

He was careful around the abrasions that marked my ankles and wrists. He was even more so with the welts upon my back. It barely hurt at all, not even when he smeared the open sores with antiseptic cream.

He washed my hair, cleaned under my fingernails as well as my toes. He even brushed my teeth, taking care to avoid the corners of my mouth where the gag had bruised and cut me. Then he shaved me: my legs, under my arms, and the tuft of carrot curls that crowned my sex. When I was as bare as an infant, he rinsed me with clean fresh water. For a moment, the warm sensation of liquid cascading through my hair, over my shoulders, down my breasts and back, felt so good that I could not help but lean back under the flow.

My unguarded moment of acquiesce was instantly rewarded. The heat of his mouth covered the tiny hollow at the base of my throat, causing me to gasp as his tongue dipped in to taste me. He cupped between my legs, his



fingers parting the wet folds. He seemed to know just where and how to touch me, and the unexpected, unwelcome pleasure arched me right up onto my toes, crying out in spite of myself. "No!"

His reply was simply, overwhelmingly, "Yes."

"Don't touch me!" I hissed, both frightened and infuriated. I struggled blindly to draw out of his grasp, turning my face away in case he should try to kiss my lips.

He caught my bottom in his free hand, pulling me right up to the edge of the tub. It was either lean against him or fall, and the strength of his grasp did not allow for the choice to be mine.

"No," I moaned when his fingers moved between my thighs. Tears again stung my eyes, soaking into my blindfold as his experienced touch brought my hips to bucking against him. As the pleasure intensified, so did my desperation. My head fell to his shoulder as I thrashed, his fingers evoking the first real twinges of orgasm within me, sending them rippling through my traitor's body. With no other avenue for fight left to me, I bit him savagely, grinding my teeth against the flesh of his arm until the coppery taste of blood filled my mouth.

The pleasure ceased abruptly. He yanked my head back with a fistful of my own long hair.

"You bit me," he said, his voice laden more with astonishment and even the tiniest hint of admiration, than anger.

I blindly spat his own blood back at him.

"Mm," he rumbled, so low and soft. "Americans. The first instinct is always to fight."

"And win," I snarled.

"You all say that, and yet none of your predecessors have. Not under my hand."

Shivering, bound and blindfolded and with far more bravado than I felt, I said, "Then I'll be the first!"

"Mm," he said again. It was a cold sound now. Whatever admiration he might have been inclined to feel had vanished from his tone. "Step."

His firm grip on my elbow didn't give me much choice and I did as he directed, lifting my leg to step blindly over the side of the tub. I stood upon the soft carpet, motionless while he gently rubbed my body with a soft towel. Again, no part of me was left untouched. When he parted the lips of my newly shaven pubis, I wanted so much to fight and kick and he would not even let me draw away. My single protesting step backwards was countered by a firm grip upon my arm and a sudden, stinging swat from his hand as it clapped the center of my bottom, catching both cheeks at once.

I jerked, crying out my hurt and surprise. My wrists strained against their restraints, his hold on my arm keeping me from ducking out of reach. I expected to be struck again, my fear made worse because I could not see the blow coming.

"You will not deny me access to this body again," he said softly. "You have lost that right. This body belongs to me, for as long as I choose to keep it, in any manner I choose to use it. There is pain enough to be found here with your compliance. To defy me will only make matters far, far worse."

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I trembled, releasing a shakily held breath. Despite the warmth of the fire at my back, his words left me utterly cold within. My bottom stung where he'd struck it, but my pride stung even more and the voice I heard hissing at him I scarcely recognized as my own. "Fuck you!"

His hands left me entirely. I barely heard him move, but a short distance away there was a soft wooden clatter and then the sound of something vaguely heavy being set on the floor in front of me. A chair, I think, for it creaked as he sat upon it and I felt an oblong wooden object placed flat against my bare leg.

"Do you know what this is?" he asked. When I stayed silent, he said, "Guess."

When I still said nothing, he turned me around and I quickly found myself sitting stiffly upon his lap, his thighs muscular and hard beneath me. His hand ran over my tangled hair, gathering the mass together at my back. With painstaking gentleness he began to brush my hair. He took such care with me, I never felt a single pull from a one of the snarls as he diligently worked the bristles through. And it was a long time before the bristles of that brush could move freely through my carrot tresses, top to bottom without a single hitch. The motions were so lulling, I almost fell asleep on his lap.

"How about now?" he asked softly, laying the cool wood flat against my thigh again. "What is it, do you think?"

And I answered him, "Hairbrush," because those gentle ministrations, coupled with the exhaustion of living for three

long days in a rocking, traveling cage, conspired to rob me of my anger.

"Hairbrushes have two uses," he said, and passed the bristles again through my smooth hair. "This is one."

I don't really know how he did it, it happened so quickly and so smoothly. One minute he had hold of my arm, and in the next, his hard thighs were under my hips and I was lying face-down across them.

"This is the other."

Without preamble the flat wooden head of that brush slapped the unprotected surface of my bottom. It jolted me upon his knee, igniting the most fearsome stinging against my skin where it hit, first upon my right nether cheek and then upon the left. The blows fell so quickly that the third hard smack was well landed before so much as a startled gasp tore past my lips. It was the fifth that jolted me from my shock and at last I found my voice.

The room echoed with the mingled sounds of his sharp, staccato smacks and my shrill cries. My bound hands could not get back to protect me and when I snapped my feet up to block the progress of the brush, he merely shifted his hold, struck the soles of my feet to drive them back to the floor and parted his knees to capture my legs between his.

His hand at the small of my back pressed me down until my bottom rounded over his thigh and the hairbrush attacked again, this time with a vengeance. I howled with the pain of it, but he was merciless.

"You will never again speak to me with disrespect," he said, that low voice calm and completely unaffected by my cries.

"No, please stop! Stop!"

"You will not speak to me with disrespect," he said again, as though patiently instructing a very young child.

"Yes! I swear! I promise!" I would have promised anything to stop this torment. "Please!"

I don't know how many times he hit me, but I was on fire from behind and on the verge of real tears before it ended.

He leaned sideways to lay the hairbrush on the floor and as he straightened again, his hand came to rest on my sore and throbbing buttocks. "I love red heads. The fair, pale skin marks so beautifully."

My tears cascaded free of me then. I bow my head, choking on my sobs, while his warm hand caressed the area he had so thoroughly punished not a moment before. He let me cry, allowing me to wail my misery to the floor but not to rise from his lap. The reason for this became brutally clear as I gradually regained control of myself.

"You will never be permitted to harm a Judgment master," he said.

I gasped as his caressing hand, which had administered such gentle comfort, suddenly turned violent against me. Once more the room was filled with the sound of spanking and my ragged sobs as I succumbed to his domination. Though he used only his bare palm this time, the punishment seemed to last longer and fell harder than with the awful hairbrush. And not just my bottom, this time he also spanked

the backs of my thighs, igniting a painful fire that had me rocking and kicking, completely frantic and yet unable to escape.

It felt forever before his hard hand came to a rest upon the summit of my throbbing buttocks. While I could barely draw breath, he was not even winded. "Well, infant. Are you suitably sorry?"

"Yes!" I garbled through my sobs. "Yes!"

"Yes, what?" he coaxed, his hand stroking the tops of my thighs where my imprisonment between his legs had not saved them from punishment.

I knew what he wanted me to say. My face flamed and I bow my head further, so very ashamed. "Y-yes, M-Master."

The tight hold of his thighs upon mine eased just long enough for him to release one of my legs. He parted it from its twin, forcing one leg into freedom before clamping down again upon my remaining limb. His hand smoothed over the rosy summits of both nether cheeks, his fingers trailing lightly between them, over my anus, and down into the quivering slit of my sex. He divided the lips, despite my anguished groan, and invaded my body.

"Mm, very tight." One finger became two and I shifted with discomfort as he stretched me open. My foot that was free scrambled against the floor for any kind of leverage with which to evade his touch, a vain and futile effort that stilled the instant he said, "Lie still."

I froze when his fingers pressed deep enough to test my maidenhood and the discomfort of it had me squealing through gritted teeth.

He stopped. "Oh, don't tell me..." And then he laughed softly. "Infant, have you come to me a virgin?"

I closed my eyes behind my blindfold, dreading what I knew he would do now. I couldn't answer. It was all I could do not to start crying all over again.

He took his fingers from me. "What a quandary this puts me in. Do I take my pleasure with your body, or leave you intact and double your sales price?"

I stiffened. I thought I had reached the bottom most point of my degradation, but it was all to happen over again, with a new master, another unknown devil, waiting out there for me somewhere. I started to kick and claw at him, but my sore bottom stopped me abruptly. Already bent over his knee, this was not the best of positions from which to initiate a rebellion. And I'd had enough of his hand for one night.

"What to do, what to do," he mused. He stroked down the sloop of my back. After a moment, his strong thighs released their inflexible hold on my captured leg and he helped me to stand.

I was not to be raped? I hardly dared to believe it, or that my reprieve would be due to something so simple as money.

Seeing a way out of this hell, I blurted, "I can pay you."

"Can you now?" I felt him stand beside me. He took my shoulders in his hands and turned me around.

"Whatever you want." My voice quavered. I had two hundred dollars in my savings account back in the States. That was all there was left after sinking every other cent into this one trip to Europe, my last ditch effort to experience freedom before the yoke of college and adulthood settled its

mantle of responsibility upon me. But at this point, I would have promised him anything, any amount of money necessary to get free. "Name your price."

He walked me slowly forward, guiding me where he desired me to go. "Any price to keep me from sliding into your sweet body?"

"Yes."

"And you'll pay it?" he asked.

"Yes!" I hissed. My legs bumped against something large and soft. A bed. I quickly jumped back and collided into the hard breadth of his chest. His arms came around me.

"Two cents," he rumbled, his tone mocking me.

"Unfortunately for you, I have had a fairly thorough look at your body tonight and I have not seen so much as one penny, much less two. So, how can you pay my price, Infant? Right here, right now?"

"Please..." Despairing, I broke under fresh pleading sobs.

"...I'll pay ... I'll pay whatever ... you want, just please..."

"You are beautiful in your misery," he murmured. "There is no amount of money that would entice me to let you go now, without first savoring all you have to offer."

I shook my head, sobbing helplessly. I had escaped nothing.

"Relax," he told me. "You may even find what I do with you pleasurable."

He held my arms, balancing me as he bade me kneel upon the edge of the bed. I was then bent forward over a mound of pillows, which he placed beneath my hips, as though I were little more than an oversized doll to be arranged for his liking.



I buried my face in the bedspread, smelling the clean masculine scent of it, wishing I were anyplace but here, as he propped my legs well apart.

He touched me everywhere, endlessly patient, in no hurry at all to simply take his pleasure and leave me to my misery. I wished I was dead. I tried to feel nothing, but he left me not even that. With practiced, knowing hands, he made my breasts ache and my nipples stiffen in his palms. He ignited a slow heat within my womb that branched out all through me. I gasped when he found my clit, my body responding so intensely to his touch. I felt horribly, horribly betrayed.

"Shall I allow you gratification tonight?" He slid one finger in and out of me, the pad of his thumb making a slow and practiced assault against the sensitive nub hidden within the naked folds of my female flesh. "I will be generous. Come for me, infant. Accept this little gift of pleasure, and then I will take mine. Come, your Master commands it."

My hips moved of their own accord. I didn't want it, but I was helpless to stop the shivers building in my womb, created by the relentless motions of his hand. I tensed. My legs shook. The sensation of that thick digit wiggling inside left me moaning, a low-pitched warbling sound, for my teeth had begun to chatter again.

"Come," he chanted near my ear. "Come for your Master."  
"No!"

One finger became two, filling me, stretching me to the limit of comfort, and touching a place inside me that brought me jerking against him on that mound of soft pillows. My hands clenched, my toes curled.

"Come," he commanded.

And I did, shouting and sobbing at once, convulsing powerfully as my body fell victim to the seduction of his touch and voice.

"I hate you!" I wept, my traitor's body vibrating with the lingering thrills of my orgasm.

"No," he corrected, and a cold lubricant was spread over my bottom's passage. His finger pushing the gel deep inside me, gliding in all the way to the first knuckle. "You are not permitted to hate."

I froze as I felt for the first time the solid head of him press against me. Automatically, I clenched down tightly to keep him out. To my shame, I began to beg, "No. No, please! No. No!"

"Say, 'This one loves her Master.'"

Despite my very real fear at what he was about to do, the words froze in my throat, choking me.

"Say it," he warned, "or I will make you scream it."

As he took firm hold upon my hips, I stammered, "T-this one loves her M-Master."

"Again," he commanded. "Make me believe it."

"This one loves her Master," I repeated desperately.

"I don't believe you are sincere."

I cried out, "This one loves—"

He pushed hard, forcing himself inside me, and I screamed as the entire length of him sank all the way in. Pain overwhelmed what little pleasure still lingered within me, drowning it out completely. And when he thrust, it felt as

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though he impaled me on a stake of unimaginable size,  
though I know only the pain made it seem so.

Holding my hips immobile, he took me hard and fast,  
driving me into the mattress, brutalizing my poor bottom  
while I screeched, "This one loves her Master!" over and over  
until I was hoarse.

He could not come soon enough; to me it felt as though he  
thrust forever. It came as a bitter relief when he moaned and  
spilled his seed into my tender back passage, splashing warm  
lines of it down my thighs when he withdrew, thank God, for  
the last time.

"This one loves her Master," I wept convulsively, broken, a  
limp rag of a woman, my abused bottom propped up in the  
air, pain piercing me in shocks long after he was done  
plunging inside me.

He caressed my hair back from my face and pressed the  
gentlest kiss upon my shoulder. "I believe you."

I lay as he left me, weak and frightened and too hurt to  
move. The sound of running water and splashing told me he  
washed himself. Then there was only silence, punctuated by  
my own ragged breathing and the pop of a log as it cracked in  
the heat of the fire.

A cold cloth pressed to my newly ravaged bottom hole. He  
lifted me, removing the pillows to lay me fully upon the bed.  
Once more gentle and tender, he cleaned me and applied a  
soothing ointment to my wounds. Then he lay down beside  
me, covering us both with a blanket even as he drew me into  
a close one-armed embrace.

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I lay tensely in his bed while his breathing turned slow and heavy, the rhythm lulling me against my will.

I think I slept, waking twice more in moments of savage agony when he took me again throughout the night, as though I were a man. Still bound and blind-folded, all I could do was cry. And of that I did a fair amount. Tears soaked my face, saturating the pillow under my head. Those words, "This one loves her Master" were branded into my mind and on my tongue for I shouted them continuously all the while.

Much to his enjoyment.

As he fell upon me for the final time that night, spent, sweat splashing from his face to mine, he laughed breathlessly. "Of course you do. Be contented, infant. I will make you feel this love for me deep and often."

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### CHAPTER THREE

*The Matron took my uniform, harness and jesses, leaving me standing naked in front of my cot for what felt like forever. I missed my jesses and the cheerful jingling of the gold bells that should have bound my right ankle. They had been my only comfort in this strange, unfriendly place, and now she had stolen them from me! Leaving me to stare at the formless blue jumpsuit, exactly like the uniforms worn by the other females here. For two hours, I stared at it, hating it. It was ugly. It would cover me completely, as though I were ugly too. A thing of shame to be so thoroughly concealed from sight.*

*"I've got better things to do than baby you," the Matron told me. "Put them on."*

*I know there was once a time when I dressed myself. It seemed an age ago now. But when I touched the ugly blue thing lying on my cot, my Master's teachings came back to me in a flood of painful memory. I could not even make myself pick them up, much less put them on. I was disobeying the Matron, but I could not—would not—disobey my Master.*

*After two hours of staring, the Matron finally came to dress me herself, thrusting the ugly uniform upon me, jamming the coarse cloth over my hands and feet, each jerky motion done in anger and disgust. This rough treatment was frightening. What if my Master never came for me. Did that mean I would lose my rank, that I would no longer be a Personal? Would I*

*be reduced back to the rank of New-Comer, here, in this awful place?*

*I sobbed as though my heart were breaking, but the Matron was no more moved by my tears than any master in Judgment might have been.*

*I was taken before a local doctor, who examined the weals that decorated me. He looked so much like Master Moulton that I turned and pranced before him. I displayed my marks with pride. After all, they were proof of my high value and my worth to my Master, who loved me and punished me with all severity. Surely, a master himself, he would understand. But he only frowned, became angry, and my pride wilted in my breast. It seemed that I could only displease.*

*Even the way I walked made the others angry. After so many years of wearing the hard, bone-like corset and three inch heels that were everyday life for a Personal, I couldn't help but walk in mincing steps upon my tiptoes. With spine straight and shoulders thrown back, I maintained my stiffly perfect posture and silently endured the mockery of the low-ranking females as they hissed the word 'Freak' at me as I passed them on the way to the dining hall.*

*It was impossible to comprehend why they would speak to me. Why was I even in the same room with them? They could hardly rank higher than Primaries and Midpoints, these women, for none were well-trained by any standard! I walked past them without acknowledging of their gross breeches in etiquette; personals never socialized with those below the rank of Personal, but the silly female masters not only placed*

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*me within the same dining hall, I was made to sit at the Lessers' table!*

*All through the meal, I could feel the Matron's angry stare. On all sides of me, women ate heartily from their bowls of hot cereal, but I could only stare at mine. Twice my shaking hands rose to grip the spoon, and twice they hastened back to my lap where it was proper for them to lie. My stomach felt pinched and empty. My mouth watered and I swallowed convulsively. I was so hungry!*

*Why did they torment me this way?*

*I clasped my hands to my chest so I would not be tempted again to take up the spoon, but no one came to feed me, and I soon began to rock on the bench.*

*Where was my Master? Why didn't he come for me? What if he couldn't find me? Ever? What if I was made to stay with these people in this horrible place full of unfeeling, angry matrons and officers.*

*I couldn't stay here! I couldn't! I needed my Master. I needed to feel his hands on me, reassuring, petting, and punishing me. Tears slipped past my lashes and down my nose. They fell into my untouched cereal.*

*I was so hungry.*

\* \* \* \*

As the gypsies had with our clothes, Judgment stripped us of our identities. First they took our names. Callie McGuire. That had been mine. Tane, the Master of the Masters, would eventually give us new ones, but until we were so privileged, they called us by the color of our hair. Out of all Judgment's

one hundred and fifty-five females, of those of us new enough to be without names, there were eleven Blondes, six Brunettes, two Blacks, but only one Red. Me.

All throughout that night, I wished the world would end, but my prayers went unheard. My first day in Hell began at dawn.

At least I assumed it dawned. As deep as we were in the rock, there were no windows. From the moment of our arrival to the day of our individual sales, the closest we ever came to the Outside was the Crater, a garden and exercise area roughly the size of a football field, the craggy rock sides too steep to climb, the top of the walls like a two-story building all around us. There was grass here, plants, and an aviary with colorful birds of all sizes and species (although we, being unworthy creatures, were never permitted inside of that).

The only time we ever saw the mountain courtyard again, surrounded by its high stone walls and iron-toothed portcullis, was when we were displayed there—as a finished product—to potential buyers. An experience I would not have to dread for three years.

What woke me in the morning was my captor's roving hands and experienced mouth. He suckled my nipples, dipped his tongue into my navel and told me that I would be beautiful were I pierced there and decorated with a jewel. His mouth moved lower still and I could not stifle a moan of unwilling pleasure as he found my clit and suckled that, too. He said I would look lovely pierced there as well, but that I would have to prove myself obedient before he granted me such an honor. I hoped to be never so obedient.



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And then, as though he could read my rebellious thoughts with his mind, he sat at the edge of the bed, put me over his knee and spanked me for the second time in all my life. Because he felt like it, he said, but he left me crying before it was over.

Pushing me down to kneel on the floor, he put himself into my mouth and, with his hand on the top of my head, bobbed me up and down on that solid shaft until I thought I would choke it went so deep into my throat. I wished I was brave enough to bite, but still blindfolded and bound, I feared his retaliation. When he came, sputtering and gagging, I spat his seed from my mouth.

Without another word, he summoned a guard and I was blindly led away, taken to the same Spartan, barrack-like sleeping quarters where my sisters in suffering had spent the night. At last my blindfold and bonds were removed.

I didn't think it possible to suffer any worse than what I had endured all through my first night, but they quickly proved me wrong.

There were five of us bought from the gypsies. Brunette was Russian, and the only one I knew from my van. The others I didn't recognize, but none of us were of the same nationality. Black was a sweet, soft Italian girl—I don't think she stopped crying once that whole first month—and the two Blondes were German and French, respectively. I think this was done deliberately. It felt very isolating to have no one to talk to.

Within a few minutes of my arrival, a troop of men entered the barracks. Under the supervision of one master and ten,

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willow-switch toting guards, we were escorted, single file from the dormitory. Even I needed nothing more than to heard the hiss of the lithe switch slicing the air behind me to get me moving.

We were taken to a large, white-tiled bathroom. Naked and shivering, more from fear than any real sense of cold, we were lined up against the back wall, a guard flanking each of us at both sides.

The master began to speak, but not in any language that I could recognize. Everything he said was softly translated for me—indeed for each of us—in our native tongues by the guards.

"You will be bathed," one of my two guards told me. As the master spoke again, his voice booming with authority, he said, "When you become worthy of clothes, you will don the uniform provided you. You will learn our language and speak it solely. You will be obedient."

The guards left us lined up at the tile wall. With numbed acceptance, we watched as they unraveled a hose from a rack and turned the water on. The 'bath' was brutal and the water ice cold. All five of us shrieked and twisted this way, clinging together as our bodies were pounded by the spray.

Blonde German tried to run, but her two guards caught her and with startling efficiency dropped her belly down on the tile floor. They held her there for the master, who calmly shut off the hose. He approached her, already removing his heavy black belt.

I am ashamed to say we did nothing to help her. We huddled, shivering and dripping, and watched the price of

disobedience unfolding with the length of leather that dangled from his hand.

The master spoke, his rich voice echoing through the shower room, and my guard translated for me, "You will be obedient."

She cried and pleaded right from the first mighty swipe, which flattened the chubby base of her buttocks and turned it scarlet. The sharp cracks of the leather mingled with her shrieks of pain, but he was pitiless. He turned her flanks a bright shade of wounded red, and though she writhed and fought her guards, their grips were inflexible and all she could do was scream.

Brunette screamed too, and it set off a chain reaction with the rest of us. When the master turned to glare at us, all but Brunette and the Blonde under the belt fell silent. His cold eyes settled on my Russian companion, and me as well, since I was huddled up next to her.

What he spoke, I didn't need to have translated. Not when a lilting smile curled the corners of his mouth and he raised a finger to his lips. "Shh," I discovered, was universal.

I don't think Brunette even noticed, because it wasn't until I grabbed her head and covered her mouth with my hand that she stopped screaming.

The master lay two more fearsome swipes of that belt across her chubby, red bottom and then allowed the guards to lift her from the floor. She was led weeping back to her place in line and the hose was turned on us again. They got very little protest from us at all after that.

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They soaked us down thoroughly, then turned off the spray. We were each handed a bar of soap and a rough gray wash cloth. They stared unabashed while we washed every inch of our bodies, then doused us with another painful round from the hose. As I had been last night, my companions all were shaved as bald as young girls again.

And this humiliation was just the beginning. Once clean and dried, we were led naked down barren, cheerless corridors. I tried to keep track of the path, but I was soon hopelessly confused. The dark, empty halls looked too much the same, and the direction for the door I most wanted—the one behind which lay my freedom—was kept a complete mystery from me.

We were brought to Judgment's medical center. The Master Doctor introduced himself as Moulton while we lined up against the wall, and he was very, very thorough in his examinations of us.

He collected blood in multiple vials. Urine and fecal samples were taken with each of us made to squat over a pot, without a shred of privacy as we made our "contribution". When Black had difficulty, she underwent the added embarrassment of a public enema. The sight of that was enough to convince me to cooperate. When it came my turn, I accepted the fresh pot they handed me, turned my face to the wall as I squatted, and tried to pretend that I was alone.

Our hair was checked for fleas and lice. We were given eye exams. Our hearing and motor skills were tested. They looked in our ears, noses and mouths. They even seemed interested

in our individual level of intelligence. While we waited for the final, and worst, aspect of the examination, we had to complete short written tests regarding mathematics, sciences, the composition of sentence structures and reading abilities. It was almost like being back in school.

