

The Problematic Princess: Anopy

By

Abigail Webster

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Chapter One

Dulcie smiled at the reporter and replied, "From what I have seen of the friendly people who live here, I am sure I will feel at home very soon. I am sure Leader Canton will be showing me more of your lands in the near future, and I am certainly looking forward to learning all I can of your customs and traditions in order to be of help to my husband."

"That is all for now, reporter," Canton said quietly but firmly as he helped Dulcie climb inside the vehicle. He made a note to have a little stool added as a standard to all of the vehicles that she might ride in so that she found it easy to enter and leave a vehicle without risk of falling. He was so tall it was a simple matter for him to get inside, but if he had not been here to lift the tiny woman, she would have found it difficult to climb in. He noted that Dulcie gave the reporter a little nod and polite smile, and he was proud of her. She was gracious and off to a great start. He had no doubt that the short interlude would be splattered all over the stations within minutes.

"Are all of your arrivals met with so much enthusiasm, Leader Canton?" she inquired.

"You may address me informally when Nurick is our driver, wife. He has been with our family for many years, as has his father and grandfather before. Nurick, this is my wife, Princess Dulcie."

"I am most pleased to meet you, Lady." Nurick smiled happily.

Dulcie immediately liked the pleasant young man. He was closer to her in age than her husband. "It is a pleasure, Nurick," she said with a friendly smile. "So, husband, do you always have such a gathering when you return home?" she repeated her question.

"I can honestly tell you that even if we arrived in the middle of the night, and the weather was cold and snow flying everywhere, there would be a crowd to greet me and welcome me. I feel truly humbled by such love and affection," he added.

"Canton is a great Leader," Nurick added his opinion. "He is much loved by everyone."

"Not everyone," Canton disagreed.

"Only by fools who wish for the power you have..." Nurick was comfortable enough to argue with the Leader. "Lady, your husband is a modest man. He has done much to make our land prosperous and to end poverty. I know for a fact that while he truly was smitten with your beauty, he would not have offered for you if it would not help the people of Anopy. Such selfishness is beyond Canton... That is why he is a good Leader."

"Nurick, you say too much." Canton was embarrassed.

“I do not want you to forget to tell your bride that it was she you wanted, Canton. The building material was second only to her.”

“I thank you for telling me, Nurick,” Dulcie said softly, looking into Canton’s dark eyes and smiling warmly. “Canton mentioned as much to me, but I feared it was only to make me feel better. I am happy to know it is the truth. It warms my heart,” she admitted.

“I would not lie of such things, little Princess,” Canton spoke, his tone gentle.

“I did not know you then. I believe Father chose well for me,” she stated, her words simple, but not lost on her husband.

“Those words warm my heart,” he said, repeating her own words, and letting her know he understood her feelings because he shared in them.

Their drive took quite a while and Canton was careful to point out things he felt Dulcie would need to know. He also told her quite firmly that she was not to go anywhere alone until he gave permission. The look she gave him was full of temper and indignation and he lowered his voice and said, “This is not up for discussion, Little Princess. While nearly everyone here will treat you with respect, there are some who would do you harm simply because you are my wife; others because you are from another land and they mistrust all outsiders. Until you know what areas are safe, and the people who are to be trusted, you will need an escort to guide you about. Do you understand?”

She nodded reluctantly, somewhat mollified that he did not intend to suffocate her indefinitely, and went back to listening to him speak. She saw many interesting places that she planned to explore later. They finally turned into a driveway and drove toward a huge, modern building. They had to stop at another gate, enter a code, and then were admitted by a guard. They drove up to a side entrance that was protected from the elements, and Canton helped her out of the vehicle. “Thank you, Nurick,” Canton said politely to the younger man.

Canton held open the door for her and they walked inside and Dulcie immediately felt homesick. The castle she had called home for years was nothing like this place. It felt cold and unwelcoming.

“You are disappointed?” Canton asked, awaiting her reaction.

“It is so white... so modern; nothing like home.”

“You do not like it, do you, little Princess?” Her answer was important to him.

“No, Canton, I do not,” she truthfully answered, feeling disappointed.