Blonde German was the first to be subjected to the gynecological chair. With a face as red as her flanks, she crept past the two masters and reluctantly hoisted herself up into the seat, wincing as her whipped bottom and thighs made contact with the black leather beneath her. She placed her legs into each of the stirrups and then she covered her face with her hands and cried as Master Moulton probed her private parts, looking for signs of sexually transmitted diseases, pregnancy, and opening her wide with a speculum to measure the size of her passage and search for abnormalities. With one final indignity, the tightness of her bottom was prodded and tested before a series of four vaccinating injections were dispatched and Blonde was allowed to get up.

It was no treat being the last in line. As I stood in trepidation, awaiting my turn, something in the speculum process hurt Brunette, for midway through it she stiffened and nearly came up off the chair, shrieking with pain. She had to be restrained after that, with a guard at each leg holding her open for Moulton, and the other master pinning her hands above her head. At a word from the Master Doctor, he reached down between her legs to fondle her. Though Brunette continued to arch and cry out, the pitch and tone of her protests minutely changed. By the end of it, she was

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flushed, panting as breathlessly as if she'd run a marathon, and her hips could hardly be kept still.

The exam concluded, but the master did not grant her sexual release. She got up from the chair slowly, walking as if in a daze to join the others. And then there was only me left to go.

Doctor Moulton wiped down the chair, as he had at the beginning of each examination, and patted the seat for me. I stared at it, at the other master with his dark and lecherous smile and the long solid bulge that pressed taut against the front of his black pants, and my legs just would not work. I pressed back against the wall, shaking my head. Indeed, I shook all over.

My defiance aroused him. The bulge in the master's pants became thicker and larger and incredibly more pronounced. For the second time, he slid his belt from around his waist, beckoning me with one finger before firmly indicating the chair. I shook my head again, more frantically this time because out of the corners of my eyes I could already see my two guards coming for me.

He wrapped the buckle end of his belt around his hand several times, shortening the length as I was dragged, kicking, flailing and screaming, to the examination chair. They bent me over it, hauling me so far up over the top that my feet no longer touched the floor. My guards held me in place from the other side to give the master plenty of room to whip me.

"You will be obedient," the master said in that other language. Having heard it twice now, I did not need an interpreter.

As horrible as it had been to witness, the belt was even worse to experience. Held as I was, I could not even see it coming before the first stroke sliced into me from behind, catching the middle of my thighs. I bucked and shouted, and the belt worked its way up my legs to brand my bottom with overlapping lines of sheer fire.

"This is the last time you will behave this badly," my guard told me.

"I doubt it." Even in the throes of agony, I recognized that low voice the instant I heard it. "Stay your arm, Boyden."

My whipping stopped and the guards released their hold on me. Exhausted from my struggles, sobbing with the hurt throbbing in my flanks, I more fell off than climbed gracefully down from the chair.

He stood in the doorway, tall, his head clearing six feet at least. His chest and shoulders were thickly built, with a lean waist and narrow, slender hips. His hair and eyes were black and a lazy smile graced his angular face as he looked at me. This was my captor, the man who had taken me so mercilessly in the wee hours of the night. Who had reveled in my tears, hurting me until I could no longer cry, but just lie pinned beneath him, grunting and moaning as he thrust.

I backed up all the way to the wall. And my fearful recognition made him smile all the more.

"Come to me, infant."

Trembling, I shook my head.

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His smile hardly faltered. "I could have you taken to the Assembly Hall and put to the block," he said evenly. "I could have you whipped until this mountain sings with the sound of your screams, or I could leave you splayed there all day for the pleasure of each master's leisure." He beckoned with two fingers. "Come to me."

My only movement was in my trembling limbs. "You will anyway."

And he would, too. I just knew it. I could see the truth of it right there in his face.

Master Boyden ran the length of his belt through his hands, the leather rasping in his palm. Not far from me, the Master Doctor shook his head at my nerve, while the guards just glared.

He came up to me as though a lover, cupping my chin in his fingers and tilting my face up to his. "You are not afraid of me?"

If my knees knocked together any harder, I'd have fallen down. My voice quavered as I lied, "No."

Amusement danced in his black eyes. "Pity. It would have saved me some time."

Thinking back on this years later, it astounds me that he did not birch me then and there. Instead he merely tapped the tip of my nose with his finger, as though he found my disrespect utterly charming and cute.

"Have them brought to me when you are done," he told Master Boyden, then he looked at me and that funny half-smile turned the corners of his mouth again. "What a little mischief."



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In spite of all my defiance, I did not escape the humiliation of that intimate exam. In fact, the only thing it did for me was to place me squarely in the minds of the masters as a trouble-maker, and in the mind of the Mountain Lord as someone to watch more closely. Neither, as it turned out, was a good place to covet being.

Examination of my person was completed, my hymen was pronounced intact, and the five of us were marched to my captor's personal quarters as requested.

It felt very strange to finally see the places where I had suffered while blindfolded the night before. My captor's rooms were very opulent, mostly done in white. The bath was in a separated area from the bedroom. The chair he had spanked me upon was still sitting in the middle of the floor with the hairbrush on the carpet beside it, and I got a good look at my wood-backed nemesis. Were I a braver girl, I'd have abandoned my place in line, snatched up that beastly implement and thrown it past where Tane was standing, onto the fire that crackled in the stone wall. Had I any inkling of how soundly that brush and I were to be reacquainted, I might have tried harder to work up the nerve.

Instead, for my next half-thought-out act of defiance, I settled for not abasing myself before the Mountain Lord, Tane. My sisters in suffering must have thought me insane. They were probably right.

There are three postures suitable for a Judgment female to take up when in Tane's presence. The first was automatic and meant dropping to one's knees with hands behind backs and foreheads pressed low to the floor until permission to rise was

given. This was terribly uncomfortable, but any woman foolish enough not to immediately assume this position in his presence was immediately rewarded with the most brutal of whippings.

If permission to rise was granted, then posture number two was automatically assumed and the humiliation increased because we were then expected to sit back on our heels, spreading our knees wide apart, exposing ourselves completely to his eyes.

If the "honor" was granted to "present" that meant we must take one hand from behind us, part the folds of our sex, arching our hips up and out, as if pleading to be taken by him. Woe be to any female who refused any of these steps.

Woe be to me, for that's exactly what I did. Upon Master Boyden's command, my companions dropped to their knees before Tane. As the guards interpreted each instruction, they clasped their hands in supplication behind them, then bent until their heads were well down and they saw nothing but carpet. And there I stood, surrounded by irritated men dressed all in black and the naked, quaking, huddled forms of my sisters. I was still afraid, especially when Master Boyden fixed me with a hardening stare, but I hid it much better than I had at the medical center.

"Get down on your knees," he bit out sternly.

I fixed my eyes stubbornly on Tane. "I will do nothing for your pleasure."

Standing at Boyden's side, Tane arched a brow at me incredulously. "You say that with such determination. How sad, since that is going to put us at direct odds. I find myself

suddenly just as determined to see you on your knees, begging for the privilege of pleasuring me."

I met Tane's black stare squarely and, in a voice that did not waver, announced, "I want to go home. I'll be nothing but trouble for you until you let me go."

"My, you are spirited, aren't you?" His eyes roved me slowly from head to toe. To this day I believe the only reason I did not suffer more horribly right then was because it was the first time he'd encountered such a bold and foolish show of rebellion. He turned to Master Boyden, almost laughing as he said, "Is there something about me that indicates I like spirit?"

"Not that I've ever noticed," Master Boyden replied in perfect English.

"If you force me to remain here," I said evenly, "I will make you all as miserable as I am."

There was a grand flaw to my logic. While it took time for me to recognize the error in my thinking, Tane spotted it right away. It made him laugh in fact, and he indicated the women cowering around my feet. "They are all going to love you." His black stare bored straight through me as he said, "Master Boyden, give our New-Comers a nice, warm, Welcome-to-Judgment strapping. Nothing too severe, mind you. Six strokes every morning and evening for the next week or two. That should be sufficient. Except for Red, here. Escort her around her new home, introduce her to the masters. I'd like them to lend a hand in welcoming our misbehaving miss to her new life."

"I won't stay here!" I said loudly.

Boyden's hand flexed, and he laughed mirthlessly. "I do believe I will be the first."

"By all means," Tane murmured. "On second thought, something firmer than a broad hand maybe required in this case."

I glared as he walked past me to pick up the hairbrush from the floor. Boyden chuckled darkly as Tane placed it directly into my hand. I would have dropped it, but he closed my fingers around the handle and tightly held me thus.

"You will give this to each of the masters, all twenty of them," he told me softly, his countenance darkening intently as he stared right through me, all the way to my soul. "You will accept their greetings with the utmost respect, because if you do not—if you defy me any more today—I will have you welcomed by every master, sub-master, and guard within these walls. Strapped to the block in the Assembly Hall and with the cane, I will have you welcomed. By your second introduction, I guarantee you will pray for the softer salutations of this hairbrush. Am I clear to you?"

My throat feeling so tightly constricted I all but choked on the word, "Yes."

The corners of his lips turned barely upwards in victory. "What do you say?"

The look I gave him was by no means respectful. Hateful would have been more accurate. And in a voice no louder than a whisper, I said, "This one loves her Master."

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## CHAPTER FOUR

*The detective rolled his pencil between his massive hands, watching me as I, in turned, watched the floor. Two other detectives were standing against the wall to my right, just opposite of a long mirror that took up another corner to corner from left to right. I had been brought to the police station again, but not to lock me in a cell or take my prints. This time the Detective lay a black metal box with a tiny window on the table between us.*

*"This is a tape recorder," the Detective explained. "Have you used one of these before?"*

*One of the detective beside me snorted with laughter. He was a very unpleasant man. I did not like him.*

*"No, sir."*

*"Well, this will be fun then," the Detective said, getting up from his chair. He came around the table to me and held the recorder up to my mouth. He pressed a button. "All you do is say something. Anything. Uh, how about your name. Say your name."*

*"Mischief."*

*He clicked some more buttons in turn and when he held up the recorder again this time the box spoke to me: 'All you do is say something ... Anything ... Uh, how about your name ... Say your name' ... 'Mischief...'*

*My eyes widened and I squealed with delight as I reached for the box. Though it never left his hand, he let me touch and examine it from all angles. Then the Detective sat down*

and pressed the buttons again. "We're going to record the conversation, if that's all right with you?"

He looked at me questioningly, and it was horribly startling. Oh, the masters here were so strange. Since I did not protest, he continued on.

"That up there behind me," he thumbed over his shoulder to another box up on the wall, its round glass eye pointed at the table. "That's going to record us, too. Now, it's just a formality. We do it to make sure that everything that what gets said in here isn't accidentally distorted or turned around or misunderstood later. Okay?"

I could hear the bustle of activities in the outer room, the insistent ringing of the phones, the clamor of many voices talking all at once. But in this room with me, all was suddenly strained and quiet.

The Detective turned and looked up at the camera again, then he leaned towards me. "Remember what I said outside? You can have a lawyer, if you want one. But you're not in trouble—"

He stopped when I nodded my head. I knew I was raising the mountain of trouble I was already in just by arguing with him.

"No, no," the Detective said emphatically. "You're not in trouble with us at all. We want to ask you some questions is all. But, um..." He looked back up at the camera and I looked too. "You don't have to answer if you don't want to, but we need to you say 'yes' or 'no' out loud so the box can hear you. Okay?"

Judgment  
by Denise Hall

*Never had any master asked me so many questions. I liked the Detective, but I could not imagine him at Judgment. He was too weak-willed. "Yes, sir."*

*"Would you like to sit down?" the Detective asked, gesturing to the chair.*

*"Yes, sir." I knelt on the floor. Though his face disappeared from view, I could see his knees and was contented.*

*"Oh, for God's sake!" the mean detective snapped. "This is a waste of time. Mischief, my ass. The woman's a mental retard or a faker or something. Her pimp or her john did that to her and she's acting nutty to get out of trouble."*

*"Shut up, Jim," the other detective—a blonde, tall man with a paunchy belly—popped a toothpick in his mouth. He pushed away from the wall and came to me, sliding a chair up beside me. "Come on, honey. You don't have to sit on the floor. Sit up here where the camera can see you."*

*He took my arm, trying to guide me to the chair, but I pulled back. Shaking my head, I felt my eyes filling with tears again. My chest heaved as I panted, fighting the panic rising inside me. The blonde detective stopped pulling my arm instantly and the Detective quickly came around the table to me.*

*He touched my tussled hair. "No, no, you don't have to be scared. We're not going to hurt you here. You're not allowed to sit on chairs?" At the shake of my head, he just patted my shoulder. "That's okay, we'll all just sit on the floor. How about that, huh?"*

*There was a knock at the door and Jim went to answer it. He took the envelope a woman passed through to him.*

*"Are those the fingerprint results?" the Detective asked.*

*"Nope," Jim said, a frown marring his brow. "Nothing came up on the computer. She hasn't been arrested before."*

*"Of course not," the Detective said with a grin to me. "We got us a good girl here. Isn't that right?"*

*I didn't know how to answer. I could think of no way to tell him just how disobedient and full of faults I was. My Master was constantly forced to correct me because of them.*

*"Look at this," Jim said, passing a sheet of paper with a picture on it to the Detective.*

*"Callie McGuire. Red hair. Green eyes. Five-foot-two. Hundred and three pounds. Sounds about right."*

*"We got a match?" the blonde detective asked, reaching for the paper. He looked at the photo, then at me. "What's up with the computer? It couldn't give us a clearer picture than this?"*

*"It didn't come off the computer," Jim said. "It came off the fax. We sent her stats back East to missing persons in case she wasn't local. They had to do some digging to come up with this. Look at the date, gentlemen. Our little 'Mischief' has been missing for more than ten years."*

\* \* \* \*

My introduction to the masters was hellish, there was simply no other way to put it. They were devils and demons every one, and to my list of mortal enemies, beneath Tane and Boyden, I mentally added the names of Masters Shipe, Grayson, and Deaton.



Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

Master Shipe was a brawny man of perhaps thirty-five years. His face wore a constantly soured expression and he sported a scraggly beard because he loathed to shave. He was muscular, the hard lines of his arms bulging and rippling as he propelled himself aggressively through the halls with the aid of one crutch. Shipe had only one leg, the left being a mere stump that ended just above the knee. And though I later learned that he had a prosthetic, to date I have never seen him wear it.

An inspector of sorts, Shipe's sole job was to search our barracks, our beds, and our bodies for contraband or imperfections. He went about this task with frightening, single-minded purpose. His hawk eyes never missed a wrinkled bed, a disheveled uniform, or so much as a hair out of place. His favored implement was the switch. Wherever he went, there was always one within easy reach of him and he needed very little excuse to ply its sting to any unfortunate who happened to catch his eyes. He was, in fact, in the midst of this when Master Boyden brought me to him for a taste of Judgment's special brand of welcome.

Six women of varying ethnic groups were lined up against the wall of their barracks, hands flat against the stone, feet wide apart, the skirts of their too-short uniforms flipped up to reveal six naked, cringing bottoms in various states of woe. Shipe was viciously at work on the third from the end, his switch barely glimpsed as it rose and fell so rapidly upon its still-as-stone target. The two bottoms that preceded his current victim were red and welted, and one quite bruised along the lower swells. The women themselves—impossible

though it was for me to believe—made little sound at all. In fact, the only thing I heard was the whip of the implement slicing the air, the crisp, meaty impact, and the softest of grunts and gasps from the owner of the bottom he thrashed. Three pairs of quivering buttocks that he had yet to get to, clenched nervously with each invigorating smack.

I don't know how that girl could remain standing there, so silent and so still, her only motion being the involuntary juddering of her bottom as the lissome switch bit into it. I hadn't held anywhere near that still.

Master Boyden had made good his threat to be the first to welcome me properly. No sooner had we exited Tane's office, then did he bend me right over his hip and apply that hairbrush until the hall rang with my shouts of fury and pain. I had kicked and struggled from the first smack to the last, and even afterward had danced about, stomping my feet and frantically rubbing as though I could push the burning ache right off my skin. The motionlessness with which these women accepted their punishments was both horrifying and ... well, impressive.

Shipe stopped only because his switch broke, and the voluptuous, dark-haired beauty that was his victim visibly shuddered in relief, her bottom cheeks jamming together once as Shipe ordered another switch handed to him from Sub-Master Cobb, a thin, blonde man, who attended the master throughout all of his inspections.

My heart felt pity for the next girl in line, a tiny Asian thing, her slender body tensing as she braced herself for agony. Shipe swung forward on his crutch to stand behind her

and held his hand back for the fresh verge Cobb handed him. He would have started in a-fresh on his new, unmarred target, but for Master Boyden's interrupting hail.

What the men spoke to one another in that foreign language I don't know, but I do know my bottom positively crawled with dread when both masters and the sub-master turned their heads to look at me, their dark, disapproving stares identical to one another.

Without a word, Shipe handed the switch back to Cobb, who stepped up to take his place in the whipping line as the master turned on his crutch and headed right for me. My stomach sank all the way to my toes. Already my buttocks were clenched together, and Boyden's hand at my back was the only thing that kept me standing there long enough for Shipe to catch hold of my ear and drag me with him to the nearest bed. He tossed his crutch down on the mattress, then sat, dragging me right over that stump of his. He caught my legs in a vise-like scissor hold with his other, grabbed each of my arms and pulled them back behind me, securing me firmly by my wrists. Held like this, I couldn't move very well. I couldn't even keep a solid hold on that hairbrush, which he plucked from my grip as easily as if I'd released it to him.

I had not cried for Boyden. I had not cried for the second master either, Master Everard, who oversaw the females assigned to prepare the noon meal, and who had only laid ten crisp smacks to the blushing base of my buttocks, ruffled my hair and said, "You'll be sore enough by the end of the day, I'll wager. Don't worry. I'll have at you soon enough."

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

But I did cry for Master Shipe. My wails reached ear piercing decibels when he aimed for the oh-so very tender crease where bottom met thighs, laid the hairbrush into me with a vengeance, and never once wavered from his target.

"Well," Boyden asked. "Is he as miserable as you are right now, do you think?"

Master Grayson was supervising a group of girls in the Crater when we found him. He was the only one who never laid so much as a single swat to my bottom. Bent over and as close to touching my toes as I could get, with my legs spread apart and my muscles protesting this awful position, he blistered the backs of my thighs and the very tender stretches of pale flesh between them.

Master Boyden had to hold me in position after only the first few swats. And I—as the hairbrush slapped higher and higher, stinging up the insides of my thighs—panicked, thinking for sure he would not stop until he'd struck my trembling sex. I kicked up such a cry and fuss I must have attracted the attention of every girl jogging around the exercise field. I also irritated both masters so much that they decided Grayson should start over again from the beginning and welcome me even more warmly. I was in such hurt by the end, I meekly followed Boyden from the Crater, groaning piteously and rubbing the backs of my aching thighs.

My thighs hurt so much I hardly felt either Master Martin's or Master Fortner's swats, though I think they might have taken pity on me and given me only a few of the lightest smacks. Master Deaton, however, was another story entirely.

Deaton, as I would eventually learn, was Tane's half brother. Though one would not guess it by their names, the family resemblance was uncanny. They had the same height, the same strong breadth of their shoulders and lean, narrow waists. They also had the same zeal for discipline, and they carried their authority to do so like a crown. If forced to be honest with myself, I think I feared him as much as I did the Mountain Lord.

Deaton was one of three masters who took turns throughout the day supervising the daily activities of the Personals—women who lived the whole of their lives permanently ensconced within the mountain fortress, pets to the whims of the masters. They were guarded always, zealously kept separate from the rest of us. We were all Lessers compared to them, and compared to us they lived like goddesses.

The Personals had a large complex of rooms located far above the Pits, which is where the Lessers' sleeping barracks were, as well as the dining and Assembly halls, the Chore Stations, library and hobby rooms, basically any place slaves such as myself were expected to be seen. But the Personals were so far removed from us that one had to walk past each of the masters' private living quarters just to get to the first well-protected room.

I was not permitted inside the Personals' area. Master Boyden left me standing with the two guards standing sentry just outside the large, ornately carved double doors.

"If you move from this spot," he told me, "I will personally give you your first real whipping."

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

He even turned me around to face the wall, my hands and that hairbrush clasped behind my back as though I were a penitent child, before stepping through those double doors and closing them softly behind him.

Though I knew I shouldn't, I couldn't help but surreptitiously steal glimpses at the doors when I thought the guards weren't looking. Though there were lights everywhere, being fully enclosed within the mountain left anyplace not fully under a light almost gloomy with shadow. But even without a light directly overhead, from where I stood I was able to pick out certain images in the wood carvings that decorated the doors. Canes were the most prominent feature, but I also saw benches and bonds, the thorned vines of blooming roses twined through the chained links of manacles and collars, and birches applied to bent girls with open, screaming mouths and tightly clenched eyes.

The art work was beautiful, but the depiction horrific, and I shifted nervously as I looked from one distended mouth to another. Along the bottom of both doors, female figures posed in acts of humility that were at once appalling and oddly seductive. The three poses of abasement were there, as well as many positions that I was certain were intended to beckon a master to mount, rather than whip, the supplicant.

The door opened and I quickly snapped around to face the wall again. From behind me, a low voice drawled, "Was that movement I just saw?"

With a hint of amusement, one of the guards replied, "To be fair, she did glance at the wall once or twice."

"That's what I thought."

My disobedience had not gone unnoticed; my heart sank. The doors swung closed, and a huge shadow grew up on the wall around me as Master Deaton approached from behind. Unlike the other masters, who had accepted Boyden's explanation of me and my required interruption of their day without comment, Master Deaton did not take the hairbrush from my hand and simply beat me. What he did was much worse; he talked to me first.

"Why are you here?"

Though the depictions on that door had dwindled my bravado and by now one would think I'd have learned to keep a civil tongue, as I stared at the wall ahead of me, I heard myself say, "Because you're all sadistic."

"No." He loomed over my shoulder, dressed all in black, melding with the shadows. Huge and calm and speaking to me as though he were a lover, not a monster about to hurt me. "You're here because you mouthed off to the wrong man. And you're doing so again now. Not very wise. Do you know who you are?"

"Callie—"

"No," he interrupted smoothly. "You are nothing. You are New-Comer. You are Red, until we decide to give you something better. Or until we decide you aren't worth the considerable trouble you are making of yourself and we flush you, with the rest of the refuse, from our halls."

He held out his hand. After only the briefest of hesitations, I reluctantly lay the handle of the hairbrush into his palm. Maybe it was the soreness of my already swollen and battered backside, or the fact that he was only one in a long line of

men assigned to beat me—number seven to be precise, leaving me to endure the cruelties of twelve more devils just like him before it could all be through—but his words were having a horrible effect on my morale.

"This is a gentle punishment reserved for children and Personals," he said, turning the hairbrush over in his hand, looking at it soberly. "Tane must have a soft spot for you to allow so gentle an introduction. Were the choice mine, I would send you to the Black Room and treat you to your first Demerit caning. Our seasoned girls have learned to be stoic under the rod and can sometimes withstand up to four cuts without falling completely apart; we give them six, just to make sure we have their undivided attentions. But for you, a full count of twelve will leave you quickly broken of all this defiance. It would save time in the long run, be well-deserved and an efficient use of force. I'll bet you've never felt such agony in all your life. The first three will likely leave you screaming, but of course we would still have to give the remaining nine strokes. Principles must be maintained."

The hairbrush left my line of sight. I stared so hard at the wall, it seemed to blur before my eyes.

"Step back."

On shaky legs, I took one step away from the wall.

"Feet together," he directed. "Bend forward and put your hands flat on the wall. No, further down."

Bent at the waist with my hands straight out in front of me, I stared at the floor and tried not to panic completely. I watched his feet as he took up a position beside me.



"Back straight. Stiffen your legs and thrust that disobedient bottom right up for me." His hip pressed to mine and his warm hand settled on the opposite side of my waist, firmly holding me to him. "I will honor Tane's wishes and give you this gentle, child-like punishment. But were I you, I'd pray to never see me again. Don't let me even glimpse you in the halls, little one. Because the next time I have you before me, what I am inclined to do to you will make twelve strokes with the Demerit Cane feel like heaven."

I had yet to so much as glimpse a Demerit Cane, but his use of that hairbrush made me feel that way already. I swear, after Deaton I suffered through the whippings of the other masters hardly feeling a thing. The pain was such, I was numbed by it.

Master Boyden had to help me back to the New-Comer's barracks. I barely managed to walk as far as the nearest empty bed on my own. My poor bottom pulsed and pounded in time with the beating of my heart. I burned from behind, my swollen and darkly bruised buttocks consumed by a dull, deep-penetrating fire.

Our dinner meal was brought to us on trays. Consumed by hurt and despair, I pushed my tray away, wanting to die rather than eat.

"I should write you up for being wasteful," Master Boyden told me when he took it away.

I didn't answer, but buried my face in my pillow and fought hard not to cry again. I had done enough of that today. My eyes and my head both hurt from it.

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

Because of my disrespect, as soon as the last dinner tray was removed, my four companions were lined up at the foots of their bed and all were subjected to their first taste of Judgment leather. Master Boyden did not spare them, either. They received twelve strokes a piece, and he laid into each one with a vengeful energy that made the New-Comers' barracks ring with shrieks and sobs.

I was the only one not put to the strap. When it was over, my companions looks at me with such fear and anger that I could not meet their eyes. We were all of us in such a state that sleep was impossible any way but on our stomachs.

Still for the longest time, I lay awake. Four women had been beaten because of me, and no matter what I did, morning and night for the next seven days at least, they would be so again. That knowledge felt worse than my wounded hinds, throbbing and aching as they were, so hot and raw that I couldn't barely stand to have the slight touch of the sheet upon me.

Gradually the pain dimmed and dulled to a low, constant ache, and all I felt was a mild, pulsing heat that flamed my brutalized flesh all over. By this time though, the slow, rhythmic breathing of my companions told me they were all sound asleep. One fitfully so for I could hear her tossing restlessly beneath her blanket.

I was just closing my eyes when I heard the door to our barracks open and a shadowed male came into the room. He moved quietly down the column of beds, stopping at Brunette's bed to divest himself of his clothes. She raised her

head when he pulled the blankets back, and he said, "Shh. Unless you want an audience."

I turned my face away when he lay down beside her, but Brunette made no protest as he parted her legs and settled himself between them. The only sound was the soft, wet noise of gentle kissing, although it wasn't long before that gave way to soft sighs and the creaking of bedsprings.

The door opened again. Two men came in, dividing as they selected different beds. In the bed next to mine, Black sat bolt upright when one touched her shoulder. In the dark of the room, I saw the outline of her chest rising and falling rapidly as he took her hand and pressed something into her palm. Allowing her only a moment to look at it, he lifted her chin and murmured, "Don't force me to whip you."

While he removed his pants, I heard the soft crinkle of plastic unwrapping and Black put something into her mouth.

I covered my ears when the door opened again. Burying my face down in my pillow, I cried, knowing it was only a matter of time for me.

I had barely finished the thought when my sheet was lifted and cool air caressed my skin. I grit my teeth, a keening cry seeping into my pillow as the palm of a large hand smoothed from my shoulders down the planes of my back to my hips.

Master Boyden's voice whispered near my ear, "Sit up, Red."

There was nothing I could do but obey. I was simply too sore for anything else, and I rose onto my knees, shoulders hunched as he sat on the edge of my bed just behind me. There were creaking bedsprings all around me. Somewhere

behind me, I heard plaintive sniffing and watery gasps as someone began to cry. Another was moaning and gasping expressively.

"This lotion should help soothe some of the ache away," Master Boyden said softly beside me. He uncapped a bottle I hadn't noticed him carrying, squeezing a good amount into his palm. "Put your head on the pillow."

Without a word, I lowered my head back onto my pillow and raised my bottom well into the air. He rubbed the cream into me with slow, squeezing hands, his touch making it hurt even more and I was grateful for that. The pain made his unwonted kindness easier to bear.

Under such gentle ministrations, my hind quarters became slick with lotion. I closed my eyes and, as the ache diminished beneath his soothing caresses, in a moment of weakness, I think I moaned. The sound was drowned over by a soft wail from Black as she was entered. She panted noisily, but rather than protest, she wrapped her legs around the hips of the shadowy male above her and pulled him deeper inside her. I could have borne her rape better than I could her traitorous enjoyment. Whoever had been crying before was now panting softly. And further down the row of beds, in the black I saw the figure of one of the Blondes, straddling the hips of her nighttime visitor, her slender body undulating as she rode him.

Master Boyden's hand moved between my thighs. His fingers parted my sex, sliding over my clit, and I bolted onto my knees at once. I grabbed his wrist with both hands, pushing to dislodge his hand from between my legs.

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

He caught a fistful of my hair, pulling back sharply to stop me, and I froze as he said, "How bad do you want this to be?"

I shook in the darkness, surrounded by the sounds of sex, confronted by the certainty of another night of rape, more alone than I have ever felt in all my life. I let go of his hand.

"Spread your knees," he said, and I obeyed, cringing as I felt him kneel on the mattress behind me. His hands found my hips and his hot breath caressed my ear. "Cross your wrists between your breasts."

As I hugged my shoulders, he wrapped his arm like a steel gird around my chest, pinning both of mine tight against me.

"Relax," he told me as my hands became fists of hopeless despair. "Part your knees. Wider. Now, back up. That's right, back up onto my thighs." He brushed stray strands of my hair out of my face, his voice a whispered caress at the nape of my neck. "Good girl. You're going to be a sweet little piece ... if we ever break you of all this rebelliousness."

When he touched down between my thighs again, his well-lubricated fingers slipped easily inside me. He stroked, his hips grinding into my wounded buttocks, slowly raising and lowering me in a mocking parody of love-making, never entering me though I felt him stiffening within the confines of his pants, his erection a solid lump beneath me. His thumb explored, flicking my clit as his fingers thrust, then again when I could not swallow my cry fast enough. Pleasure unraveled inside me, seeping up through my belly, trickling down into my loins. The violation of it made me groan, and I began to cry when he merely repeated the steady assault.

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

"Let yourself go," he chided. "I will make you come whether you want to or not. You're learning something you all discover here sooner or later: it's five times as fine after a good whipping. Feel the heat of the pain burning through you; the little shocks of hurt as your body tightens with pleasure." He filled me with his fingers, palming my belly as I began to shudder. "Tip back your head, Red. Look up so he can see your face. Let him see you wail your pleasure."

I stiffened against the master, squeezing my hands into useless fists within the confines of his embrace, my hips convulsing and riding his fingers wildly, my entire body writhing in the throes of a pleasure so unwanted that it felt as though it were destroying me. Wave after shaky wave racked me until my body went limp, and like a wet and useless rag, I lay sobbing against his chest. His arms cradled me, his hand soothing and petting my clit, still thrumming and vibrating to his touch despite my tears.

Master Boyden let me go, and I crumpled useless to the mattress. He covered me with the sheet, then left my bedside. It was Black who became the sheath for his desire. He rode her vigorously, filling the barracks with the wet, slapping sound of their bodies coming violently together. She may have been the one bucking upon the cock he rammed and pounded inside her, but it was frightening that he continued to look at me as, teeth bared, he found his release. Black more gasped in relief when he finally slid from her body and rose to dress.

"See you tomorrow," he said, and I was left to sleep for the remainder of the night alone.

Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

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## CHAPTER FIVE

*"Why do you do that?" the Detective asked suddenly.*

*I started, a fist of panic suddenly clenching in my belly. What was I doing wrong now?*

*"You always stare at the floor. Why don't you ever look at my face, meet my eyes?"*

*I was at a loss. How could a master, even a weak one from the Outside like the Detective, not know something so basic? I stammered over my reply, "B-because a slave never looks upon a master."*

*Still in the conference room at the police station, Jim and the nice, blonde detective who were talking quietly behind me, fell abruptly silent. As if on cue, both men came back to sit on the table. They all three looked at me. Their sudden interest was frightening, but I suddenly realized what I had said wrong. I felt the familiar burn of tears in my eyes.*

*The Detective set aside the pencil he'd been rolling between his hands and leaned closer to me. "What?"*

*I blinked rapidly. My lower lip trembled as I hastened to amend myself. He wasn't a strong master, but he hadn't deserved my disrespect. "Because a slave never looks upon a master, sir."*

*Clasping my hands behind my back, I bow down to press my forehead to his shoe in apology.*

*"No." The Detective shook his head as if to clear it from a blow. "I meant—get up. Please don't do that, Callie. Now, what master? Who says he's your master?"*



*I felt as confused as he looked. "My Master, Daymon Tane."*

*Running his hand over his balding head, the Detective sighed. His glance fell to the file folder on the table at his elbow. He picked it up and showed me the picture, which I looked at obligingly, but without a great deal of interest. It was from the Before Time and would not help me get back to my Master, so it didn't really matter to me.*

*"Is this you?" he asked.*

*The photo was smudged and dark from the fax, but the features were irrefutably mine. "Yes, sir."*

*"What's happened to you?" the Detective demanded. "Your family looked for you for years. They think you're dead. Did you ever try to get to a phone? Did you ever try to contact anyone? Callie, where have you been?"*

\* \* \* \*

Rank was everything in Judgment. There was Tane, of course, at the top of the scale, with twenty masters under him, ten sub-masters to assist them, and forty some guards below even that. But none of us could ever hope to attain the privilege of that kind of status. We would never gain the honor guarding so much as a door. We were female, and were divided down differently.

For us, Personals topped the list. They got the best of everything: better food, the prettiest hair pieces, the softest towels in a rainbow of colors. Their uniforms were so white and soft, seductively transparent, but with the most revealing bodices and the highest heeled shoes. Their skirts were the

shortest allowed; bib-like, the gossamer cloth barely covered their buttocks. And when they turned or walked, it didn't even do that much.

They never did chores, never washed their own laundry or food dishes after meals. A guard was assigned to clean their bathroom and the Personals' common areas. Only Personals were allowed to wear makeup. They played in the garden daily and were the only females allowed in the aviary.

We all envied them, but no one wanted to be one. Personals were the masters' permanent companions, life partners at least as much as a slave could partner to her master. Perhaps favored pet was closer to the truth, and it was for that reason that they received the absolute best of all things. But it also meant they got the harshest treatment. It was rare that a female of lesser importance ever saw a Personal, and for the longest time, I thought them a mountain myth. But on the few occasions when one was spied, the marks upon their bodies were enough to pale and leave shaken even the sturdiest Lesser among us.

In the Pit, Elite status was what we all aspired to. They were the icons we grew desperate to model ourselves after. Their short yellow uniforms, two-inch high heels, sparkling jeweled hair combs, earrings, bracelets and anklets, were the badges of accomplishment that we couldn't wait to achieve. Elites got dessert for dinner every night. They got to use bathrooms with hot running water. They were the finished product, and there were very few of them in Judgment at any one time, since most were sold within a month of obtaining this favored and long looked-to status.

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Midpoints came next and were the most plentiful of Lessers, recognized by their soft pink uniforms and shoes. Oh, at long last shoes! The heels were only an inch high, but it was a wonderful thing to be able to put our barefoot days behind us. And it was always amusing to spot a new Midpoint as she tottered unsteadily through the halls, learning to walk gracefully on those spike-point heels.

They got dessert on the last supper of each week. They got hair ribbons and barrettes, bobby pins, twist ties, scrunchies and bows. What vain and silly creatures, women, that things like this should make a difference. But the allure of just being allowed to put our hair up was very, very powerful.

Primaries were on the bottom rung of the rank ladder. Their uniforms were a dull blue-gray. There was no jewelry, no pretty hair fripperies, and no desserts at meals. They got fed last in the dining hall and had to sit at the worst tables, those right below the masters' dais and under their watchful eyes. They were punished more frequently than any other rank, because most Primaries had yet to be completely cleansed of all reluctance or defiance, and some still clung to stubborn traces of individuality and worth.

But even lower than Primaries, New-Comers were the dregs of Judgment society. We weren't even worthy of clothes. For that first month, we lived solely within our barracks, not permitted to leave except every morning before breakfast when we were escorted to the bathroom and sprayed down with the hose. Even our daily exercise was taken at the foot of our beds: jumping jacks, push-ups and

sit-ups, and slow stretches that bent our bodies into common punishment positions. By the end of our second week, there wasn't a one of us who couldn't touch her toes with perfectly straightened knees.

We were fed healthy but tasteless foods: plain oatmeal, half an apple and milk for breakfast; a thick, gritty and gray shake-like substance for lunch, which smelled bad and which I never could drink without first holding my nose; and for dinner, dressingless salad, raw vegetables, and a bland piece of chicken or fish, which was usually ground up into a crumbled, unappetizing lump. At the foot of our beds, we'd sit with dinner trays balance on our laps, the barracks tomblike with silence as we ate this unpalatable fare.

I, in my initial defiance, attempted to stage a hunger strike. Only one person was brave enough to join—me—and it lasted three whole meals, from dinner to dinner over the course of one twenty-four hour period. The only reason it didn't last longer than that was because my incredibly slow sense of self-preservation at last kicked in.

We had just been handed our dinner trays and I was settling on my bed for another round of 'My Will Against Theirs,' when the barrack door swung open and in came two masters and two guards. The guards carried between them what looked to be a black, leather-padded saw horse with harness straps affixed to its legs. Master Hutch directed where they should set it down, and began a rudimentary check of the straps.

Master Martin carried the cane. Whistling a cheerful tune, he bounced lightly down the barrack steps and met up with

Master Boyden halfway across the floor, near the front of the twin rows of beds.

"Thank you for coming," Master Boyden said politely.

"Not at all," Hutch replied.

"Happy to help," Martin added, then directed the guards.

"Set it up over there and move those beds aside. I want plenty of room to swing into." He twirled the cane in his hand, as though limbering up his arm, and it made a nasty hissing sound as it swished through the air. "Which one is it?"

"Red, of course." Master Boyden turned his head and all three men looked right at me.

I froze on my bed.

Hutch asked, "Isn't that the one we all—"

"That's her," Boyden said.

And Martin smiled. "And she still hasn't learned. I knew I'd get the chance to work that little bottom over. Now, you'll really make my day if you say she didn't bruise yesterday and that I'll have a nice, pale little slate to work upon."

"After Deaton got through with her?" Boyden snorted. "Are you serious? She'll carry those marks for a week at least."

Martin tsked. "Pity. I always do my best work on an unmarred canvas. Still, can't complain. Any week a Black Master gets to cane a New-Comer is a good week to draw Demerit Duty."

As the guards set the 'horse' down and shifted beds out of the way, the masters headed down the aisle between the rows of beds, all dark smiles and white teeth, coming straight to me.

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Master Martin caressed the foot of Black's bed, sending her scrambling all the way to the bars at the head to avoid being anywhere near it. He never took his eyes off me as he said, "I love the young ones, so full of spit and fire and practically no common sense—wonderful mixture, that. Hutch, didn't our little mischief-maker here have a taut, firm bottom? I seem to recall commenting on that when I had her across my knee yesterday."

"Very firm," Hutch confirmed. "Very little wobble to it at all."

"That kind of bottom just begs for the cane." Martin struck the end of Black's mattress, the cane slicing through the air to deliver a mighty 'THWHACK!' upon the neatly made blankets, and I jumped so hard I nearly fell off my own. "Put her right up for me, Boyden. I'll give her welts she'll feel for the rest of her life."

I swallowed hard.

Master Boyden lay his hands on the metal foot rail of the bed and leaned over, bringing his face down to mine. "Last chance," he told me. "I'll tolerate no more of your little mutinies. I suggest you start eating."

Beside him, Master Martin lovingly caressed the yellow length of that beastly cane with his hand. "Oh, don't listen to him. Please. Be defiant."

I cleaned my plate. We all did. But to this day, I hold the record for the longest running hunger strike in Judgment's history.

On day number three, they introduced us to caramels and getting me to eat after that ceased to be a problem. And lord,

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did those candies ever become a treat! It's how they got us to learn their language.

Master Boyden schooled us every day, teaching us simple words at first and giving a single caramel square to the female who made the most progress or who tried the hardest to fold her tongue around the unfamiliar sounds. For the female who, in his estimate, learned the least, a sound dose of his thick leather strap was enough to motivate the rest of us to try harder. Even me. Three times on the receiving end of that strap was all I required before I decided becoming bi-lingual was in my best interest. But the day I got my first caramel ... oh ... never has anyone savored a candy so thoroughly as I.

They say if a person is dropped into a foreign speaking country, by month's end necessity will have forced them to learn the language enough to adequately converse with the locals. Caramel squares and harsh leather whippings had us speaking Judgment's language in two weeks. By the end of the month, we had begun to lose our accents.

Those candies also got us to betray ourselves.

At the end of our time as New-Comers, we were led from our solitary barrack to a well-lit room that was almost like a cross between a craft store and a music hall. There were all sorts of musical instruments: pianos, guitars, flutes, etc. There were tables full of books, half-woven tapestries on looms, easels with white canvases and a rainbow array of paints, water colors and pastels, charcoal pencils and sketch pads, arts and craft supplies to boggle the imagination. And the question was put to us: "What can you do?"

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I watched as my companions scrambled like a line of naked, pink seals to reveal their favorite hobbies. Brunette and French Blonde both played piano, Brunette only passably so. But they were rewarded with caramel candies and Master Boyden logged a note in the book he was carrying.

Black arranged flowers and dug yarn from the sewing box with which to crochet, and received a candy for both. Blonde German sang, her soprano voice not opera quality but lilting and beautiful and very pleasing despite the fact that her song was in German and I couldn't understand a word of it. She got two caramels for that alone, and we were all very jealous because of it. Even me, though I kept myself apart from the rest, standing next to the wall and making no move to join my fellow seals in the performance arena.

"What do you do?" Master Boyden finally asked me.

Just because I wanted caramels bad enough to learn their language, didn't mean I was ready to fall at their feet in throes of obedience. At this point, I knew I would never be allowed to go home. But rather than give up, the wheels in my mind had switched tracks. I was now thinking about escape.

He held his hand out, gesturing to the musical instruments. "Do you play?"

"Not since I was five," I said.

He looked at me. "Not since I was five, what?"

"Sir." That word stuck in my throat nearly every time, but Boyden's ever ready strap was slowly but surely helping me overcome my reticence.

He made a note in his book. "That's three for today."



I turned my head away, making a face as I realized I'd be under his strap before bedtime again tonight.

"What did you play?"

"A kazoo," I muttered, then quickly added, "Sir."

"Too late," he said, almost cheerfully and making another note. "That's four, and I ought to give you another for cheek, so watch it. Can you sew?"

"No, sir."

"Everyone has hobbies, Red. What do you like to do for fun?"

"Watch tv mostly." I frowned, picking at my hands, then realized my mistake.

"Five," he said. "What else?"

"Keep your caramels, sir." I was careful to keep my tone and expression both neutral. "I am not a trained monkey. I won't dance for you."

"Six. The respect is there, but so is the attitude. What kind of dancing do you do?"

"It was a figure of speech, sir. I can't dance."

"Two more for lying then." Master Boyden glanced around the room. He noted Brunette's artistic ability with a charcoal pencil, and German blonde who was busy showing her golden-haired sister how to fold origami animals.

"Do I get sent home, sir," I asked, not entirely unhopeful, "if I haven't any decent skills at all?"

Master Boyden glanced at me over the top of his book, his expression unreadable. "Your status and sales price are determined by the quality of companionship you offer. A man can only beat and fuck a female, even the most beautiful of

females, so many times before boredom sets in. When she can do other things, then she maintains a level of interest. Blonde with the lovely singing voice will likely be ranked higher than the rest of you. She has a talent that her sales price will reflect. She will, in all probability, be sold to a more artistically inclined master who will value her ability. With fewer skills, comes less value and a lower price. And think, if just about anyone can afford to buy you, Red, who knows what kind of brutal, callous, sadistic master you might find yourself undervalued by. As hard as it may be for you to believe, there are things Outside worse than what you'll find within these walls."

It was a chillingly cold explanation, and as I digested the hard-to-swallow information, he smiled. "There have been a rare, few females who have come to us without a single decent skill, too stupid or disinclined to pick one up during their time of training. I believe all three were sold to fetish brothels. How many years can you endure that kind of treatment, do you think: nightly beatings, being passed from one man to the next, used so frequently that after a while the pain of brutal, savage rutting causes all sexual sensation to fade into nothingness. That is, of course, if you are even allowed to keep your clitoris. Some places have been known to cut them from a female to keep her focused on pleasuring the men mounting her, instead of selfishly achieving an orgasm for herself. At least whores and prostitutes can change their professions if they want to badly enough. All you'll be able to do is lie on your back, stare at the ceiling and try to retain your sanity. How appealing is that to you?"

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I stared at the origami animals the blondes had fashioned: German's, all beautiful and elegant creations; French, still struggling to fold a simple swan. I looked up at him, swallowing my pride as I asked, "Do you have any clay, sir?"

"Do you sculpt?"

Reluctantly, I nodded. "I make pottery, too."

"Nine." He held out his hand to show me to the pottery wheel. "Right this way."

I made a small pot. Uninspired and unenthusiastic though I was, my foot pumped the peddle to spin the wheel and my hands knew well where and how to touch the clay to mold that lump into a pleasing form.

"Very nice," Master Boyden told me.

But the second he graded the skill, I destroyed my creation, letting my hands fall into the sides and reducing the structure to an ugly, wet lump again.

\* \* \* \*

German Blonde was removed from our group before the rest of us even left the skill room. She was renamed Passerine, which is more imaginative, I suppose, than what it meant: Songbird.

Our time as New-Comers ended that day. We were given the drab blue-grey uniforms of Primaries and taken down into the Pit to join the rest of Judgment's Lessers. French Blonde and Brunette were given into the care of Master Hutch, who supervised those who could play a musical instrument with some degree of competency. Black went to Master Borsch in the sewing room.

"You should probably go to Master Duncan," Boyden said as he led me down a long corridor, past a good many skill room doors. "He's got eleven painters and would no doubt be grateful for a sculptor and a little variety. But this was requested especially with you in mind, and Tane has already agreed."

We went almost to the end of the hall before Boyden stopped, opened a door, and motioned me inside. "I've been looking forward to this." He took my hand and pressed a yellow slip of paper into my palm. "Your nine counts of misbehavior. Be sure to give them to your new instructor."

I went in. There were four Primaries, seven Midpoints and three Elites, each sitting at individual desks that were, but for the ankle stocks underneath them, strangely reminiscent of grade school. All along the walls were bookcases crammed full of huge leather-bound tomes. The walls were lined with canes, straps, paddles and yokes. At the front of the room, there was a stool in one corner and a waist-high stock with wrist and neck holes in the other.

Over all this presided Master Deaton. His desk was centered on a raised dais between the stock and stool, and at the moment, he was half-leaning, half-sitting on the edge, a long, whippy cane in his hands, which he methodically bent back and forth as he surveyed the Lessers under his command. I think we saw each other at the same time.

Master Boyden patted me on the shoulder and winked, "Welcome to Primary life."

And the door closed behind me, sealing me in that room with a man who suddenly seemed more like a demon. We

stared at one another, his black eyes boring into mine, squelching whatever rebellious feelings I'd been coddling since the skill room. Though I could have been a stone statue for all I moved, Master Deaton came as close to cracking a smile as I would ever see him.

"Well, bugger me blind." The corner of his mouth curled ever so slightly upward. "I didn't think Tane would agree to put you in my care. He must think you're as desperate for discipline as I do. Either that, or you just didn't pray hard enough."

Taking one step back, I bumped into the wall, disturbing a neat display of canes with my elbow and knocking two of them to the floor. Not one of the other Lessers so much as turned her head to look at me.

In fact, the only one moving was Master Deaton, who pointed the length of that cane at me and said, "You must be wondering right now, what does he have planned for me?"

I knew what he had planned for me. The pain from his last spanking had lasted a long time, and the bruises even longer. The very idea of what he could—would—do to me now, left me almost paralyzed with fear.

"A female should know her fate before it's dealt her," he said in his soft, loverly way. "It's a fascinating thing to watch—the visible, emotional conflict as a woman tries to reconcile herself with the agony she knows she'll suffer under my hand. I've been looking forward to watching you struggle all month long. The fear I see on your face is a good beginning, but you have only the barest inkling of what I can

do to you. I think I'll give you a little demonstration. Something to broaden your scope of understanding. Dawn."

A blonde Midpoint immediately lay her pencil aside and stood up beside her desk. Like a well-trained soldier, she stood at attention with her head high, her arms straight at her sides, and waited to be directed. From under the back of her uniform skirt, dark bruise-like lines laddered the back of her legs to a point halfway down her thighs. I felt my own legs go weak and rubbery in response to the sight.

"Yoke," he ordered, and she snapped around on her heels, hurrying to the back of the room to fetch the device from the wall. Her eyes briefly found mine. For a moment, I thought I saw sympathy, but then her face smoothed into an emotionless mask. She must have been wondering which of us was fated to be strapped into that awful contraption ... God knows, I was!

But Master Deaton had other ideas. Instead, he said, "Desire, come here."

A lovely, dark-haired Midpoint from the farthest row stood up. Tall and serene of face, she made her way slowly to the master's dais.

I had to get out of here. Everything in me was screaming to flee, but for Desire it was too late. She climbed the dais to stand before the vengeful master, who towered over her by at least a head.

"Turn and face the room."

As she faced us, Master Deaton lifted the back of her skirt, baring her firm, shapely buttocks. He stroked them with his hand.

"Hardly a mark left from your last whipping," he mused aloud. "I suppose that makes this overdue, doesn't it?"

"Yes, sir," Desire obediently replied. Her expression never changed, but I thought for a moment I saw her mouth tighten a little at the corners.

Impotent anger and flighty panic left me trembling. The last thing I wanted to hear was the awful whir and whip of that cane in Deaton's hand as it met unfortunate flesh, but I was as transfixed as the other Lessers watching from their desks.

When Dawn brought the yoke to the dais, Desire held out her arms and the device was strapped to her shoulders and wrists. This truly was an implement of torture. After my first hour in one, I could have sworn my arms were leaving their sockets, but Desire never made a sound. Her face remained serene, expressionless.

"Lean forward," Master Deaton said, and she bent at the waist. When her hips and shoulders were nearly aligned, he stopped her. "That's enough."

The weight of the yoke made holding such a position a hellish effort to say the least. After only a few seconds, even from the back of the room, I could see her beginning to shake from the strain.

"Thank Red for your punishment," Master Deaton told her.

My stomach lurched when Desire's lovely brown eyes found mine. Though there was no sign of accusation within them, I felt a stab of guilt as she dutifully said, "Thank you."

The master stood back, measured air and with a lunging step forward, he thrashed into the pro-offered buttocks with a

vigor that nearly had me jumping from my skin. Desire's body jolted from the impact, but her face never changed in expression. I flinched more than she did as the second and third stroke fell. My hand flew out to grab the door handle as the fourth knocked her a step forward, and for the first time, she reacted to the pain. Her eyes closed and she slowly exhaled the breath she'd been holding. The fifth stroke brought a sheen of moisture to her eyes, but the sixth, the last and most vicious one, made her jerk and gasp. No one moved, and for a while the only sound was Desire's raspy breathing.

"All right, stand up," said Master Deaton. "Turn and show your marks."

Harnessed as she was, Desire had to bend her knees before she could raise herself and the heavy yoke to stand upright again. My knees wobbled as I saw the dark lines the cane had clawed into the very base of her buttocks. In view of all, the welts puffed her skin and began to turn purple.

"Come here, Red," Master Deaton said softly.

My stomach dropped all the way to my toes. I looked down at the yellow slip I was holding in my shaking hand, then the door handle which I clutched white-knuckled, and then to the six rapidly purpling marks swelling upon Desire's backside. I almost wet myself right there.

"Red." Master Deaton lowered his head, his black eyes drilling into me, the very picture of the devil incarnate. "Come to me."

Flinging open the door, I ran.

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## CHAPTER SIX

*The Detective and his friends leaned back on the table, looking at one another as well as at me. "Who is Daymon Tane, Callie?"*

*"My Master, sir." My voice softened as I said it, and I felt a warm tingling within as I thought of him.*

*"Is he the one who abuses you?"*

*I blinked in confusion, thinking perhaps I had misunderstood him. Very carefully, I raised my eyes so that I looked just past his shoulder. I could see his face this way, read his expression, and yet remain respectful. "I am not abused, sir."*

*The Detective leaned his elbows on his knees, his large hands clasped in front of his mouth.*

*"Callie," he began hesitantly. "When we brought you in, there were welts as thick as my finger all over your backside."*

*I smiled with pride at this and smoothed my hand back to touch my tender flanks. That was the problem with welts: they faded too quickly. In a few more days the majority of the bruises would also be gone, and then I would be pale and smooth all over. I wouldn't even have the pleasant, red warmth of a well-spanked bottom, and the thought of it made me a little sad. I couldn't remember the last time I was completely without mark.*

*"They are almost gone now," I said, gingerly touching the worst spot down on my thigh. Then my smile faded and my*

*eyes teared; I was so terribly homesick. "Will I go back to my Master soon?"*

*The Detective reached over to cup my chin. "Honey, I'm going to make certain that you never go back to that bastard. Don't worry, he won't ever lay a hand on you again."*

*Shocked, I pulled my face from his hand. My mouth gaped; I couldn't breathe. Had he driven his fist into my gut, it couldn't have felt any worse than the pain and panic and fear that burst through me.*

*I leapt to my feet, startling them all with my horrified scream. "Noooooooo!"*

\* \* \* \*

The door to Deaton's skill room slammed back against the wall, I threw it open with such panic. I ran, as hard and as fast as I knew how, back down the corridor. Above me, an unseen intercom blared: "Primary running through the halls."

An instant later, every training room door swung open and the masters stepped out into the hall. I barely dodged past Master Boyden without being grabbed, ducked around a corner, and crashed into a guard. We both went down in a tangled pile of arms and legs, but I was back on my feet and fleeing down the hall, I think, before he quite realized what had knocked him down.

I hit the Pit at a dead run, ducked past the eight barrack doors, and scrambled up a flight of steps at the other side of the room. As I was nearing the top, I felt the ominous tremor of someone mounting the stairs behind me and my panic intensified.

My escape was a doomed attempt from the start. I didn't know where I was going. I didn't know where the mountain entrance was. I could have been running in the opposite direction, losing myself deeper in this nightmare. All I know is I burst out of the Pit, flew around a corner and collided straight into the arms of the Mountain Lord. The force of the impact knocked him back against the wall and me flat on my rear on the hard, stone floor.

I screamed, my hands and feet scrambling clumsily to get away from him. I rolled onto my hip, ready to gain my feet and run again, but the hall was full of guards and masters. Master Deaton, his cane in his hand, was in the lead. He did not stop when he saw Tane, as the others did, but came steadily right for me. I did not realize I was cowering, panting and whimpering, against Tane's legs until I felt his hand snag the scruff of my uniform and pull me to my feet.

"We must be getting soft to let such a little infant this far out of the Pit," Tane said mildly, shaking me by my clothes.

Breathing hard, as much with anger as the exertion I'd just put them all through, Deaton was not amused. "This one requires extensive whipping."

"Yes, we really have been too lenient with her," Tane mused, and I closed my eyes. Already I could feel Deaton's cane biting savagely into me. It would be unbearable. I would scream and weep as they laughed and made their sport of me. Hot tears fell from my eyes as the Mountain Lord pronounced my sentence. "Three for leaving Master Deaton's class, another three for leading us this merry little chase, and three more for running into me. I'll give them privately in my

quarters. Also, I think a session with the Demerit Cane is well in order. Master Willhite, you are the Black Master this week?"

From the back of the group behind Deaton, Willhite pushed his way to the front. "Yes."

Tane nodded. "Whip her well and whip her low. I want marks that will last for weeks."

"I doubt that's going to be a problem."

I groaned, low and long.

"I am her barracks master," Deaton said, his eyes still locked on me, his anger terrifying with its intensity. "I believe I am entitled to some of these cuts."

Transferring his grip from my clothes to my arm, Tane only said, "I assume she fled because she was being punished."

"Yes."

"When you get her back, by all means, give her her due. I think between the three of us, we can teach our little mischief-maker how to behave."

"That's one mischief-maker who's about to get a very sore tail," Master Willhite joked to Deaton, who continued to glare at me and remained unamused.

Once again, I found myself taken to Tane's private chambers. I went docilely, my failed escape attempt leaving me tired, frightened and completely dispirited. He took no chances with me, locking the door behind us, though he needn't have bothered. I was too depressed to try again.

"What am I going to do with you?" he said, cupping my cheek with his hand.

Fighting tears, I begged him, "Let me go."

He smiled. "No."

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He caressed the bow of my lips, my chin and the bridge of my nose. He stripped me of my drab uniform and left me standing before him nude. "Bow," he directed.

I lowered myself to my knees, bending down to lay my forehead before his feet and clasping my hands behind my back. I had to close my eyes to keep back the threatening tears.

"Rise," he told me.

Taking two deep breaths, I sat back on my heels, my eyes still closed so I wouldn't have to see his face as I spread my knees wide apart.

After a long pause, he said, "Present."

I turned a slow, hot shade of red, but again obeyed. As my fingers opened wide the pink lips of my sex, I lifted my hips up and out, laying my shoulders so far back that they almost touched the floor. He made me hold this position until the strain left the muscles in my back and legs aching. I grit my teeth, panting with the effort it took to hold myself thus. Seconds turned into minutes, and the minutes dragged themselves agonizingly one after another into forever. A fine sheen of sweat broke out over my skin. I groaned.

"Stand," he finally said, and I collapsed backwards into a heap on the floor, a sweating, panting, shaking mess of flesh. He smiled, waiting, the epitome of infinite patience as I rolled onto my side and wearily climbed to my feet. "In the trunk at the foot of my bed, there are two sets of leather wrist straps. Fetch them and take them to my bed."

On aching legs, I obeyed without a word. I knew what he wanted. The moment had come. I was going to be beaten again.

"I want you on your stomach," he instructed. "Your bottom needs to be well-raised on a few pillows."

I arranged the bed as he directed, but if he was surprised by my compliance, he did not show it. In fact, he seemed to expect it. My tears threatened, but I refused to let them fall as I lay down with my hips elevated high on that small mountain of pillows. And I made no protest at all when he strapped my wrists together and fastened them to a hook below the mattress line in the headboard. Burying my face in my arms, I waited for him to just get on with it. But he wasn't inclined to simply allow me to hate him. Instead, he caressed me. His warm palms wandered over my skin, giving my traitor's body ample time to remember his touch. It responded despite my unwilling mind, my nipples peaking as he stroked me, massaging my shoulders, my back, my waist. He caressed me all the way to my toes.

"The Elites already dislike you, you know." He worked his way back to my shoulders, then slipped his hands under me. Cupping my breasts, he rolled the stiffened tips between his fingers and gently plucked at them. "I know the sensual skill level of every female I train. I know them when they first come to me and again when they leave. I have already surpassed my quota with you, and I feel no inclination to stop. They are understandably jealous."

He stroked my ribs and waist, and slipped down between my legs to fondle my plump bottom. His fingers slipped down

my bottom crack to part the folds of my sex. He knew exactly how to touch me. To my shame, I heard the wet, slick sound of my own arousal as he caressed me, and I hated him for that.

And he could hardly help but notice my state. "This is a pleasant surprise. You weren't trying to escape after all, were you? You were instead running to me for help, to beg me, please, release you from this unbearable, sexual ache."

I closed my eyes, hot tears falling to the mattress as he found my clit and his slippery fingers roved over and over the sensitive tip. My hips were soon moving against him, and I was choking on desperate whimpers of need.

Unable to stand it, I raised my head, begging, "Stop! Please stop!"

His fingers never paused their torment, and instead he said, "Let's play a game. Repeat after me: This one loves her Master, heart and soul."

My shoulders shook as I dissolved into sobs of despair.

"This one loves her Master," he repeated, his voice seductively coaxing. "Heart and soul."

To my everlasting shame, I said it, though my voice broke and I sobbed on 'heart and soul.'

"Good girl." He stroked my hair, tipping my head back so he could watch my face as he other hand continued its relentless sexual assault. My legs had begun to shake, and I trembled under him. "Now say: Yes, Master. Hard please, Master."

Gasping and sniffing, my face wet with tears and my nose running, I dutifully repeated the line. It felt as though there

were a great spring wound tightly within me. And every time his nimble fingers made their rolling circle between my thighs, the spring became tighter still.

"And lastly, let me hear you say: If it pleases you, Master."

As my trembling voice softly whispered it back to him, Tane took up the second set of bands, strapping my legs together just above the knees. "The rules of our game are simple. I am going to ask you a series of questions, to which you will reply with one of the three answers I've already given you. You may use each line only once, so think carefully and be sure your answers are appropriate to the question or your punishment will be doubled with each incorrect answer." He combed my hair back from my face with his fingers, then tied it into a pony tail so he could see my woe-filled features.

"Whether you cooperate or not, this should be fun for me. So, let's begin with an easy question first: What does this female have to say to me?"

His fingers abruptly stopped their maddening caress. Instead, they drew back to give that tormented little nub the gentlest of spansks, barely more than a pat, but my entire body jolted upon the pillows and I cried out raggedly, "This one loves her Master, heart and soul!"

He bent to kiss my nape, his soft, warm mouth caressing a languid, unhurried path to my ear. He palmed my groin, barely rubbing, easing me back from the edge of coming. I sobbed through gritted teeth, my body gaining a life all its own, rubbing and arching against him, desperate for completion. Only when my gyrations eased, did his fingers



return to claim my clit and slowly he began to wind the spring again.

"I am torn," he admitted, watching as my eyes closed and my mouth fell open in a series of breathy moans. "I want both to fuck you and whip you as you deserve to be. Not that you don't need both, obviously, but I have been hard as a rock for days just thinking about sliding into your body. I used Caress last night so I could finally gain some sleep. Poor thing, I wore her out. She's been bow-legged all day. I'd love to do the same to you. Unfortunately, you did try to escape, and I can't exactly let that slide. It would do horrible things to our Lessers' sense of discipline. So what do you think: should I punish you for trying to run away?"

Just as I became fully wound again beneath him, he drew back his hand to gently spank between my legs once, then twice, my entire body convulsing with each wet, little smack. I threw my head back against his shoulder, sobbing and moaning all at once.

Another hot tear slipped from my eye, but he saw it and bent to kiss it from my cheek. "Answer me, Red. Should I punish you for trying to run away?"

My jaw shook as though I were half frozen, stuttering my reply as my teeth chattered. "I-I-If it s-s-so p-pleases you, M-Master. Ohpleaseohpleaseohplease..." I arched back my hips, trying to ride upon suddenly uncooperative fingers.

"Ah," he smiled. "I definitely like you like this." I buried my face in my arms, groaning as, hot against my ear, he murmured, "Shall I give you a good, sound strapping to punish you for running away? Answer me, Infant."

"Yes, Master," I wept. "H-hard p-please, Master."

"A female after my own heart," he said, and he once more caught the center of my being, throbbing and aching, beneath the tip of his fingers and began to circle it relentlessly. "You're very good at this game. You hardly missed a cue. Let's play again. Would you like to be fucked before I punish you?"

It was the cruelest thing he could ever have done, to make me want him so badly. I shouted, "Oh yes, please, Master! Ooo-o! Please, Master! Oh God, hard please, Master!"

He tsked close to my ear. "You keep ad-libbing the answers, though it's not entirely displeasing to me. You have a seductive little bottom. I'd love to get at it again. But I'm sorely tempted to pop that little cherry between your legs and ride you so hard that you feel my pounding all the way up to your throat."

"Yes!" had become my mantra. I panted it breathlessly, rocking against him, hardly even hearing what he said.

"I am going to give you what you so desperately want." The bed shifted under his weight as he moved to straddle my thighs. I both felt and heard as he unfastened the front of his pants and, when he bent over me to brace his strong arms to either side of my smaller shoulders, I felt the thick and solid length of him, settle hot in the crease of my bottom.

He leaned down to brush his lips across the curve of my throat, rising up to my ear. With a not so gentle tug, he bit the tender lobe, commanding without speaking, until I turned my head to receive his kiss.

He cupped my mound, abandoning my clit in favor of spreading those nether lips open to the monster shaft that

slipped between my thighs. He moved his hips, rubbing and stroking the length of it along my slit, and the feel of it there was nothing short of heaven. That hot, pulsating need sank from my clit all the way to my womb. I moaned constantly, begging without words for him to come inside me.

"You like that, do you?" He rolled my clit, wet and slippery and aching with my own arousal, between his fingers.

"Yes, Master! Oh, hard please, Master!" I hardly knew what I said. My whole body trembled and I moaned again. I bit the mattress sheet. "This one loves—oh! Loves her Master, heart and—and soooou! Oh!"

He laughed. "Yes, you definitely like this."

I turned my head when he bade me, opening to him without protest while his tongue thrust into my mouth in a sweet parody of mating. He chuckled low in his throat when I hesitantly tried to kiss him back.

He shifted and I felt the full heat of him, rampant and hard, slip between the lips of my sex. It lodged there, at the entrance of me and I could all but feel it throbbing against me. He was very thick, very large. He spread me open with his fingers to ease the way as he pushed the head of him into my yielding flesh. Even as wet as he had made me, the size of him in a place so tight and untried, made the progress slow and he had me biting back whimpers of discomfort and alarm.

"Relax, mischief-maker." He nipped at my shoulder and the side of my neck, soothing the marks his teeth left with gentle kisses. "You see the torment you caused poor Caress? I battered her womb for hours with this insatiable beast, but it would not be contented. It has been hungry for you. It

desires a bath in blood." I whimpered, clutching the straps that bound my hands as he whispered, "Feel it pulsing inside you? My beautiful little mischief-maker, I do believe I am going to tear you apart."

He pushed hard, and I shouted my pain as he entered me. For one horrible moment, it felt as though his words had been prophetic, that he'd split me in two. He withdrew an inch and immediately thrust again, sinking deeper, and then deeper still. On his third forceful lunge, I felt him butt painfully against my womb, impaling me to the fullest that I could be.

It hurt worse now, with my legs strapped together, than all the times that he had taken me as a man my first night here. Allowing me no time to adjust to his intrusion, he pumped in and out with monstrous vigor. By his own admission, he said he desired my blood. And if so, then he must have been well contented, because I bled profusely upon that relentless shaft, unable to do more than grunt as my body was forced to accept him. No matter how I hunched and squirmed beneath him, I could not ease its battering.

He balanced his weight on one arm, wrapped the other tight around my waist and forced me to move with his rigorous thrusts. "My God you are so tight! This is a cunt to be savored!"

A master's sexual gratification is of paramount importance; my own had no priority of consideration, and I wish I could say that the pain of his intrusion rid me of the need for mine. But it didn't happen that way. Rather than pull away from him, I lifted back my hips to meet his thrusts. The pain had changed. Though it still hurt, I felt it in a whole new aspect:

one of intense pleasure. I threw back my head as he cupped my mound and his fingers found the aching nub they had abandoned there.

"Tip back your head," he commanded. "Let me see your face."

I obeyed, then gasped sharply. I clawed at the headboard, pulling at the straps that held me immobile while he turned my whole universe upside down. I climaxed hard, shuddering all around as I wept at this ultimate betrayal, wilting like a spent flower in my bonds.

"Yes, cry," he panted, and rose up onto his knees to take me in long, punishing strokes. "Cry for me."

He made the bed shake with the violence of his motions, and I could only wail a mixture of pleasure, pain and exertion as his fingers dug into my hips. Tane came with a roar. He yanked on my hips, impaling me as deep as he could go one last time before collapsing on top of me.

There was no greater relief than the feel of that monster sliding out of me for good. He rolled over on his back and left me lying with my hips raised upon that mound of pillows, wounded and throbbing in the aftermath.

"How long, I wonder," he panted, "before the beast within demands your suffering again." He rolled his head to look at me, but I turned my face away, I was so ashamed. "Already I want to have you brought to me again, tonight after Lights Out. You'll be tender, I'm sure. I could tie you on your back and watch you cry out as I savor the tightness of your beautiful cunt. I will suckle at your breasts, use my teeth on your clit. I will hurt you, and I will make you love it."

I groaned, sobbing into my arms as he climbed over me and got out of bed. He stroked my back, an idle gesture that felt more like an assertion of possession than one meant to comfort.

He patted my hip, "Now, to take care of that other business."

Tane went back to the chest and brought out a well-oiled, black leather strap. It was a fearsome thing, four inches wide and very thick. It made a raspy sound as he dragged it over his palm, feeling the supple length.

"You've earned nine with this. I honestly can't remember the last time I personally dealt out such a minor punishment. Hardly seems worth the effort. Still—" he measured the tail of the strap against the distance he stood away from me, "—you aren't a hardened female yet, so a mere nine might make a lasting impression."

Before I could protest, he raised his arm and, in a fury of motion, brought it cracking down full across the lower half of my raised buttocks. Pain lanced through me. I jolted up in my bonds, shouting and kicking against the mattress with both feet.

The second stroke over-lapped the first, cracking across my skin with ear-stunning impact and covering my entire bottom with a smarting, pink blush. I twisted onto my side as the strap wrapped around me yet again, exactly covering where the first had fallen. The end of it flicked the side of my hip. That hurt almost as much as all three blows combined.

"Don't twist your bottom away," Tane admonished calmly. "Lie flat over the pillows and take your punishment properly."

This is only nine little licks. You'll take a good many more before this day is over. Be brave, lie still and behave yourself."

My protest was a wild, frantic sob, which he ignored. The walls rang with the steady crack of leather and my own screams. My throat felt raw by the time all nine had fallen. And when he did finally set the strap aside to unbuckle my thighs, he amused himself by watching me writhe and thrash in the bedding. I didn't care how I looked, the smart was laving through me in ever increasing waves that took a long time to fade. Especially on the tops of my thighs, where every second stroke had overlapped, catching me where the flesh was the most sensitive.

I wept the entire time he redressed me, unable to believe the hurt he had inflicted. A white pin was affixed to the front of my uniform, over my left breast. My Demerit. It said, 'Runaway.' When he summoned a guard to take me back to Deaton's skill room, a thick leather collar was fastened around my neck. The buckle was padlocked so I could not remove it and a leash clipped to the front.

"Take her to Master Deaton. If she fights your lead, a flick of your switch should make her cooperative again," Tane told the guard, though he looked at me when he said and I think he did so strictly for my benefit.

It was a terrible humiliation to be returned to the Pit on a leash. The barracks were full of Lessers gathered together, talking and laughing—laughing!—as they enjoyed a half hour break between skill sessions. As I was led to Deaton's room, all fell silent. They turned to watch me with blank, pitiless

expressions. Two girls even backed away, as though the punishment I was about to receive might somehow be diverted onto them if I drew too close.

Master Deaton was waiting for me at his desk. During my absence, a pottery wheel, sculpting table, extra lights, shaping tools and bricks upon bricks of gray clay had been brought in and set up in front of his dais. Affixed to the bottom of my chair was a set of ankle stocks. There would be no more running from him.

The guard took me right up onto the dais to laying my leash in the master's outstretched hand without so much as a word.

"Thank you," Deaton said, and my guard took his leave of us.

The dark-haired master's face was glacial for all the emotion he showed as he wrapped the end of the leash around his palm. He drew me in very close to him. "Did you enjoy your little run through the halls?"

"N-no, sir." My hands shot out at my sides as I struggled to keep my balance as he caught hold of my collar clip and pulled me right up onto my toes.

He dragged me around to the front of his desk and sat down on the edge, dragging me by my collar to stand between his knees. "How strange. To me, it looked as though you were enjoying yourself immensely. At my expense, I might add."

My muscles tightening automatically, hurting where Tane's strap had already turned my bottom scarlet. "No, sir."

"And now you dare to argue with me."



I caught myself before another 'No sir' slipped from my mouth. There was no safe way to answer him. I tried to keep quiet, but he didn't let it go. Masters never let go when an infraction worth punishing presents itself.

Deaton gently shook me by my collar. "You dared to argue with me, didn't you, Red?"

I swallowed hard. "Y-yes, sir."

"Come here." Without waiting for my compliance, he pulled me face down across one knee. "Let's see what damage he's done to you."

He flipped the back of my uniform skirt up to appraise my red, raw flanks.

"My, my. He obviously enjoyed himself. A pity that you did as well. Just look at how wet you are, Red. Disgraceful."

I hissed a long-drawn breath as his fingertips traced that painful line where Tane's strap had scalded the tops of my thighs.

"At least he gave me something to aim for. Don't worry. I'll leave you so completely welted that, by the time I'm done with you, you won't even notice this."

I closed my eyes, my head hanging down between my shoulders. There was nothing I could do. I couldn't run. I couldn't escape. In a few minutes, he would have me shrieking and begging for mercy until my throat was raw, so I would not even be able to maintain the dignity of silence.

"Well," he said expectantly, and gave my hip a stinging slap. "Do you think I'm going to spank your bottom as though you were a Personal? You aren't worthy of so gentle and loving a touch. Stand up."

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I pushed slowly back to my feet, but could only retreat as far as his hold on my collar permitted. He stood with me, his dark eyes boring into me with a fierce, almost gleeful ferocity. "Let's go find a proper cane. Nothing too thick or brutish. Nice and whippy is just the thing for you."

He made me crawl on the floor beside him, led by my leash to the back of the room he governed. He selected the thinnest verge from his collection—a long and wicked wand that swished as it sliced the air and bent almost double when his arm stopped its arc.

Perched on hands and knees, I had to spread my legs wide and arch my hips back to receive his strokes. Before each one, he held the cane to my lips so I could kiss the length and thank him for his time and efforts. My count was eighteen, with the added stipulation of a repeating cut if I moved from position. I wasn't very good at holding still. Though Master Deaton held tightly to my leash, as the whuck of the cane burrowed into me, I crawled and flopped at his feet, shrieking lustily I could not bear the pain.

Patience must have been a family trait. Master Deaton waited through each of my disobedient displays, allowing me in my own time to rise shakily back onto my hands and knees, offer up my bottom for the next stroke and tearfully kiss the cane.

My bad behavior turned an eighteen stroke punishment into one that numbered forty-seven. From first to last, Master Deaton spared me nothing. It took time, but I eventually came to realize he was right to do this. And over the years,

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no matter the marks I would accrue at his hand, I never ran from him again.

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## CHAPTER SEVEN

*"Okay," the Detective sighed, rubbing his temples with two fingers and tapping his pencil on the piece of paper in front of him. "There's your master..."*

*"Yes, sir. Daymon Tane," I supplied helpfully. I didn't mind answering their questions. It was the only thing I'd yet done that had made anyone happy here on the Outside. At this point, I was grateful to have finally found a way to please.*

*He looked at me, a slight frown tugging at his mouth. "Now, Callie, I thought we just agreed you weren't going to call me that."*

*Unfortunately, I flushed miserably, I never seemed to please them for long. 'Sir' was so hopelessly ingrained in me, unless I was truly rattled, it fell from my tongue without my thinking.*

*The Detective looked back down at his paper. "So under this Tane fellow there's these other "masters," their assistants, and guards. Give me their names again. I want to make sure I've got everybody."*

*"Master Deaton, Master Boyden, Master Smith, Master Rodman..." I recited carefully the names of every male in Judgment by their order of importance and seniority, right down to Ray, my favorite guard, who cleaned the Personals' common rooms daily.*

*"This is going to be one hell of a collar," said Jim, leaning over the Detective's shoulder.*

*My ears perked. "May I have my collar back, too?" I asked hopefully. I wanted my jesses, too. But I was hesitant to ask, lest they think me greedy.*

*The Detective ignored both of us. He tapped the paper with his pencil, again. "Tane has you," he said, redirecting my attention. "Do these guys—these top masters—do they have, uh, girls like you ... slaves ... uh, too?"*

*"Personals," I supplied. "Yes, many do."*

*"Do you know their names, too?"*

*Well, of course I knew my sisters in suffering. "Desire, Opal, Snow, Midget..."*

*"No, no." The Detective stopped me. "I need their other names. You know, like your other name—"*

*"Mischief."*

*"No, your real name," he corrected. "Callie McGuire."*

*I dared to argue with him, whispering, "Mischief," even as I shied from him and from that old Before time name.*

*The Detective shook his head. "Okay, forget it. We'll get back to that later. Uh, how many of these masters have—what did you call them..."*

*"Personals," the blonde detective interjected.*

*"Yeah, Personals. Which of these guys have Personals?"*

*I named off sixteen masters.*

*"What about the assistants? Do they have Personals, too?"*

*"Some do."*

*"How many?"*

*"Four," I said and named them off as well, watching as he made notes upon his paper. I couldn't read the markings. I*

*think I remember I once could, but now it looked like gibberish.*

*"What about the guards? How many of them have Personals?"*

*"Eleven."*

*"Only eleven?" He looked at the paper. "What about these other guys? When they want a Personal, what do they do?"*

*"Run out to the local Seven-Eleven and grab one off the shelf." Jim smirked.*

*I fidgeted with my fingers. "Many do not want Personals. They do not like the hassle."*

*The Detective ran a quick tally down his page. "I've got seventy-four names here and only thirty-two Personals. Does your master share you with the guys who don't have slaves of their own?"*

*I held my breath a moment, stunned by what he was suggesting. In all the years that I had been at Judgment, only once had a guard been permitted to mount me. It was a special treat bequeathed to him for preventing a Lesser from harming another Personal. Both females had been where they shouldn't have, and it might have ended disastrously had the guard not heard the ensuing attack and investigated. Tane rewarded him with me; my command having been to pleasure him 'until his eyes cross.' But no guard would have presumed to command a master's Personal without his express permission. As far as I knew, permission was never even asked.*

*Maybe I was misunderstanding the question. "I am shared with the other masters, sometimes."*

*"What about the guards?"*

*"Maybe they're all gay?" the mean detective suggested.*

*"Or eunuchs."*

*I fidgeted with my fingers again, growing increasingly uncomfortable as the conversation steered unerringly toward the topic of the Lessers. Personals did not associate with Lessers. They did not look at them. They did not talk of them. I licked my lips, answering carefully, "They use the others."*

*"Other Personals?"*

*"No." My voice dropped to a whisper as I did the forbidden.*

*"Lessers."*

*"Lessers?" He began writing again. "What's a Lesser?"*

*"The unfinished product."*

*His pencil stopped its busy scratching. He echoed, "You girls are a product?"*

*I rubbed my hands upon my knees, trembling as his expression began to darken angrily. Had I said something? Was his anger directed at me? I was answering his questions. Was it something I'd said?*

*"Is he selling his slaves here?" The Detective pointed at the table between us. "In my city? How many girls, Callie? How many Lessers does he have?"*

*"I-I-I don't know," I quavered. My fingers picked nervously at my clothes, and I dared a quick look behind me, past the blonde detective, who was chewing on his bottom lip. I didn't want to talk about this anymore. I wanted to be helpful but, oh, if my Master were to hear this conversation...*

*"This is important, Callie." The Detective was writing again, the pencil scratching furiously at the paper before him. He*

*filled the page, flipped it and continued on the blank one beneath. "What's your best guess? Ten, twenty girls? Where does he get them?"*

*"He buys them," I said, my throat closing on the words, choking me.*

*"He buys them!" His voice rose. "Somebody else is selling these girls?"*

*"Mac," the blonde detective said behind me. "Lower your voice."*

*I hugged my shoulders, beginning to rock. Why was he angry at me? I was answering his questions! Why was he angry?*

*"How many girls, Callie?"*

*"I-I d-don't know."*

*"Is it more than twenty?"*

*I couldn't breathe right. My heart was pounding in my throat. I tried to think. "I-I don't—Maybe two hundred. There was almost that many before my Master took me from Pit."*

*"Two hundred?" The blonde detective groaned and covered his eyes.*

*"He keeps you in a pit?!" The Detective's fury seemed to magnify right before my eyes, and I couldn't bear it. I bowed into submission, pressing my forehead to the floor at his feet as I burst into tears.*

*I felt a gentle hand on my back, and the blonde detective said, "We're taking five."*

*"I don't need a god damn break!" The Detective snarled. "I need to catch this fucking asshole and put him in jail for the rest of his life. Two hundred girls in a pit!"*



*"You are going to take a break," the blonde detective said firmly. "And so will she. And when you come back, kindly remember to keep your fucking voice down."*

*I felt the flow of air shift around me as the Detective slammed his chair back. I felt him touched the back of my neck. Struggling for calm, he said, "I'm sorry. It's not you I'm mad at."*

*And then he stalked from the room. The door shut hard behind him.*

\* \* \* \*

I had been a Primary for less than one day and already I'd earned my first Demerit Caning.

Dinner was held first. The Primary table was right in front of the masters' dais, and I found myself sitting squarely in front of Tane's place, where I felt his eyes on me throughout the meal.

Brunette sat down next to me. In a soft voice, she asked, "You've got a Demerit already?"

"Yes." Surprisingly enough, talking was permitted in the dining hall so long as we were sedate about it. I noticed her wince as she shifted on her chair. "Did they get you, too?"

"Ten with a paddle," she confided. "I wasn't paying attention."

A guard made his way to our table, and tapped Brunette on the shoulder. "Your name is Honey."

As he walked away, I noticed the newly-declared 'Honey' blushing. "What?"

She didn't look at me. "Master Hutch, my barrack master, he said I tasted sweet as honey. You know," her voice softened and lowered in embarrassment. "Down there."

I looked up at the dais just as Master Deaton leaned toward Tane to ask, "What is your fascination with that one? I have never seen you so affixed."

They did not bother lowering their voices, and we sat so close that everyone at our table heard them clearly. I dropped my eyes to my plate and stared at it, feeling a slow, burning humiliation suffuse my entire body.

"I happen to know you are equally affixed to a certain Midpoint named Desire," the Mountain Lord countered. "What is your fascination there?"

"Point taken." Deaton glanced down at me and one corner of his mouth turned upwards. "Do you share?"

"With you? Absolutely. I didn't know you had a taste for redheads."

"She's held your interest this long. There must be something there worth investigating."

As if the attention of one master wasn't bad enough ... I covered my face with my hands and wished the earth would swallow me whole.

Being Primaries, we were served our food last. It was hardly gourmet, but I do believe I ate better as a slave than I ever did free. Baked chicken, mashed potatoes for Primaries (baked with butter for Midpoints and Elites) and green beans, and a fresh salad with dressing.

Despite the fact that I could barely sit down, I ate every bite and then spent the remainder of the meal hour fingering

my knife and fork, knowing that I hadn't a prayer of smuggling either from the table. In all likelihood, I would only be disciplined that much more harshly for the trying. So I lay both utensils on my plate and gave up on that idea all together.

Before the end of the meal, the dreaded Demerit list was posted at the back of the dining hall. It was put up where we could all see it as we filed out of the room, as if those of us with Demerits needed a list to remind us. But for those not faced with eminent discipline, there was much pushing and shoving as the Lessers jostled one another to see who was due the cane tonight. For them it was a gleeful event. For me, it was hard to imagine anyone being here for so long that they began to look forward to the suffering of others.

I hung back until nearly everyone had left before making my way to the list. There were six names on it. Mine was the second to last.

"It will be a royal caning, I believe," a soft voice spoke into my ear.

I turned my head to see Tane standing as silent as an apparition at my shoulder. He smiled, his eyes on the list, and bent slowly to my ear. I closed my eyes, shivering as the warmth of his mouth enclosed the sensitive lobe in a kiss of stark intimacy. "I have invited Master Deaton to join us tomorrow. Be prepared to please two masters then, instead of one."

"Please don't," I whispered.

His hands briefly cupped my shoulders. "What a tender morsel you are. I should have named you weeks ago, it's so obvious. You are Mischief."

Then he was gone, back down the hall to his quarters and the Lessers that lingered around the list now stood staring at me with something akin to horror and pity. I had attracted the attention of a master. And not just any master, the Mountain Lord himself. I saw no end to the torment I would endure at his hands.

After dinner we had two hours, which that we could spend in the pursuit of anything we desired. It was during the latter half of this that the Black Master would collect together those of us from the list for punishment. But between dinner and then, we had sixty minutes that felt like a lifetime in which to dread it.

Most Lessers congregated in a huge room filled with bookshelves and chairs, an immense underground library of sorts. Some played card and board games, some read or talked. Some signed up for permission to learn other skills—variety in our days being a luxury. I tried to hang myself in one of the empty barrack rooms.

My chosen implements of self-destruction were a bedsheet about the neck and the top stairway banister. But instead of breaking my neck and leaving me nicely dead, my thick leather collar—as well as my ineptitude with knots—botched the job. I was left to dangle, choking slowly, until a Midpoint discovered me and ran blabbing to a nearby master.

I was cut down and, needless to say, went to my Demerit Caning with a heavy heart, a bruised and sore throat, and

red, blood shot eyes. To add insult to injury, I also had a second Demerit added to the front of my uniform. This one read, 'AMP': Abuse of a Master's Property.

Among the youngest of Judgment's masters, virile and spry and usually in a good humor, Master Wilhite had handsome features with short curly black hair and square shoulders on a thick body. He neither smiled nor frowned as he watched us file into the Demerit Room and line up, one behind the other, along the wall.

In attendance to him was Sub-Master McPherson, a Scotsman with shocks of red hair that stood out in bright contrast against the black of his form-fitting uniform. At the moment, he was in the process of selecting a number of canes from the wall rack. A man who normally liked to flirt with the Lessers, he was anything but smiling now as he whipped the canes through the air, testing their flexibility.

"Not that one," Master Wilhite directed, and gestured to a slightly thicker rod. "Let me have that one there."

McPherson drew down the one he indicated and brought it to Wilhite.

The Demerit Room wasn't particularly large. There were only two articles of furniture: the first being a roman-style pedestal upon which sat a huge black book that, when closed as it was now, measured two feet long, eighteen inches wide, and was at least four inches thick; the second was the Rack.

The Rack looked nothing like its namesake, but was rather an upside down 'L' shaped structure built of wood and black leather. Painfully simple in design, utterly inescapable when caught in its indifferent hold. It crowned the head of the

cavernous chamber leaving plenty of room for the Black Master to dispense his correction from behind.

After handing the cane to Master Wilhite, McPherson retreated to the pedestal near the head of our penitent line of soon-to-be victims. He opened the book to a page in the middle, marked with a slender black ribbon, and took out a fountain pen. As Wilhite called out our names and demerits, and sentenced us to the number of our count, McPherson dutifully recorded us into that book.

"Joy."

A tall, black woman at the front of the line, lifted her chin a little. From the way she shivered as she looked at the Rack, I knew she'd been here before.

"Failure to Posture," Wilhite said. "I'll give her six. The same for Treasure. Argumentative. I'll do them first. It's been a while since I've had you under my cane, Treaz. This will be a pleasure."

The petite blonde, second in line, said soft and tremblingly, "Yes, sir."

"Mimic. Back Talking. This is twice in as many months. Twelve should ensure there is no third time."

Poor Mimic, she wavered faintly on her feet. She bit her lip, something she was probably wishing she'd done earlier before earning her demerit.

For Laggardly Behavior during exercise in the Crater, Tawny received a count of three, the smallest given. And for Ebony, the Outright Defiance of a Master's Command earned her eighteen. Ebony was the female right beside me. A beautiful woman, with skin the color of coffee and cream, her

bottom as round as a bubble, she began to cry when Master Wilhite pronounced her sentence.

Then Master Wilhite looked at me, "Red?"

"Mischief," the Sub-Master interjected.

"What?"

McPherson raised his head from the Black Book and said, "He's just named her. It's Mischief."

"How very apt." Lightly taping the cane against his leg, he came down the line to stand in front of me. "We haven't had a Runaway in years. I'd be inclined to give her two dozen for that alone, but that—" He tapped the cane against my second white Demerit button. "The Abuse of a Master's Property is a serious offense and should have gone to the Assembly Block."

He pressed the end of the cane under my chin and gently forced back my head so he could see the strangulation bruises where they already marred my throat.

"Maybe because she's so new," McPherson suggested.

"Maybe because he's got plans for her bottom that don't involve its being ruined first. It's vastly more interesting to pump a woman until she groans, than to have her already groaning and in so much pain she doesn't even notice your pounding. I'm in the mood for generosity. Twelve for running, but it will be a walloping eightener for the AMP." Wilhite turned and headed for the Rack. "Let's get started, shall we? Joy, my luscious dark-skinned beauty, bring that saucy bottom of yours over here. I mean to teach it a lesson."

Voluptuously formed, Joy meekly followed Master Wilhite. That she had been through all this before was blatantly obvious when, without waiting for instructions, she stepped

up to the Rack. She held his pro-offered hand for balance as she slipped her feet into the padded ankle-stocks that ran across the bottom. She held perfectly still while McPherson adjusted the height, raising the pommel until it nestled right up against her groin. Thus 'saddled,' they strapped her legs to the vertical part of the Rack, and Joy lay her torso down along the padded horizontal 'L' stretch.

McPherson lowered a bracing bar across the small of her back, pressing her hips flat to the Rack and subsequently thrusting her bottom well up for Wilhite's cane. Then taking hold of her wrists in each of his hands, he braced his foot on the ankle stocks along the bottom and pulled, hauling her fully forward.

Her graceful back curved, her taut round buttocks parted, Joy was well and truly stretched for whipping.

Master Wilhite tossed back her yellow bib of an Elite skirt and gave a sharp bark of laughter. "Dear me, how did this happen? Joy," he declared, "You haven't a mark on you! How long has it been since your last thrashing?"

Her legs, all I could see of her, quivered and, as she briefly struggled and failed to clench, her dusky bottom hole seemed to wink back at those of us apprehensively waiting our turns. "Six weeks, sir."

While Master Wilhite folded his arms across his chest and covered his eyes with one hand, McPherson grinned and said, "We'll have to rip her barrack's master for neglecting this sweet little thing."

Wilhite glared good-naturedly at Joy through parted fingers. He smiled dryly. "I am her barrack's master." While



McPherson threw his head back and laughed, he said, "How embarrassing. I'll never live this down. Joy, dear?" He tapped her hip with the end of his cane. "How have you gone six weeks without so much as a bottom warming? And don't say you were good. I'll never believe it."

There was no way to answer such a question. Master Wilhite tapped her hip again with the cane before she hesitantly said, "I d-don't know?"

"Hm." He tapped her flanks yet again. "My fault I suppose. Well, can't undo the past, can only go forward, and all that. How about an order of the birch every night for six nights. That ought to make up for it."

Shakily, Joy said, "Y-yes, sir."

"Lovely! Now that that's settled..." He turned and strolled a few steps behind her, cutting the cane sharply through the air in a single, vicious practice swing. The sound and sight of that cut made me jump. Master Wilhite noticed and he winked at me. "I'll get to you soon enough, my dear. Soon enough," he said, and turned his attention back to his victim. "You know the drill. Let's go."

In a trembling voice, Joy said, "This one wishes to atone for failing to posture before the Master. This one begs the Master, please punish her for her disrespect."

"Heave her on over, McPherson. If she can clench like that, you haven't got her tight enough."

Joy grunted as the Sub-Master pulled her another inch closer towards him. Wilhite took one lunging step forward, and the cane became a bright yellow blur as he sliced it through the air. The loud, meaty whup as it landed had every

female in line jumping half out of her skin. On the Rack, Joy's entire body registered the shock of the blow. She gasped, but the truly frightening thing, was the long, dark line that grew up where the cane had struck, turning her brown skin plum-colored all along the instant ridge.

"One," McPherson said cheerfully.

Beside me, Ebony began to shake. Mimic was crying softly

There was a long pause as Master Wilhite measured the cane against her flanks and stepped back. He struck again, thumping into wobbly flesh, driving her buttocks upwards and raising a second instant dark welt almost perfectly parallel to the first, a bare finger's breadth higher.

"Two."

Joy panted, tiny mewling sounds punctuating her exhales as her muscles up and down her back and legs rippled as she struggled to flex. McPherson adjusted his grip and pulled her taut again.

At three, Joy garbled a long-drawn out groan, "Uuu-aaaggh!"

The Rack creaked as she threw back her head, eyes squeezed tightly shut, her face twisted in a grimace of acute pain. Four fell, then five, and Joy shouted. She was now panting as hard as if she'd run a minute mile and a fine sheen of sweat covered her all over. A ladder of purpling welts climbed her bottom from the chubby base to the summit, where he was measuring the last stroke.

"One more," McPherson said, and pulled her tight to receive it.

The last was the worst of all, driving Joy well up onto the Rack and leaving her backside lividly marked.

"Very well taken," Master Wilhite congratulated.

Joy made a gargled sobbing sound. As McPherson let her go, she jacked up off the Rack as far as the bracing bar would allow and grabbed at her bottom cheeks with both hands.

"Unnnngh!" she strangled.

I watched as she was unfastened and, as she turned to go, saw the blood where she'd bitten her lip at some point to keep from screaming. My knees went weak. Ebony had latched onto my arm with talon-like hands. As though I could save her. As though I weren't on the verge of hysterics myself.

My legs almost buckled as it hit me: Joy had taken six strokes; I was due thirty—thirty!—across trembling buttocks already tenderized by both a strap and cane.

Joy's progress to the door was slow and agonizing and allowed us all plenty of time to see our futures in each of her shaky steps.

"Treaz," Master Wilhite called, and we turned as one to look at him. He smiled. "Come to me, my darling."

Wringing her small hands, Treasure went to the Rack and took Joy's place upon it. As her legs were secured in the stocks and the bar laid across her back, she made a slight face and held out her hands to Sub-Master McPherson.

As Master Wilhite raised her pink skirt out of his way, he said, "Lovely. Absolutely lovely. Where did you get those two beauties?"

"Master Boyden, sir. Running in the halls."

"He's likely had enough of runners for one day."

"Yes, sir."

"Those are nice and tight, but I'll see if I can't land a shot between and link those marks right together. Give you something to remember this by."

I don't believe any of us were in danger of forgetting. But she just whispered miserably, "Yes, sir."

"Whenever you're ready," he said brightly.

Treasure raised her head and tremblingly said, "This one seeks atonement for the sin of arguing with a master. She is truly sorry, Master. Please punish her for her disrespect."

And so it started again. Treasure met each whuck of the rod with a deep-throated grunt and much attempted squirming. I thought watching the welts flushing into appearance on Joy's dark skin was dreadful. But it was much, much worse on the already bruised buttocks of poor Treasure. It was like a preview of what I would suffer when it came my turn to writhe upon the Rack.

Due twelve, watching Mimic was even worse for me. She endured Wilhite's torment in amazing silence until he lashed in with an impressive sixth stroke. Then she raised her head, her face a contorted mask, her groan dissolving into gut-wrenching sobs. "Oh please, Master ... oh please, Master..."

Having reached the upper swell of her round bottom, Wilhite lowered the cane to measure once more along the base of her bottom, this time aiming for the relatively unmarked spaces between the welts he'd just created.

Ignoring her sobs, he said, "I don't know. I don't think my aim's that good, but I might be able to do half without

overlapping. What do you think, McPherson? Three out of six?"

Careful to keep hold of Mimic's hands to keep her from prematurely escaping his hold, McPherson came partway around the Rack. He looked at her flanks a moment, then nodded. "I'll take that bet."

"Put a piece up for it?" Master Wilhite asked.

"That new silver bridle bit I bought?"

"A beautiful piece that. How about a cane or two for your personal stock?"

"Throw in a nice lap paddle, good for over-the-knee spanking, and you've got a deal. I've got plenty of severe implements. It's the intimate ones I'm needing now."

"I'll even inscribe your Personal's name into it ... when you get one."

McPherson laughed and returned to the head of the Rack. He braced his foot upon the bottom and pulled Mimic well over. During their conversation, Mimic had lost all shreds of bravado. She screamed as he continued.

Master Wilhite lost the game, landing only two of the following six strokes successfully without overlapping. Mimic twisted and writhed upon the Rack's leather padding for several minutes after they released her from it. When finally she at last came back to herself enough to leave the room, she did so clutching her bottom with both hands, uttering a deep and dreadful groan that accompanied each step.

"Tawny, my darling," Master Wilhite called, and beckoned her with his finger. "Come to me."

Clutching the front of her uniform skirt, Tawny took two trembling steps and then broke completely down. McPherson had to help her to the Rack. From first to last, she screamed and howled.

Ebony fainted twice: once as Tawny stumbled past us for the door, a trickle of blood winding down the back of her leg where the cane had cut her, and a second time just after the tenth of her horrific eighteen stroke count. Smelling salts were applied to bring her back around before the caning continued, the final six overlapping upon his previous strokes until she screeched like something wild and inhuman.

He rubbed her back and kissed her forehead when it was done. "God, I love it when they shout like that!"

Then she, too, was punished and gone. And I was all that was left, suddenly very much alone, with two devils grinning in front of me.

It was my turn. The room spun. I couldn't move.

"Mischief?" Master Wilhite patted the black leather padding of the Rack's groin saddle. "Hop on up here, sweetheart. The quicker it's over and done, the better you'll feel about it. Come on."

Slowly I forced myself to take that first step, unable even to take my eyes from that frightful contraption. McPherson held out his hand, and I lay mine in his steady palm. He helped me to balance myself as I stepped each foot into the ankle stocks. They had to adjust the Rack for my shorter stature, and as I pressed my hips into the saddle, I felt how warm the pommel still was from the groins of each previous

Lesser. I shuddered, very nearly losing it right there, but for Master Wilhite, who touched the small of my back.

"I know it's your first time, Mischief." He stroked up to rub my shoulder. "Don't worry, I'm going to take good care of you. We'll divide this down into three sets of ten. After each set, we'll take a break so you can calm down some before we continue. All right?"

I was so terrified, I nodded—nodded!—and lay myself down upon the horizontal board. The bracing bar was pressed into the small of my back, clamping down on my hips firmly and forcing my bottom to curve up for the cane. The strength of its hold was surprising. My lower half was so stretched, I could barely even flex my legs.

"Do you remember what you need to say?" Wilhite asked.

My mind went suddenly, completely blank. I stuttered, "This—this one I-loves her M-Master?"

McPherson arched his red eyebrows and grinned back at Wilhite. "He is teaching her, isn't he?"

Wilhite only said, "Close enough," and patted my hip. As he drew the skirt of my uniform up to bare me for punishment, he tsked. "Look at this. What a mess. Mischief, I'll try not to draw blood so we can stay up off your thighs for as long as possible. Poor girl, you are going to feel this."

When McPherson held out his hands, I, shaking badly, reached out to take them. That was when the door opened behind us.

"Hell no," Master Wilhite said as Tane entered the Demerit Room. "Absolutely not. I'm the Black Master this week. I

refuse to step aside until I've thumped her at least once. You owe me that much at the very least!"

"I am not here to take your place." Tane held the door open for Deaton who brought in two chairs. "I wish merely to hear her scream."

Keeping to the back of the room, they set the chairs against the wall and sat down side by side. Tane stretched his long legs out before him, crossing them at the ankles. He folded his hands over his stomach, resting his head back against the wall and closing his eyes. "Proceed, Master Wilhite. Give me a symphony."

Mine was a brief fury of rebellion, but it helped me to stay silent through the first three strokes. After that I was lost to torture. Hellish, burning waves of pain assailed me; pure white fire carried me on infernal wings to new planes of agony. I don't remember screaming. They told me later that Master Deaton opened the Demerit Room door so the halls of Judgment could sing with the sounds of my suffering, but I don't remember that, either.

I do remember feeling broken: totally, mentally, physically, utterly broken. I remember hurting every where, as though Master Wilhite had taken his cane and beaten me from head to foot. And I remember Tane's strong arms, lifting me from the Rack, cradling me to his chest as he carried me back to his quarters. He bathed me, limp as a rag though I was, staining his washcloth with my blood, and he gave me something to soothe my raw, voiceless throat.

I slept the night in his bed and awoke in the morning to the gentle touch of his hands upon my body. I turned into his



Judgment  
*by Denise Hall*

kiss without much coaxing, sighing as he slid himself inside me, wrapping my limbs around him despite the excruciating pain and trying to move with him. I wanted him as close to me as he could come. If he was close, then he could not hurt me. If he was close, then I was safe.

"Good girl," he murmured and cupped the side of my face in his hand. "You are mine, Mischief. My beautiful Mischief."

I wept as he made me come.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT

*My stomach growled three times in one hour and the Detective decided to break for lunch. The blonde detective said something about a corner vender and the other two men took out their wallets and gave him money. The Detective asked me, "Ketchup and mustard okay with you?"*

*I couldn't remember what either of those were, but I didn't want to be difficult. So I just agreed. "Yes, s—" I caught myself just as he raised an eyebrow. "Yes."*

*He smiled. "Thank you."*

*Jim went to get drinks, and the Detective took me to the bathroom. Then we waited for the food to arrive. Jim returned first and put four cans on the table.*

*"I didn't know what you wanted so I got you a diet," he said as he set one in front of me. I looked at it. It must have been cold, there was condensation already building on the outside.*

*Then the blonde detective returned with a box. "Hey, hey! Grub's on!"*

*He unpacked several individually wrapped items around the table and even placed one in front of me.*

*Another punishment.*

*My stomach clenched and bit painfully. I gripped my fingers in my lap in silent frustration. Miserably, I watched them eat. It had been two days since my Master and I were separated. Two days since my last meal. I was so hungry!*

*"What's the matter?" Jim snapped. "Hotdogs too good for you?"*

*"Shut up, Jim," the other two said in bored unison.*

*"Maybe she's not hungry," the blonde detective suggested, but my grumbling stomach vetoed that.*

*"Maybe she's never had a hotdog before," said the Detective.*

*"Or maybe—" Jim said, emphasizing the word above my bowed head, "—she likes sitting on cushions at her 'master's' feet while she eats little delicacies from his fingertips. Maybe she likes being pampered and is waiting for us to do all that for her, too."*

*"Man, I'm gonna hit you if you don't shut the fuck up," the blonde detective snarled. "Leave the woman alone. She's got it rough enough already without you nettling her."*

*"Fuck you," Jim laughed.*

*And while the two drew breath to argue in full fury, the Detective suddenly raised his face to look at me. He softly said, "That's it."*

*The other two looked at him.*

*"What's it?" Jim said finally.*

*The Detective put down his food and picked up mine. I watched with hungry, watering eyes, fully expecting him to eat it right there in front of me. My shoulders jerking spasmodically, I began to choke on the sobs rising in my throat.*

*"Hold on, hold on. I'm going as fast as I can." Unwrapping the hotdog, the Detective broke off a small portion of meat and bun and raised it to my mouth.*

*I lunged forward, grabbing his hand with both of mine to keep him from pulling away before I could take a bite in my teeth. For such behavior at Judgment, I would have been severely punished. But here I didn't care. I barely chewed before swallowing, small whimpers of relief escaping as I bit hungrily into a second piece.*

*"She can't feed herself," the Detective said. "God, I'm such an idiot. She can't dress or undress herself. Last night she couldn't get into bed herself. She didn't know how to wash her hands, either. I had to do that for her the other day. It only goes to figure..."*

*"They don't let her eat?" the blonde detective asked, his eyebrows raised incredulously.*

*"They don't let her feed herself." The Detective had run out of my hotdog and picked his own to give me. I all but cooed appreciation.*

*"Bull shit," Jim barked. "She could if she wanted to. Just leave it sitting in front of her. When she gets hungry enough, she'll eat."*

*The blonde detective was staring at me. "Man, would you look at her inhale that stuff."*

*"No, I think she'd starve before she fed herself," the Detective told Jim. "Remember a few years ago, in the paper, that story on a boy the South Central P.D. picked up. The poor kid's parents had forced him to live in a small storage closet for seven years before a neighbor saw them feeding him through the door and called it in. The kid was eleven years old when they first locked him up. By the time he was released, he crawled around like a dog, barking and whining*

*and stuff. He couldn't speak, couldn't walk, couldn't use silverware, but you can bet he did before they literally conditioned him to not know how."*

*The two men silently watched the Detective give me the last of his food, then Jim reached over and dropped the remains of his lunch in my lap. He wiped his mouth on his wrist. "I wasn't hungry anyway."*

\* \* \* \*

I stared at the large, perfectly rectangular, ten-pound brick of gray sculpting clay, uninspired. My body ached. My soul felt empty, desolate. There was a great, yawning nothingness within me. And how could something be made from nothing?

Master Deaton strolled casually up and down the rows of tables—observing the Lessers as they expanded and perfected their skills in poetry and creative writing—a cane clasped loosely behind his back. Here and there he paused to read someone's work, or to help with a problem, or to re-direct a wandering attention with a warning tap from the end of that cane. As he reached the end of the last row, he circled my desk, set apart from the others.

"Do you need motivation?" he asked. His emotionless, basilisk eyes stared into mine, utterly void of pity or sympathy.

"No, Master," I said softly. Because after three days of looking at him and this unformed brick of clay, I suddenly knew what I would create. I took my hands from my lap, picked up my tools, and diligently set myself to work. By the time for lunch drew near, I had the preliminary shape of a

female in Posture One, bowed down with forehead to the ground.

Tane's guards came for me just before the intercom chimed the noon hour. I waited in my seat until the leash was clipped to my collar, and my hands were cuffed via two leather wrist restraints behind my back—my latest reward for bad behavior. They weren't necessary. The Demerit Caning alone had been enough to convince me never again to throw dishes, knives, forks, or food up onto the masters' dais at Tane or Deaton.

Tane was sitting at his desk, writing letters to masters located on the Outside, when I arrived. The guard unclipped my hands and leash, and without a word, I lowered myself into a subservient position on the floor.

"Rise," he said without looking up, his pen continuing to scratch upon Judgment stationary. Just as quickly, before I had even fully assumed Posture Two, he told me, "Present."

I arched my back, lifting my hips to him. My fingers parted the folds of my sex for his visual enjoyment should he deign to look. My head and shoulders were leaned so far back that they almost touched the floor behind me. He left me like this while he continued to write, and before the first minute had passed, my muscles all strained to hold me thus, causing me to shake.

"I have forty-three orders from eager buyers and only nineteen Elites," he murmured softly, more thinking aloud than speaking to me. "I can think of eleven Midpoints that I can prematurely graduate. One buyer doesn't care about the quality of the product, so long as it can suck and fuck well

enough to please his customers. He wants five, but I won't waste good malleable material on a master of that caliber. I'll give him two low-brow Midpoints and an untrainable Primary."

Had I not already been trembling from exertion, I would have started right then. "Me, Master?" Was I untrainable?

His pen paused its scratching, and he turned his head to look at me. After a moment of unreadable contemplation, he scrapped his chair back and stood up. When he came to me, he reached down to take hold of my collar.

"Up," he said.

At first I was relieved that my aching muscles would no longer be forced to hold the torturous Posture Three. But he soon had me wishing he'd put me back to it.

Tane looped a piece of rope through the rings in my wrist cuffs and hoisted me up onto my toes as he tied me to a hook in one wall. He cut my uniform from my body and left me hanging there nude, a slab of meat strung up for the butcher. Then he turned out all the lights but the table lamp he wrote by, blanketing me in darkness.

"Now be silent," he told me and went back to his letters.

It wasn't long before my arms began to ache. I tried to alleviate this by standing as high up onto my tiptoes as I could perch, but I simply could not stand that way for long. My muscles, stretched into this new torment, reacted with sharp contractions of pain so intense that I was bathed by my own sweat within the first half an hour.

And not just my arms, the pain rippled down through my shoulders, into my back, chest and belly, and all the way to

my hips and legs. The entire length of me was a mass of protesting muscle that soon had me whimpering, "Please, Master, this one begs to come down."

He continued to write as though he hadn't heard.

"Please, Master," I pleaded, my voice cracking. My frame jerked as a strong spasm clenched along my tortured shoulders and into my back.

Without raising his eyes, he said, "I told you to be silent."

I started to cry.

He slapped his pen down on the table and stood up. From the trunk at the foot of his bed, he began to withdraw various crops and straps, anal plugs and beads of all sizes and shapes, devices meant to cause both pleasure and pain. What he returned with, however, was a ball gag and weights, which he fastened around each of my ankles.

"Open your mouth," he softly commanded.

Shivering, I obeyed, but sobbed as he gently stuffed the ball bit into my mouth and tied it in place so I couldn't spit it out again.

He patted my bottom in warning. "Now, be silent."

Back at the table, he picked up the pen to continue writing as though he'd never been interrupted.

In an attempt to distract myself from the shooting pain in my extremities, I tried to remember what life was like before Judgment.

There was nothing, just a big empty blank. I couldn't even bring to mind the faces of my parents. Just how long I had been within these mountain walls, I don't know. My days all ran one into the other. Mere weeks felt like years. The chime



of the intercom, as it sang out our daily breaks, marked the passage of time. Each posting of the Demerit list meant another day was almost ended, and I had many of these markers stretching out behind me. I had endured the wrath of nine different Black Masters and narrowly avoided a few others. What did that mean? Had Judgment consumed four, maybe five months of my life?

The shooting pains grew in force and frequency. By the time I heard the intercom chime the dinner hour, muffled wails and moans were coming through my gag. Through a haze of red pain, I heard Tane get up again.

My eyes peeled back in agonized dread to see him return to the trunk. He dug through it briefly, then withdrew a thin, gold chain with gripping clasps at each end. As he came back to me, he cupped my naked breasts in his warm hands.

"I love the feel of your body in my hands." He bent his head to take each nipple into his mouth in turn. He suckled and nipped, gently scrapping his teeth across the tips until they stood up eagerly for his attention. Then he cruelly attached the clamps to me and tightened them down. My toes no longer touched the ground as he tightened the ropes through the hook and hung me further up upon the wall. The pressure in my hips and shoulders seemed to double. My cries were muffled by the gag.

His finger traced down the length of the chain down to my navel. He gave a sharp tug at the center to hear me shriek, the ball stifling me so that I hardly made a sound.

"Absolutely beautiful," he said, more to himself than to me. Then he left me hanging again and went back to his work.

The hours passed. I barely heard the chime for Lights Out above my own constant mewling cries of pain. My body was consumed by fire. I was one long convulsing wave of burning agony by the time he lay his pen aside. He stretched then as he stood and, with hands on his narrow hips, he slowly stalked me from across the room.

Tears streamed down my face. My nose was running and I was bathed entirely in sweat. I know I couldn't have been a pretty sight, but Tane seemed not to care. He gently brushed clinging tendrils of damp hair back from my eyes, then left me hanging there as he walked out of my peripheral range.

My eyes closed miserably. I whimpered and shuddered as my body tightened in another spasm. The unexpected touch of something cool against the side of my throat had my eyes peeling open again in agonized disbelief. With effort, I brought him into focus. He held a small jar of minty smelling ointment in one hand, his other gently rubbed the pale cream into my neck and shoulders. He covered every inch of my body, up my arms, down my legs to my feet, even taking time to caress between the digits of my fingers and toes.

"Does that feel better?" he asked, soft and solicitous as he bathed my face with a cold, wet cloth.

I groaned, tipping my head back against the stone wall as all the places where he'd been touching my body began to tingle and then to heat. The sensation building hotter and hotter until I burned all over, awash in an ointment that

burned my skin like fire. I groaned constantly, my eyes widening, beseeching him for relief from this new torment.

"Good," he said. "It's beginning to work then."

He only spooned more of that deceptively comforting ointment onto his fingers. "This will help, I promise. You'll be very grateful for this stuff tomorrow when you have to move."

He rubbed it into my back, belly, hips and thighs. My bottom he caressed in slow, rhythmic circles, massaging me with medicinal fire until all sense of cool had turned to flame everywhere. And I mewed continuously, my eyes pleading with him to stop, please stop.

He dipped two fingers back into the jar. Reaching down between my thighs and behind me, he trailed a thick pale line down the crease of my buttocks, over my anus, and up into the quivering folds of my sex. Relentless, he stroked it into me, igniting an unbearable fire there.

As I sobbed around my gag, his mouth dipped to my breasts, opening to take first one tightly clasped nipple, then the other. The heat of his lips aggravated the fire and made it burn ever hotter as he suckled, rubbing his tongue against the stiff, aching tips, so sensitized by the clamps that it felt as if he scraped me raw with sandpaper.

I hurt both inside and out. My arms felt as though they were being slowly pried from their sockets. It was a fight to drag air through my nose to my aching lungs. My head throbbed, my ears filled with the pounding of blood at my temples, like the relentless marching of an army of feet.

Tane forced my legs apart, lifting my limp left leg and wrapping it around his hips, holding it in place with the hand

that held the ointment jar. His other remained busy between my thighs, working the heating solution into me until it felt as if he held a flaming brand between those nether lips. My whimpers grew to screams, long, keening sounds that the ball gag muffled to whimpers.

"That's it," Tane whispered. "Beg for me."

I garbled syllables around the gag frantically. As he thrust two fingers deep inside me, each jerk of my hips felt as though it dislocated my shoulders. He pushed that lotion into my body and that tingling burn sank to my womb, lurching my agonized frame into orgasm. As I shuddered and shook all around him, he smiled into my tear-filled eyes. Only when the convulsions completely stopped did his fingers finally withdraw from me.

I sagged helplessly in his arms, my limbs incapable of supporting me, when he finally removed the weights from my ankles and untied me from the hook.

"It's all right, Infant," he said to me. "Sleep now."

He tucked me into his bed as if I were just that, a weak and defenseless babe, and I sobbed, every inch of me so in pain that I didn't care whether I was quiet or not.

He raised my head and pressed a cup to my lips. "Drink this."

A thick, herbal concoction was poured down my throat, and within minutes I was spiraling deep into the black abyss of sleep.

At some point during the night, he woke me so I could eat. I could barely move; the agony of simply trying had me crying out. Tane seemed to expect this and fed me dinner in

bed, from his plate no less. Little cubes of meat and cheese with crackers, pieces of sliced apples, pears and grapes, wine from his own cup, which he held to my lips. Funny how something like this could make me feel special, but it did. It was a meal unlike anything a Lesser in the Pit could hope for, with each bite taken from the hand that took delight in tormenting me.

"You please me," Tane told me. "We'll have to do this again. Perhaps tomorrow, if you are well enough to raise your arms over your head. You know I could spend years listening to you weep."

He carried me into the bathroom and cleaned me afterwards because my arms ached to the point of uselessness. Then he carried me back to his bed and lay down beside me to sleep, his arm thrown casually around my waist. As his snores resonated through the room, I slowly, painfully, slid out from under the blankets and his arm.

This, my second escape attempt, was a lesson in absolute agony. I could barely move. Every muscle hurt beyond comprehension. It took forever just to drag myself to his chamber door, which took another lifetime to open due to fumbling fingers that refused to grip. By the time I got that door knob to turn, I was in tears, sweating from exhaustion and pain, my entire body throbbing with the effort it took just to keep standing. Sheer force of will was all that kept me going. The only thing that worked in my favor was the intercom, which this time, thankfully, remained silent.

I found my way outside with very little difficulty. The door to the courtyard was unlocked and though I thought this odd

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in a fortress of captives, I chalked it up to lax security measures. For all I knew, I could have been the only Lesser to make it this far out of the Pit. I really didn't know, but not one to question good fortune, I hobbled outside.

Again, to make such an attempt out of desperation was my undoing. I had no food, no clothes or shoes, and each step was a limp of pain-filled misery. But I am nothing if not stubborn and slow to give up.

In the dark, cobble-stoned courtyard, I staggered past the empty display racks toward the portcullis, jumping at the slightest of sounds, half-expecting Tane to melt from the depths of every shadow. Though I never encountered a soul, I was a nervous mess by the time I reached the small door off to one side.

Again I had to fumble to turn the latch, glancing repeatedly back over my shoulder at the dark mountain fortress, expecting any minute for masters to swarm the courtyard behind me. The click of the release was deafening in the night's silence, and my heart pounded in my throat. I was certain the sound would lead every master in Judgment to me like a beacon.

But no one came, and the whisper of a calming breeze accompanied me as I dragged myself out the door to freedom.

A sliver of moonlight outlined a cover of clouds above me. It was cold and I shivered, unable even to move my arms to hug myself for warmth. I limped a few, hesitant steps down the unpaved mountain road. The whole world seemed to spread out in front of me and for a moment I felt nearly

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overwhelmed by it. This was freedom. I could now do whatever I wanted without fear of punishment. I would never have to posture myself at anyone's feet ever again. I could go anywhere I wanted.

I could go home.

I did not smile, or acknowledge any of these realizations with any semblance of happiness. Try though I did, I couldn't remember where home was. Every image I conjured was an image of Judgment, Tane, or the masters. And of all the places that I could go, I wanted to go back to bed most of all.

The wind picked up. As it billowed around me, caressing my skin and pulling at my hair, my teeth began to chatter. My feet were cold and sore from walking on bumpy cobblestones and sharp, tiny pebbles. I looked back over my shoulder at the door beside the portcullis, yawning open in silent invitation.

Yes, I was punished.

*But only when I disobeyed.*

I was being trained for sale to a man who would be master over me, body and soul.

*But I would be valued and desired by him.*

I was fed and kept warm and clothed.

*Because I was cherished.*

*Because I was loved.*

I left the open Outside without so much as a backwards glance, and I limped back through that door. No longer my prison, Judgment had become my home.

As I made my way back to Tane's quarters and crawled back into bed beside him, I found myself hoping that he

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would not hurt me too much tomorrow. When I lay my head upon his pillow, his arm came around my waist. He pulled me back into the cradle of his body and kissed me just behind my ear.

"Um," he said, low and throaty. "You're cold."

He felt a little cool to me too, and it made me nervous. I fidgeted with my fingers, unsure what—if anything—I should say in response.

"Good night," he said, an ominously amused taint to his tone. He knew.

I shivered. "Yes, Master."

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## CHAPTER NINE

*They left me in the room all alone, still kneeling on the floor where I'd stayed throughout the length of their interview. Via the mirror, I tried to watch their reflections through the slightly open door. The detectives were speaking with someone they'd called Captain.*

*I quickly snapped my head back around to face the table ahead of me as Captain glanced at me past the Detective's shoulder. A slight trickle of apprehension shivered my spine as the four of them came back into the room.*

*Captain pulled out a chair and pushed it in front of me. He set his coffee mug down on the table and, with a long-drawn out sigh, eased himself onto the seat. He scratched his forehead. "All right. Let's start over from the beginning. Who is she again?"*

*"Cal lie McGuire, disappeared without a trace on a trip to Italy some ten years ago." I heard a familiar jingle as the Detective lay a package on the table. My ears perks as he unfolded the top and my jesses slid out by Captain's coffee cup. "This and an overcoat is what she was wearing when she was picked up."*

*Captain lifted a section of chain in one hand and the leather straps that was meant to wrap around my torso and criss-cross up between my breasts with his other. "What is this, some sort of harness?" he asked me, turning it over. He scratched at the chain links with a thumbnail. "I think this is real gold."*

*"They are my jesses." I bit my lower lip as he pulled the halter onto his lap to get a better look at it. The Matron had linked the wrist and ankle cuffs together to create a wound up, disgraceful clump of golden chains and bejeweled rings, lonely and dejected for our having been parted. "M-may I wear them now?"*

*He pretended not to have heard me. "I could probably retire on the cost of just one of these chains. What do we have on this Daymon Tane?"*

*"Nothing in the system," the Detective told him.*

*With another sigh, Captain held my jesses out to me.*

*"Okay, Miss McGuire. Here you go. Put them on."*

*I missed the weight of my harness so much, I wanted to snatch it from his hands. Even knowing I couldn't put it on myself, when Captain dangled the mass of chains and cuffs before me, it was all I could do not to reach for them.*

*"Well?" Captain drawled impatiently. "You wanted to wear them, so I'm giving them to you. Go ahead."*

*My bottom lip quivered. "Personals aren't permitted."*

*A tiny flare of panic burst inside me. Should I call him 'sir' or not? Would it make him mad like it did the Detective? Indecision put me in a quandary that was made even worse when they all leaned in close around me.*

*"Why not?" the Detective said. "You know how it works. Which part goes on your ankle?"*

*I pointed without hesitation and he unfastened the gold cuff and lay it in my open hands. I held the familiar instrument, the chains streaming between my fingers, the bells that had been soldered to ruby and diamond studded*

*rings along the sides singing pleasantly, a happy noise in my ears. My hand began to shake. I dared not close my fingers around it.*

*"Put it on your ankle," Captain told me firmly.*

*I began to breathe a little faster, looking at my own foot with moistening eyes. It blurred as my tears welled.*

*"Put it on," Captain ordered, his voice rising sharply. "I am giving you an order! You're a slave, aren't you? What's a matter? Your master didn't teach you obedience? Put them on now!"*

*I dropped the jesses when he began to shout at me. Panting, I tried to crawl backwards away from him, but a restraining hand clamped down on the back of my neck.*

*"Wait a minute here," the Detective held up his hands. "Don't do that! I told you, she's not faking this! She can't be! Come on—"*

*Captain stood up, towering over me as though enraged. I gasped, shying away when he shoved the jesses in my face. "Pick them up! Put them on!"*

*I clasped my hands behind my back and bowed to press my forehead to the floor between his black shoes. With eyes squeezed tightly shut, at any moment expecting punishment to lash into me, I panicked. Where was my Master? Screaming, I pleaded into the floor for him to save me.*

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, Tane said nothing about my foray Outside and for a short time I thought it might go unpunished. Maybe he didn't know after all. Maybe he just

thought I'd gone to the bathroom. I should have known better. Though I rarely saw the cameras, there were always watchful eyes in Judgment. Nothing ever happened here that Tane was not aware of.

But he said nothing to me right away. He only fed me bites of breakfast from his plate while I sat upon his lap, my back against his chest, my hips so sore that I could not kneel down or sit cross-legged on the floor. Not even on a pillow. He showed me the greatest kindness by not forcing me to try more than just the once.

After breakfast, he washed my face and brushed my teeth. He even showered with me, his body propping mine upright as my knees wobbled in and out and my legs ached and throbbed. I hurt more now than I had last night, and for a while I panicked that I might be permanently crippled.

"I left you hoisted too long for your first time," Tane said. "We will not have a repeat session tonight. I can be patient. I'll wait until you've had time to heal before we try again."

He brushed my hair, too. I liked it when he did that. He was so gentle, so careful not to pull and the rhythmic motions of the hairbrush were so relaxing, it almost put me to sleep right there on his lap.

"Sit up, Mischief." He had to tell me twice, but the third time, he only chuckled and did not punish me. There seemed no end to his kindness today.

Summoning a guard, I had to be carried to Deaton's skill room. I don't know if I was expected to actually work on my sculpture. I would have liked to but every time I raised my arms higher than my waist piercing shocks of agony raced

through my shoulders. I had the will to finish my female in Posture One, but the body simply couldn't comply. I could barely move. It even hurt to breathe.

Despite this, I was the envy of every Lesser in that room. Tane had provided cushions for my chair, both on the seat as well as the back. There was also a beautiful mother of pearl hair piece with matching earrings laying beside my sculpture, waiting for me. I was the only Primary in Judgment with jewelry of such Elite quality. The covetous looks cast at these gifts made no sense to me. Had my peers but known the agony it took to win them, I doubt if they'd have been so discontented.

But they didn't know, and they responded to what they perceived to be my favored treatment in the only way they could. They ignored me. I was never spoken to. No one sat next to me in the dining hall, not even Honey after that first time. No one even looked in my direction, or at least not if they thought I might see them. This is what Tane's extra attention won me: the complete and utter banishment of my peers.

Not that I minded not having anyone to talk to. Well, not really anyway. The daily torture inflicted on me was hard enough to suffer through without my having to reminisce about it as well. So I listened to the others busily writing their poems or their stories, and I stared at my malleable clay lump, wishing I could move just enough to continue to mold her a little closer to life.

I'm not sure exactly when I first became aware of an odd prickling at the back of my neck. But by some newly found

sixth sense, I cocked an ear expectantly toward the door. Tane was in the Pit. It was as if I felt him striding down the hall. The knowledge of him shivered down my spine even before he opened the door and that long-legged stride, that was by now so familiar to me, carried him into Deaton's skill room. In attendance to him was Sub-Master Gansel and Masters Hutch, carrying a long seven-switch birch, and Boyden, who had a ledger clasped in one hand. From the insignia on Hutch's black uniform, I recognized him for this week's Black Master.

For a moment I was afraid he'd come to summon me to another of his special training sessions, despite this morning's assurances that I would be allowed the time to heal. I was so disheartened, that I barely heard the rattling desks as fourteen Lessers immediately dropped to the floor to posture.

I did my best to join them, but my uncooperative limbs ensured that I more fell out of my chair than got gracefully down. I stifled a groan as I rolled onto my hands and knees. Panting with the pain and effort, I did not so much as rest my forehead to the floor as I pressed it there in the hopes that it would prop me upright as I tried to drag my arms behind my back. My shoulders protested their abuse and I could not get either side fully behind me. I couldn't even clasp my hands together as was proper, so I left them lying uselessly at my sides. A fine sheen of sweat had broke out on my skin from this exertion, and mine was still the sloppiest Posture One in the room.

Tane's shoes appeared before me. He squatted down and his warm hand touched my back. "You do not need to posture

for me today, Mischief. Sub-Master Gansel, kindly rub some of this into her and help her back onto the pillows."

I sighed as Gansel took the jar Tane handed him and knelt down behind me. He lifted me onto my knees, automatically pulling me to sit up on his thighs to take the pressure off my hips, and I flopped back against his chest like a limp doll.

"Just relax, Mischief," he said, low against my ear as he opened the jar. "This will make you feel so much better."

Though he peeled back my clothes to rub that cool, tingling ointment into me, his was an impersonal hand. The heat actually felt good today. It seeped into my skin, soothing everywhere I ached, especially my joints. And while he did not touch me sexually, when he rubbed into the inner slopes of my thighs, his knuckles grazed up against my already moistening slit and a sensual shiver raced through me.

Tane noticed at once. "Don't you dare come for him," he warned me. Though he smiled when he said it, there was a dark look to his eyes that had me determined to ignore Gansel's touch as best I could.

But it still felt good.

"That time again already," Master Deaton asked.

I glanced up at the only three Elites in the room. All were trembling. The closest to me, Amber, had her hands clenched into tight fists behind her and there were tears dropping from her cheeks to the floor.

"Amber," Tane said. "Spirit, and Garnish. Join the line in the hall."

As the Elites filed slowly outside, with the opening and closing of the door, I heard a good deal of sniffing from the

Lessers outside. This moment would come for each of us, and we all knew it. For the females in the hall, their fates were now realized, but I don't think a one of them wanted to leave. As often as we were subjected to the most brutal of treatments here, the unknown on the Outside was by far more terrifying to consider.

Tane walked up and down in front of the cowering Lessers as Gansel rearranged my clothes and helped me back into my chair. I was the only one in the room sitting at a desk. It was unnerving and made me so uncomfortable that I tried to get back down on the floor, but Gansel's hand on my shoulder wouldn't let me.

"Stay where you are, Mischief," he told me.

Tane tapped the shoulder of the female before him. "Rise."

She rose gracefully into Posture Two, spreading her knees so wide apart that each touched the Lesser to either side of her.

"Hello, Mirth," he said. There was an underlying gentleness in his tone that I recognized instantly. That was the one he used when he spoke to me. A startling shock of jealousy swept through me that he would use the same soothing tone of voice on Mirth. Had I been able to raise my arms higher than my waist, I'd have thrown myself at her, the hook-nosed, long-faced, flaxen-haired sow!

The intensity of such an unkind thought shocked me. Mirth had done nothing to deserve my enmity, except to be kidnaped the same as I. I was suddenly very ashamed of myself.



"Have you been disciplined yet this week?" Tane asked her.

With a whispered trepidation that humbled me even more, Mirth said, "Yes, sir. My barracks master gave me the strap for Untidiness, sir."

"Your barracks master is Rodman, isn't he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you still untidy?"

"No, sir."

"Nothing quite like a lick or two of leather to help inspire reform."

Her small shoulders sagged a little. "Yes, sir."

"Boyden," Tane smiled down at the top of Mirth's bowed head. "Notify Master Rodman that Mirth is to receive a dose of his strap each morning and night for the next week. Let's see what other lovely reforms we can inspire in her."

Master Boyden made a mark in his book. "As good as done."

Tane reached over the next girl in line and raised her pink Midpoint's skirt. "Bare, smooth and pale. Hutch, give Darling here six of your best. We don't want her feeling neglected."

Then he moved on and Hutch came forward, brandishing his birch. He took hold of Darling's ear and drew her out of line on her hands and knees. Claspings her neck between his legs, he flipped up her skirt and lay six harsh, swishing strokes across her backside. Darling yelped with each wristy smack, the switches fanning out and raising many welts at once. The tips were the worst of all, leaving reddish-purplish dots as they whipped into the tops of her thighs, and

sometimes even catching the tender pouch of her pussy, which made Darling's entire body jump as she screeched.

Tane waited until Hutch was finished and Darling was back in her row, sniffing with her head bowed to the floor, before selecting his next victim. "Hello, Mahogany."

We all heard her swallow. "Hello, sir."

"You may rise," he allowed.

"Thank you, sir." But she hesitated for just a moment, as if trying to steel herself for what she knew was coming.

"Better yet, why don't you present," he said when she had finally assumed Posture Two.

My jealousy hit me with the speed and force of a locomotive. I didn't want him looking at her! She was prettier than I!

I tried to stand up, but my legs were weak and hurt and in my haste wouldn't work right. All I succeeded in doing was falling to one knee, bumping my desk noisily in the process, and attracting the attentions of every master in the room. They all glared at me, and Tane was no longer smiling as he watched me struggle to fold myself into Posture Three.

There are a hundred and seventy different types of muscles in the human body, and I felt every one of them shrieking in protest as I bent myself backwards. My body buckled and I collapsed flat on my back with my legs half under me, panting and unable to move so much as a finger.

Master Deaton appeared above me, hands on his hips. "And just what was that supposed to get you, hm?"

The ointment was still working its heating magic. As I lay there with my legs awkwardly bent and my arms flopped out at my sides, unmoving, I almost felt comfortable.

Tane appeared above me just across from Master Deaton. His eyes glittered with something that almost looked like amusement. "I thought I told you to stay in your chair."

"You just had to name her Mischief," Deaton said, shaking his head.

"Seemed like a good idea at the time."

"That sort of thing encourages bad behavior."

Tane raised his head to fix Sub-Master Gansel—who had covered his face with one hand while he laughed at me—with a mildly irritated stare. "Did she somehow get away from you?"

The Sub-Master sobered at his tone. "My apologies, sir. I wasn't expecting her to do that."

Tane turned that same look back on me. "If I weren't so certain that putting you to the Rack would dislocate your shoulders right now, I'd give you a demerit for disobedience. Master Deaton, would you happen to have an extra birch in the room?"

Deaton arched a dark eyebrow. "You must be joking. How many switches do you fancy: three, five, seven, or nine?"

"Five should do nicely. Are they pickled?"

Very drily, Deaton said, "You are joking." He clasped his hands loosely behind his back. "My birches have sat in brine for so long, I guarantee they'll outlast any bottom in here. Dawn! Fetch a fiver."

The Lesser scrambled to her feet and hastened to the birch column. She selected a willowy verge and brought it back to the masters.

"The most obedient little helper I've ever had," Deaton commented.

"Really?" As Tane took the wicked looking implement from her proffered fingertips, he said, "Congratulations, Dawn. You're an Elite for a day. Go join the line in the hall."

"Yes, sir." Obediently, Dawn headed for the door. But as she walked out to take her place with the others, she wrung her hands fretfully.

"Wonderful. Now I'll have to find a new fetch-and-carry girl," Deaton said mildly.

Tane handed Gansel the birch. "Hold her on your lap, Sub-Master. If she tries to get down again, give her a few licks with that."

"Yes, sir."

I watched as the birch passed from hand to hand above me. The funny thing was, it didn't particularly bother me that I hovered on the edge of a whipping. Oh, I felt a little trepidation as Sub-Master Gansel lay that bundle of switches upon my desk and bent to gather me in his arms. But as he cradled me on his lap and as Tane graced me with another of his bemused smiles before turning his attention back to Mahogany—poor Mahogany, who'd been made to hold that torturous position and was now shaking like a leaf in an autumn gale—I felt as though I were truly cherished.

"Rise," Tane told her, and that made me happy, because he hadn't time to really look at her. He must not have wanted

to. He'd probably just wanted to make her suffer. I was okay with that.

"Have you been disciplined this week?" he asked her.

"No, sir," she whispered.

"No? What a pity. A lovely bottom like yours deserves thrashing at least on a weekly basis. You certainly deserve it. Just look at the poor state you've put my Mischief in."

Mahogany obligingly turned her head, but the look she gave me was even less friendly than the one I shot her in return.

"I think we have a bit of rivalry here that needs addressing," Tane said, noting both our stares.

"I believe so," Deaton agreed as he gave me a quelling glare. Dryly, he said, "Mahogany has always been so perfectly well-behaved. I wonder where this misbehavior comes from."

"Pride, I think, is the culprit here," Tane drawled. "I don't believe there is a female in this room entitled to any of that. Hutch, relieve Mahogany of her lingering pride."

Mahogany was abandoned to the Black Master's more than capable hands. There was a startling stillness among the rest of us as he pulled her out to him and into position with her head between his knees. It was as if we held out collective breaths just before the birch switches rent the air to lay a sudden, sharp—whick!—across her bare flanks.

Mahogany gasped, and as Tane passed by me on his way to the next row of kneeling Lessers, he bent to whisper hot against my ear, "Don't think you've gotten away with anything here, Infant. We've plenty to talk about later tonight, just you and me and that little birch beside you."

I looked down at it as though it were a coiled and hissing snake about to bite me. The steady whicks of the spanking in progress and Mahogany's increasingly frantic yelps had me sitting very tensely on Gansel's thighs. I had never been birched before, but I had often seen the damage one did and it was frightening to listen to a female, who could always take Deaton's cane in relative silence, losing her composure under a rain of eighteen whistling strokes.

"This one here—" Tane tapped another Lesser on the knee with the toe of his shoe. "See that she gets a good thrashing for breaking posture when you're done there, Hutch. She's been peeking. A Lesser who enjoys the suffering of a sister deserves to suffer a little herself. Pin a demerit to her uniform as well, Master Boyden. A few thumps with a cane on top of fresh birch welts should teach her to keep her eyes properly on the floor."

Hutch never looked up. He continued to lay into Mahogany until the pretty dark-haired female was writhing to get away. Her yelps turned to shrieks, then desperate sobs. By the last stroke, the ends of the birch were beginning to break away. He left her flesh a mottle of welts, peppered by dark, blister-like spots, and Mahogany weeping on the floor.

I stared in horrified wonder. I don't think there was a drop of blood left in the faces of the Lessers around her; they were all so pale and shaken.

"Up with you, Faith," Tane said, tapping a quivering female's shoulder. "Go on out to the hall."

She all but fled the room, no doubt grateful to be getting out without first taking a session with that birch herself.

"You're stripping my barrack," Master Deaton remarked.

Tane walked to the end of the second row and stopped. He looked at Desire, then raised an eyebrow to Deaton.

"Don't even think about it," his brother said implacably.

"She's been here a year longer than any of the Elites. I won't keep her a Midpoint indefinitely. You'd better decide what you want. If you don't want a Personal, then she's an Elite and needs to take her place in the hall."

Master Deaton stared back at him, devoid of emotion, for a long time. "Yes," he finally said.

"Yes, what? Yes, she needs to go to the hall, or yes, she's a Personal?"

"Yes, she's not going anywhere."

"You've only been tormenting her for four years. It's about time you took her for your own."

Tane headed down the third row of Lessers, but when he stopped, I heard a sudden, panicky whisper from the cowering female at his feet, "Oh no, sir, please sir ... oh no, not me ... sir, please oh please, not me ... spare me ... oh no, sir, please, sir..."

I could have told her begging did no good. I probably knew that better than any other Lesser in that room. I begged religiously every night I spent in his chambers, and it hadn't helped me once.

"If there's one thing I can't stand," Tane said, pulling her from her row by her ear. "It's whining. Give me a beggar, a pleader or a sniveler any day."

"No, no ... Sir, please sir..." The Lesser broke completely down and a physical struggle ensued.

"Why you disobedient bit of baggage!" Tane's tone took on a harshness I'd never heard from him before as he dropped her to the ground and tried to pin her on her stomach. Like an eel, she wriggled to stay on her side or back, thwarting his efforts and begging all the while.

"Get your backside up, Mouse," he snapped. "Deaton get me a cane!"

Handing his own cane to Tane, Deaton then reached down to grab Mouse by the back of her uniform, tossing her face-down over the nearest desk. One hand between her shoulders pinned her there, while he grabbed her wrists when she tried to cover her bottom with her hands.

Tane pointed to the Lessers behind him with the end of the cane. "Move," he barked at them, and they scattered well out of his cane's swinging range.

As the first blow fell, Mouse let out an ear-piercing shriek. Her automatic kick hit Tane's right leg and she halfway broke out of Deaton's hold just enough to knock over a neighboring desk.

I positively shook with fear for her as, grim-faced, Boyden lay his ledger down and went to help.

"Hold her still," Tane ordered.

"I'd like to," Deaton said through gritted teeth. "She's biting my arm."

Tane laughed at that, but the sound was angry and dark and had me catching my breath nervously.

Thhh-whack!

His cane bit into the soft underside of her buttocks, driving them upwards and eliciting another scream from Mouse. He



gave her six total, all low, creating a single, thick, plum-colored welt that had me squirming in sympathy.

Mouse sobbed miserably when it was over and I could hear Tane's breathing, heavy with anger rather than exertion, alongside her.

"I haven't seen such a disgraceful performance in years," he growled. "Master Hutch, I want Mouse on the Assembly Block this afternoon. Three dozen with the birch, and three more with the martinet."

"As you say," Hutch replied, just as grimly. "Resisting chastisement is worth at least that much."

"And lest mutiny be a common theme among the Lessers in this row," Tane gestured down the line with his cane. "Give them all a Demerit. Six of your best and work them low."

"I'm going to be a very busy man tonight," Hutch remarked, clasping the broken birch behind his back and looking at each of the doomed females in turn.

"I've half a mind to order the strap taken to every Lesser in this room." Tane started back to the dais. "Mischief!"

I jumped as he barked my name.

"Does a female ever resist her master?"

Eyes wide, I jerked my head from side to side. "N-no, Master!"

Tane came slowly to me. He hunkered down beside me, and I closed my eyes in utter dismay. I knew—just knew—he was about to give me a turn with Deaton's savage cane. But instead, his tone once more soft and gentle, he said, "You left Judgment last night."

I felt Gansel stiffen beneath me. Behind Tane, Master Deaton looked first surprised and then quickly and chillingly angry.

"Yes, Master," I whispered.

"Why did you come back?"

"I-I don't know, Master."

"You were beyond the door." He cupped my chin, tilting back my head and giving me no choice but to look at him. "You could have kept going, but didn't. I want to know why. Did you see me behind you?"

"N-no, Master." I shook in the cradle of his palm. My eyes teared. For the life of me I couldn't think of a single clear, definite reason for coming back, other than I didn't really want to go. Out of desperation, I told him the only thing that came to mind. "This one loves her Master, heart and soul."

Tane smiled. "Ah."

"I simply do not understand your fascination with that one," Master Deaton said, shaking his head again. "You have a hundred quiet, obedient things to choose from—"

"Like Desire?" Tane asked.

Deaton frowned. "I was going to say like Shadow or Pixie. Even Ember if you can stand her snoring."

"Quiet and obedient are a dime a dozen." Tane stood up. He bent to deliver the briefest of kisses to my trembling lips. "What can I say? There's a fondness in me for the naughty ones. Take Mischief to my quarters, Gansel, and wait until I get there. I have one more skill room to visit and four more suitable candidates to find, before I can devote the rest of the night to bringing my Mischief to heel. Put her to bed and let

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her sleep. She'll need all the rest she can get to endure what I have planned for tonight."

I never got to wear the soft pink uniform of a Midpoint, or the short, yellow skirt and high heels of an Elite. That was the day Tane took me for his Personal, and I was removed from life in the Pit.

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## CHAPTER TEN

*The doctor rubbed my arm after giving me a sedative. Already I could feel the calming effects soothing through me, inserting short pauses between the panicked moans that still found their way from a throat screamed raw.*

*I lay facing the back of the couch in Captain's office, despondently staring out the window, blue sky and fluffy, white clouds drifting along far above me. I was never going to see my Master again. I was lost in the Outside, abandoned to a world that made no sense to me and to the unpredictable male and female masters that dwelt in it. I would never be loved or cared for again. I closed my eyes against a fresh rush of tears.*

*With a final pat to my shoulder, the doctor went to stand with the three detectives. "Hospitalization would be my first recommendation. She needs to be under immediate twenty-four hour observation. In all likelihood, she's going to require extensive professional care for a long time."*

*"You want to commit her," the nice detective said.*

*"Yes," the doctor affirmed. "I want to commit her."*

*"I don't want her put in a nuthouse," the Detective protested. "She's not crazy."*

*The doctor didn't argue, but said, "A hospital is the best place for her. I've never seen conditioning this severe before. Granted, I'm not an expert, but I can't even think where to begin undoing the damage. In all probability, she'll never fully*

recover. Someone will need to supervise and care for her the rest of her life."

The Detective came to squat next to the couch and me. He reached out to touch my cheek, but feeling betrayed, I turned my face away.

"She's not a puppy, Mac," Jim said. "You can't keep her. We just do our job and hope everything else works out for the best."

"Our job." The Detective's mouth became a hard, thin line. "We saved her from one bad situation and threw her head first into another."

The nice detective slipped his hands in his back jeans pockets. "At least in the hospital she won't be beaten."

"No, they'll just drug her up to the gills, wrap her into a straight jacket, and lock her up until she either recovers or dies. What an improvement."

The door opened again and somewhere in the increasingly foggy recesses of my awareness, I heard Captain say, "Pack her up, gentlemen. Mischief's going home."

"Home?" The Detective stood up. "I thought her folks lived on the east coast. They can't have come for her ... Who is he?"

"This is Ambassador Daymon Tane. He's on a business trip, visiting our fair city from Europe."

"You've got to be kidding me," Jim said.

The gentle, beloved tones of my Master floated down through the fog, music to my ears. "There's my beautiful little mischief-maker." Fingertips trailed lightly across my brow, and I fought groggily to peel my eyelids open so I could see

*him. "Wake up, Infant. Time to go home. It's been two days since I last had you across my knee. You should have no trouble taking the punishment you've earned this time."*

*"You son of bitch!" the Detective snapped, and sounds of a very brief scuffle broke out around me.*

\* \* \* \*

They call it 'Taming the Falcon.' To gentle a wild bird, a patient trainer first hoods and jesses it before he begins to train it. In this way the bird is taught to obey commands and, if done properly, can even come to love and adore its human counterpart. For my first two months as a Personal, I was a falcon.

The ugly blue-gray Primary uniform was stripped from my skin and replaced with the hard-as-bone black corset and soft, white uniform of a Personal. The gossamer, bib-like skirt barely covered my pubis in front and revealed the lower curve of my bottom cheeks behind. There was no bodice to it at all, which left my breasts completely bare. But the top inch or so of the corset turned up and out like a kind of shelf that lifted and cradled each one as though offering them up for my Master's delight.

My navel was pierced, as was my labia and the hood just over my clit. Because I was permitted to do nothing for myself, Tane took great care to keep these wounds clean and clear of infection.

I was fitted with a special harness, made just for me. The halter of it slid over my shoulders, criss-crossed my bare breasts, wrapped around my ribs and buckled at the back. My

leather collar was exchanged for a gold one that had velvet padding along the inside so as not to chafe my skin. My restraints were replaced with permanent ankle and wrist cuffs that matched my new collar, and all were linked by a thin gold chain via my harness and the series of rings set in the leather to keep the chain from tangling up. On each cuff hung a tiny bell that jingled when I moved. And though movement brought punishment, I learned to love the sound of those little betrayers. Once my blindfold was tied into place, sound was all I had.

Well, that and my Master, who treated me as though I were the most precious of treasures. He took great care to care for me.

He bathed and shaved me, adorned my body with select pieces of jewelry, and lightly perfumed me when the mood struck him. I was allowed to do nothing for myself; my Master did it all. He brushed my teeth. He gently dressed me every morning and removed my uniform again at night. He even raised the blankets for me before I was permitted to take my place in his bed.

My falcon's perch was a cushion by the hearth where I was required to kneel, although at first, because my body still hadn't recovered from Tane's hook, he made for me a make-shift bed of pillows. Each morning after breakfast, he would lay me down and I was expected to stay motionless throughout the day. If I wiggled, twitched or fidgeted, anything aside from the regular rise and fall of my chest as I breathed, the bells on my halter jingled and I was punished.

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It was a simple enough task—how hard is it to hold still, after all—but I could never do it. Never. The first hour felt like an age and after that my body would tense and I'd find myself wondering if perhaps I had been forgotten.

By the time the intercom chimed the lunch hour, I would be a shivering, nervous wreck. And though I calmed within minutes of his first soothing touch, I was never able to conquer the dread that overwhelmed me at his absence. It was such a silly fear, I know. Completely unfounded. My Master never forgot me, not even once. In the beginning, I don't think he even really left me alone. There were times when I heard movement around me, but it was those other times, with those frighteningly long stretches of silence, that conspired to make me disobedient, to fill me with fear and make the bells sing out.

And later, when I know he did leave me, a guard was posted within the room so despite the emptiness and loneliness, I was still not alone. With my blindfold in place, it just felt that way. When Tane returned he'd ask, "Did you hear the bells?" And the guard would answer either yes or no. 'Yes' was much more common than 'no' was.

Towards the end of my 'Falcon' days, the guard disappeared and then I truly was left alone. Darkness swallowed me, panic that I might be left like this forever consumed me. But always my Master returned to soothe me with a touch from his hand, and he'd ask, "Did you move, Mischief?"

There were many times when I told him 'yes' just so I could feel the reassurance of being pinned across his strong



thighs while a seemingly endless explosion of pain rained down across my bottom and thighs as he spanked me. It was a comfort to know he still wanted me enough to bother with punishing me. And I liked it when he held me afterward and kissed the tears from my face.

It was a rare occasion when I made it through the day as still as a statue of stone, but when I did I was rewarded with tender touches and praise. Gentle hands would caress their way to my breasts, squeezing and lifting them to his mouth, plucking and suckling at the nipples until they tightened for him. His body would come into mine, and he would satisfy himself with me. If I was very good, and if he felt I deserved it, then sometimes he would allow me pleasure as well, but it wasn't necessary. Just the feel of him sliding inside me, hard and thick, his desire for me driving him to love me with breath-taking vigor, left me as satisfied as any orgasm.

Impossible though it may be to believe, I was coming to think of my Master as my savior and not my tormenter. And in these early days of training, his gentle touches were the only light in my darkened world. I cherished them. They kept me alive when isolation and darkness consumed all else and I could no longer remember a time when I hadn't worn a collar and restraints or welts and bruises constantly upon me. All I knew was my Master rescued me from my seclusion and fears when I was good. And when I wasn't, he took me to the absolute depths of despair.

He was the air I breathed, his scent filling me as I filled my lungs. When I ate, it was always from his hand. When I drank, he held the cup. What words were spoken, were in his

voice; my every moment of pleasure derived from his touch. With all my heart, I knew he was the only reason that I lived. Chained, blindfolded and alone, I was convinced that I would die without him.

He molded me like I molded my clay, but it's only upon reflection that I can see just how drastically I changed, becoming for him the perfect Personal, a possession and a thing of beauty.

And I was proud to be so for him. My Master, my beloved. I was valuable now. At long last, I had worth.

After two months the blindfold came off and I was led, blindfolded and on my leash, into the Personals' Day Room for the very first time. It was a little frightening to suddenly go from days of silence to the sound of movement and the soft voices of other females talking quietly around me. I would have been perfectly content to turn around and go back to a life of utter isolation, but my Master ran his hand down my leash until he could hook my collar with his fingers and pulled me right into the room.

"You are going to meet the other Personals now," he said close to my ear. "Relax, Mischief. Remember, you are a peer among them. This is where you belong outside my presence."

My breathing quickened and I panicked anyway when Tane removed my blindfold for the first time since my falcon training began.

At this point, I will point out that when you lose the ability to think for yourself, you lessen your ability to cope with even the smallest of changes. This is why Personals were separated from the unpredictable, free-thinking Lessers. It's why we

were kept deep inside the mountain fortress, under lock and key, our every waking moment supervised and guarded and scheduled. Because our masters couldn't always be with us, the Personals' Day Room was created as a safe place for us to meet, like a flock of passive sheep, under the watchful eye of one master or another, depending on whose free hour it was. Every day was always the same and our schedule ran like this:

Borsch was the first master of the day, and his was a quiet hour spent reading, studying a new skill or brushing up on an old one. Next came Deaton who herded us out to the exercise field and put us through our paces. Then Master Oxley and, if the day was nice, we worked in the gardens and Aviary. Lunch came next, and the arrival of six masters and all the sub-masters. Because Personals did not feed themselves, we were paired two or three females to a male to eat and drink from his fingers. Then came Masters Grayson, Doctor Moulton, Wilhite, and Shipe, respectively, and we could either nap or work at whatever skills we possessed. That last hour of the day was always the longest one, filled with softly whispered conversation and excited glances cast to the clock on the wall as we awaited the arrival of our masters'.

It was currently Master Doctor Moulton's hour, and he walked with us through the large set of rooms designated for our daily use. There was a pottery wheel and sculpting table for me in one area of the room, near enough to the windows to catch the sunlight. At last I would be able to finish my Posture One sculpture, but my days of isolation and ostracism

were over, for my skill station was placed right in the hub of three others.

I had Snow, Master Duncan's Personal and a very talkative painter, stationed not six feet to the left of mine. Opal, Master Wilhite's Personal, spent a good portion of the days in a comfortable easy-chair in front of me, cross-stitching from patterns that she created herself. Midget, Master Smith's Personal and an avid artist with charcoal pencils, had her art station to the right and a little behind my pottery wheel.

"You may learn any new skill you desire," my Master told me as he unhooked my leash from my collar. "If there is anything you require that is not provided, you may ask for it. The garden and Aviary are open to you, so long as you do your part to keep them nice. And look there, there's your old barrack's mate, Desire. So you already have a friendly face here." My Master pointed out the sliding glass door to where Master Deaton's new Personal was currently weeding in a flower bed. "Come. Let's introduce you to the others."

It was Master Doctor Moulton's hour to supervise the Day Room. He and my Master took me to each Personal in turn. I was told her name, as well as that of her master, and her list of accomplished skills was recited for me.

"Greet your new sister," my Master then told me, and I would put my hands upon the shoulders of the newly acquainted Personal while she did the same to me and our softly murmured greetings would be exchanged.

"Kiss," my Master then said, and like lovers we would lean into one another's embrace. Our hands would clasp, our breasts touch, and our mouths meet. When my turn came to

kiss Master Doctor Moulton's Personal, Kitten, my eyes were drawn to her small, pert breasts, naked above her hard, black corset. Her nipples had been pierced and each was decorated with a single sapphire gem looped on a gold ring. They sparkled in the sunlight as she lifted her arms to lay her hands on my shoulders, and I could not help but touch one.

Kitten smiled at me. Since my corset covered my navel, I lifted the front of my uniform skirt the mere inch or two necessary to show her my ruby-studded clit ring. She must have been as impressed with my piercing as I was with hers. As we leaned in to kiss, her hand stole down to touch me there.

"How very friendly," Tane said low behind me.

"They look good together," Master Doctor Moulton added.

"It would be a pity to separate them now when they seem so attached."

Kitten all but purred as she slipped her tongue into my mouth and kissed me as a master would.

My Master and Doctor Moulton took us to the bed—a large circular bed that could have comfortably slept ten and which was set two steps down into the floor—in the Personals' private napping alcove. We were both undressed.

I had never made love to a woman before, but it seemed to please my Master. So when Kitten held her arms out, her sapphire nipple rings glittering under the lights as she breathed, I went to her. She showed me what to do, and I will admit the taste of her was not unpleasant. Nor were the sounds she made as I took her clit into my mouth. Her body jolted when I flicked her with my tongue, and a thrill a

satisfaction went through me when her hips began to jerk in time to the motions of my licking and sucking.

The warm hand of the Master Doctor settled lightly on my back. Two fingers stole beneath my chin to sink into Kitten's wet sheath, and she moaned as he thrust them in and out. Her cries quickly escalated as we drove her right to the brink of orgasm, but I was not allowed to topple her over. Moulton pulled me away at the last second and that privilege fell to my Master, who took my place between her legs.

It was the first time I saw him mount another female. Her back arched and she cried out lustily, wrapping her legs around his waist, grabbing his buttocks with claw-like hands and pulling him deep and hard into her. I didn't know we could do that. But my Master only laughed at her fervor, and I felt a stab of jealousy as he began to pump slowly into her. He did not let her come right away, but teased her, bringing her to the edge I'd primed her for. Then he stopped, holding himself still within her until the threat of her orgasm receded and he could thrust again.

My jealousy grew. That was one of the tricks he used with me.

Having divested himself of his clothes, Master Moulton sat cross-legged on the bed not far away. He held out his hand to me. "Come here, Mischief."

Casting one last look at my Master and the moaning, gasping, writhing Kitten, I went to him. My intent was to make Kitten feel the same jealousy that I did. And I threw myself into pleasuring the Master Doctor, into making him moan loudly, working him first with my hands and my mouth,

then sinking him deep inside my body. He exhaled a long, drawn-out, "Oh my God!" as I closed the muscles of my sex like a hand around his magnificent cock and slowly, deliberately caressed the length of him from base to head within me.

"She's doing that sucking, milking thing with her cunt, isn't she?" I heard my Master pant from behind us.

"How does she do that?" Moulton gasped as he grabbed my hips in both hands.

My Master laughed breathlessly. "I don't know. I noticed it for the first time six weeks ago. She gets better at it every time I let her ride me."

Eyes closed, my head thrown back, I reached back to cup Master Moulton's heavy balls and fondled them gently in my hand. So fierce was my concentration that sweat began to bead my forehead. My abdomen rippled as I flexed and pulsed my pussy up and down the length of him, rotating my hips in the smallest of circles to increase his pleasure.

His body stiffened beneath me and I, struck by a sudden gremlin of disobedience, ceased to move upon him. I released him, my sex going still and slack all around him.

His eyes snapped opened. "You little witch!" he panted and sharply spanked my hip. "She stopped!"

From behind me, my Master growled, "Perhaps Mischief needs a reminder that she is not a master and does not get to deprive another of pleasure."

I resumed my 'milking' movements at once, but the damage was already done. Moulton was no longer in danger of spending, and the deprivation intensified his pleasure

sharply. He threw back his head, growling through gritted teeth as I clenched around him yet again.

My attention was so fixed on the Master Doctor that I barely heard Kitten give her last ragged cry of ecstasy. In fact, the only reason I knew my Master had done with her was that I felt him kneel behind me. The warmth of his chest pressed against my back as the hard length of him settled between my buttocks.

He lightly touched my stomach, feeling the rhythmic movements of my inner muscles. "If I ever figure out how to teach this to the Lessers, I could double their sales prices."

"My ... God...." Moulton panted. His pelvis began to move beneath me, tight jerking motions as I brought him close to coming.

"Let's make her work at this," my beloved Master said, and I lay my head back against his shoulder as he embraced me.

I loved the feeling of being so fully packed by two masters. For having the temerity to deprive the Judgment Doctor of his pleasure, I was ruthlessly made to pay with the extended suffering of my own arousal.

It was a delicious punishment, and I did not mind it a bit.

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## CHAPTER ELEVEN

*"You drugged her." It was not a question. My Master said it as though the words tasted foul in his mouth.*

*"What were we supposed to do?" the Detective snapped. "Let her scream herself hoarse?"*

*"I suppose it doesn't matter," my Master said. "I'll simply have to wait until she recovers before punishing her."*

*"You son of a bitch!" The Detective lunged at him and there was another scuffle as he had to be restrained.*

*Tane slipped his hands beneath me, lifting me into the cradle of his arms and holding me against his chest like a treasure. Even knowing I was to be beaten, I gazed up at him with drugged adoration as he carried me to the door.*

*"You can't let him take her," the Detective protested. "You know what he'll do to her!"*

*The Captain was unswayed. Privately I thought he would make a splendid master in his own right. "She's going home. Get her things."*

*"He's breaking the law!"*

*"He's a dignitary from a foreign nation. He's above the law."*

*"I don't care if he comes from the moon!"*

*"It's called Diplomatic Immunity, Mac! You've done this too long not to know what that means!"*

*"Master..." I whispered. He had come. My heart hammered in my chest as I reached my hand up to touch his cheek. He had come for me.*

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\* \* \* \*

Time passed and I settled into my new role. Twice I became pregnant. Both were accidental and, when my second delivery ended badly and Master Doctor Moulton was forced to cut my twin daughters from me, my Master made the decision to have my tubes tied. While my first born son, Nathan, had been hale and healthy from the start, only one of my two girls survived outside my womb. The other we buried among the flowers in the Aviary where I'm allowed to visit whenever I desire. Though only minutes old, when she breathed her last against my breast, my littlest one died with worth. I know because my Master still visits her grave. He even crowned the spot with a headstone, carved with a lamb and her name, Priceless.

It wasn't until my first born, Nathan, was about five and Precious, my surviving daughter, was weaned around two that I began making my first forays into the unknown Outside. I was a Product sample, my Master said. When he would meet a potential master for a second or third time, he would take me along to use as an example. If he was called to inspect a situation with an unsatisfactory Outside master or a problem Lesser, then I would sometimes attend as a training tool.

In any case, for these excursions, a car would be summoned to the portcullis to take us to the Naples-Capodichino Airport. From there, we went all over the world: Australia, Africa, China, England, Scotland, America. I love traveling. While my Master reviewed his itinerary and made

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last minute corrections to his travel plans, I would sit quietly beside him, my uniform and jesses blanketed under a full-length, beige overcoat, and watch the Outside passing outside my tinted window.

Without access to a calendar and no way to keep track of the passing time, my days all seemed to run together. But every time I emerged from the depths of Judgment and ventured into the Outside, I saw evidence of the passing years. The village at the base of the mountain grew larger. Wooded landscapes became pastures for livestock. Businesses came and went. Clothing fashions and hairstyles changed. So did cars. The outsides of planes didn't change nearly as much as the insides, but I noticed that Judgment's private plane almost never had the same pilot and attendants twice.

Our last trip was no exception. As I was climbing the last few steps into the aircraft, I glanced up to meet the eyes of the lovely blonde stewardess standing at the door to greet us. As far back as I could remember, there had never been a female attendant aboard the plane before and I was a little surprised to see her there. I think my Master was as well, for he stopped in the doorway and just looked at her for the longest time. He lifted her left hand and looked at her ringless fingers. Then he tilted her chin and looked at her face, though she drew from his grasp rather quickly and gave him a strange look.

He glanced down at the name tag over her breast. He smiled. "Hello, Gloria."

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I had no time to become jealous. From behind me, I heard a sudden shout and turned to see three men in airline uniforms and a paunchy man in a suit and tie running to reach our plane. They pushed past me. Two of the three men took her place, while the man in the suit hustled her quickly back down the steps and my Master called after them, "I look forward to seeing you again, Gloria."

He took my hand and led me to our seats, placing me at the window and sitting down next to me at the aisle. As soon as we were airborne, the male stewards brought us food and drink, and must have thought us either loving or odd since he fed me every bite from his own hand. And when I was done eating, he requested a pillow and blanket, lay my chair back and tucked me in.

"We are going to California today. It will be a long flight and an even longer day. So get some sleep."

California. The name of it stirred some vague tendrils of memory that never quite manifested themselves. It just sounded ... familiar. Like I place I'd been to before.

While I found sleeping on a moving plane almost impossible, I obediently closed my eyes and maybe dozed now and then throughout the flight.

There is no comparing the tranquility of Judgment's halls to the hustle and bustle of big city life. Because my master was beside me, the unfamiliarity of the constant activity around me, honking horns, foul air, the shouting and talking, and moving swarms of people, did not upset me too much. But I was truly grateful when my Master checked us in to the

Mark Hopkins Hotel and we stayed in our rooms that first night.

The penthouse was nice, though nowhere near as nice as my Master's quarters back home, but they did allow for privacy. And first thing upon opening the door, even before the bellhop had carried our luggage into the living room, my Master removed my coat. I liked the look that young Outside man gave me, his mouth dropping open, his eyes widening as his gaze fell to my bare breasts.

"Present for the nice man," my Master told me, a wicked humor glittering in his eyes and turning up the corners of his mouth.

The bellhop swallowed loudly as I dropped gracefully to my knees and bent over backwards, raising my hips and parting the folds of my sex for his furiously blushing perusal.

"Would you like a tip?" my Master asked, and laughed when the young man fled our suite.

For the next few days, I accompanied my Master from one meeting to another. It didn't take long to realize that he was visiting past clients, checking up on the progress of their purchased Lessers, some of which had been sold long before I ever arrived at Judgment's door. I saw the way these females lived, some two to three to a single master, and I pitied them. Many had forgotten their Judgment training. They constantly squabbled with one another, and the welts on their buttocks sometimes extended up their backs or down their legs. They fidgeted, adjusted their own hair and clothing, and in one meeting, while my Master was inspecting three females

owned by a San Francisco lawyer, I saw one sigh in boredom, right there in front of her master and mine!

I was shocked. My Master's expression turned unreadable but for a slight tightening of his jaw, and I could tell he wasn't at all pleased.

"Excuse me," he told the lawyer, "but do you have any rope?"

While the lawyer watched on, my Master tied all three over his dining table. He cut their clothes from their bodies, baring them entirely.

"Do not clothe them again until they have earned the right," Tane said, and took off his coat. There were a special series of loops sewn on the inside for the specific purpose of discretely holding and concealing a Judgment cane. And though I rarely saw him wield it during these meetings, he brandished it now. "This has been a disgraceful display. Were they mine, they would be getting a sound dose of this each morning and night for a month."

For a long time the whirl and whup of a cane on bare flesh sang in that room, mingling with the shrieks and screams of each Lesser in turn. My Master was pure poetry in motion, strong and graceful, not sparing those females so much as a shred of mercy. I know it was spiteful, but I believe they deserved every bit of what they got. And it was a long time before that cane laid its last stripe into the swollen, welted flesh of those three unfortunates. Their lawyer master looked weak and pale, and he stared at my master with absolute fascination and more than a little awe.

"You have been remiss in your control of them," my Master growled, stroking the length of that cane through his hand. "They have grown sloven and sullen. A disrespectful female does not compliment her master. Mischief, come here!"

I went and quickly.

With a sweep of his cane, he directed me to the head of the table. "Over!"

I obeyed, snapped across it with the other girls so quickly that my hardened corset rapped the table. I braced my legs stiffly, pushing my hips out and back and grabbing hold of the edge of the table with both hands. I would show these Lessers how well a real Personal could take her discipline.

In deference to my position, my Master did not bare me as he would have done in Judgment, though my gossamer skirt afford me very little in the way of protection. He gave me two dozen strokes, and from first to last I clutched the table with a death grip, fighting as hard as I knew how to keep my face as impassive as possible. I lost composure only once to a tortured, strangled groan, but I think Desire would have been proud of such ability.

"That," my Master said, "is how they should behave. I suggest you take up your responsibilities by them with full enthusiasm, Master Gray, or I will revoke your contract and have them removed to a household where they can be bettered attended to!"

Panting with pain and working to hold back tears, as I waited for permission to rise, I felt a trembling hand smooth lightly over the welts my Master had given me. The lawyer, examining my marks with awe.

Later that day, my Master rewarded my stoicism under the rod with a chocolate truffle and he took me to a pet shop. I was allowed to hold the puppies and kittens for almost half an hour. I wanted so much to take one home with me.

"Absolutely not," my Master laughed when I cuddled a siamese kitten to my cheek and gave him such a pleading look. "There isn't a female alive capable of being good enough for that kind of reward."

Because the day was nice, and since it was only a few blocks to his next meeting, my Master decided that we should walk. A little warm in my overcoat, I nevertheless fell into step two paces behind him.

"Stay close to me," he said, as we crossed the street into a veritable strip mall of sidewalk venders. Some of them were selling the most fascinating items, and I found my head turning often as I looked at tourist-trap displays of sunglasses, spoons, and maps to the stars. There were little wooden nutcrackers of all types and designs. Toy monkeys that danced and clapped their hands. My Master paused at a jewelry kiosk to buy several hair pieces and necklaces of seashells and polished stones, and I took the opportunity to watch a food vender place a steaming-hot, oblong stretch of meat into a fold of bread and then decorate it with red and yellow paste and sprinkle chopped pickles and onions on top. I don't know what it was, but it smelled very good.

From the corner of my eye, I saw my Master's coat move on and I hurried after him, while keeping a wistful eye on some of the wondrous displays we were passing. I don't know how far I might have followed him before that honking car



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startled me into grabbing my Master's arm for comfort. But when I raised my eyes to his, the man dressed in that coat that was so much like my Master's, gave me the oddest look before shaking his hand free of my grip and walking on.

I spun on my heel, running all the way back to the food vender, but there was no sign of my Master. I turned in a full circle, the crowd swelling around me and choking my view. Panic surged inside me. I was lost!

I knocked over a table of necklaces in my panic and stumbled into the street, turning in circles, desperately searching for that familiar coat and black hair and the cross, angry eyes of my Master. It was a wonder I wasn't killed as traffic came to a screeching halt and two cars collided, one into the back of the other. I fell to my knees, clutching my stomach, rocking and crying harder than I ever had until a car with flashing lights arrived on the scene.

I was arrested for loitering, vandalism, and causing an accident. A man in a blue uniform took me to the police station where my fingerprints and picture were taken. But when they took my coat from me and saw the marks my Master's cane had left upon me, I was taken from the processing unit to a private room. When the Detective came for me a short time later, he found me huddled in one corner, sobbing, so frightened that I could not stop shaking.

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

*By the time we again reached Italy, what drugs had been given were almost entirely out of my system. But my master did not speak to me until we again reached the seclusion of Judgment's private walls. He took me straight to his chambers.*

\* \* \* \*

"Are you hungry?" he asked.

"No, Master."

"Then bring me the number three cane. You've never been whipped the way you're going to be right now."

As I went to the display rack on the wall, my Master set up a tall tripod in the middle of the room. When I brought the cane to him, he took my hand in a lovers' clasp and led me to the crux of it. My wrists were tied behind me and hoisted so far up my back that I could do nothing but bend over to relieve the pain in my shoulders. I spread my legs very wide apart so that my ankles could be cuffed to the bottom of the tripod stand. A stock bar at about waist level pushed my hips out and back and kept my weight from dislocating my arms. This was an awkward position that made moving painful and my bottom an easy target for the cane.

My Master took his time setting up the room, pulling back the furniture to give himself plenty of empty space for magnificent swinging strokes. He even brought out smelling salts and a cloth to bathe my face, as well as a bucket of cool

water and dipper. Standing a pace or two behind me, he rolled his sleeves up past his elbows before lifting the long cane and slashing a single, sharp practice arc through the air.

"What did I tell you when we crossed the street?" he said gently.

"The Master told this one to stay close," I answered softly.

"What did you do?"

"This one got lost."

"You are aptly named, my dear." Without another word, he gagged me and doused my thrust out buttocks with a fine sheen of water from the bucket. Then it came.

ONE!

I gasped, tossing back my head as pain laved through me. It was worse than I had expected. My Master struck me low, laying that first cut directly across the crease that separates bottom from thighs, and the hurt of it fanned all through me. I wrenched in my bonds, flopping in the tripod like a trout on a fisherman's line.

I felt more than heard him draw back his arm, and my thighs quivered as the cane bit in just under the previous stroke. It raised a second welt so close to the first that the two seemed to meld together and throb as one.

I grunted, gasping through my gag, tears filling my eyes and spilling freely down my cheeks.

"I have missed you terribly," my Master said softly, and the next five strokes bit in without mercy. Each seemed that much harder than the last, the whuck of the rod working down my thighs until he reached halfway to my knees. Then

the cane raised and lightly measured along the crease again.  
"I don't think I can bear to be without you."

I screamed through my gag when he struck me there again, this time working up and over the curve of my bottom, laying stroke after stroke so close together than the welts overlapped, until he reached a point a half inch lower than the top of my bottom crack. I gasped, writhing in inexpressible agony, causing the tripod to creak and groan with my contortions. Again, the cane measured lightly upon the welted crease, and I sobbed long and low.

Another five, back down my thighs, midway to my knees, and I felt a liquid trickling sensation winding down my right leg. Was it sweat or blood? I whined, hoarse and breathless whimpers torn from a throat screamed raw, and fainted for the first time three strokes later. He patiently revived me with a touch of the smelling salts beneath my nose and caressed my face with a cold cloth before continuing.

Before he was done, my body felt bathed in the fires of hell. I was weak and drained, and though the cane had only thrashed my bottom and thighs, I ached in every part of me. I felt whipped to my soul.

My Master did not untie me right away, but removed the gag and gently helped me raise my head to drink from the cup he held to my lips. The cool water soothed my scratched throat, and I drank greedily.

The pain seemed to swell, flowing through me in crashing waves. My stomach rebelled, and I vomited everything he gave me into the pan that he now held just under my mouth.

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He pressed a cup of cool water to my lips so I could again drink. This time it all stayed down.

He took me tied as I was to the tripod, showing me even less mercy than he had during my caning. Absolution did not come until much later when, spent and sobbing, I was carried to the bed and tucked gently into it.

Tane stretched out beside me, enfolding me in his arms so we both could sleep.

I was now forgiven.

I tucked my cheek against my Master's chest, breathed deeply of his comforting scent, and smiled.