“It is the State Building; I do not own it, Dulcie. We must stay here at times, but I have another residence that I prefer. This place is not like a home. It was built by a former Leader and built in a style he felt would impress others. I am truly pleased you like it no more than I do.” He smiled reassuringly, and added, “We must reside here for now while I tend to matters neglected in my absence. I will try to make sure you have amusements so you do not grow bored.”

“I am used to training for long hours at a time.”

“As a warrior? The women of Anopy are not warriors,” he told her yet again.

“I am not from Anopy and I am a warrior,” she replied, telling him once again that she was not like the women here, and she would not give up herself.

“Princess Dulcie, we will discuss this matter another time,” Leader Canton said formally, but she had no trouble reading the look in his dark eyes as they were joined by three women. Not one of the females was smiling and she sensed their animosity toward her before they spoke.

“Welcome home, Leader Canton. I can see you have procured the building materials we so desperately need on Anopy.”

“Representative Dantonne, may I introduce my wife, Princess Dulcie. Princess Dulcie, this is Representative Dantonne, a member of my Council of Advisors.”

Dulcie’s smile faded when it was apparent Representative Dantonne had no intention of acknowledging the introduction, or of introducing the two younger women who stood beside her, staring at her as if she were a worm of some sort. Dulcie held out her hand when Dantonne started to speak to Canton again about a matter she claimed was of grave importance, but sounded stupid to Dulcie. “Excuse me, Leader Canton, but even if Representative Dantonne has the manners of a boor, I would be introduced to her companions. I am sure it is most embarrassing for them to have their very presence ignored...? I am Princess Dulcie, and your name?” She looked at one of the startled young women pointedly.

“I am Representative Dantonne’s assistant, Princess Dulcie. I am called Agate.” The woman offered a polite smile, which Dulcie promptly returned.

“It is a pleasure to meet you, Agate.” Dulcie offered her a hand to shake, and Agate promptly shook hands. “And you are...?”

“I am Representative Dantonne’s daughter, Marcelle, Princess Dulcie.” Her smile was tentative, as if she feared Dulcie would dislike her.

“I am also pleased to meet you, Marcelle. Do you also work for your mother as her aide?” she questioned as she shook her hand in greeting.

“No, Princess Dulcie; I am home from school. I am studying health-related matters and would be a healer.” She looked at her mother and Dulcie was immediately aware of tension between the two women. Dantonne’s expression clearly said that Marcelle would never be a healer, and Marcelle’s was full of defiance. Dulcie decided she was on Marcelle’s side and would aid her all she could in her endeavor to do as she pleased with her life.

“Leader Canton, we really must speak of State matters!” Representative Dantonne insisted.

“Representative Dantonne...” Canton’s voice was deep and low and Dulcie realized he was furious and doing his best not to show his anger. She feared she was in grave trouble for being rude to the woman, especially when she did not know the woman’s value to her husband. But when he spoke again, she relaxed a bit. “Surely nothing is so urgent that I do not have time to take my newly-arrived wife to our private chambers and make sure she is comfortable after our long journey. While you might look upon her and merely see building materials procured for Anopy, I look upon her and see my lovely bride who is deserving of my attention. Excuse us. When I am ready, I will call all of the Representatives into the Council room. Until then, you may go about your duties.”

“I fear I mistook the matter of your marriage as one of need and sacrifice,” the woman said in a choked voice.

“While I love Anopy, I fear I am not quite so self-sacrificing, Representative Dantonne. I have waited for Princess Dulcie to reach an age that King Betarn would consider her ready for marriage. The building materials are in exchange for the ore we shall trade. My wife is precious to me.” He made it known that Dantonne had deeply offended him and her face turned almost sickly in appearance. “Come along, Princess Dulcie, and we shall continue to our chambers.” He nodded politely to the two younger women and led his wife away.

Dulcie waited until they were out of hearing and whispered, “Thank you, husband.”

“Do not thank me yet, little Princess. You have earned a punishment for calling that woman a boor. As my wife, you must obey protocol.”

“Even if she is a boor?” Dulcie asked in dismay.

“Even then, Dulcie.” He led her down a long corridor and finally came to a stop in front of door that was labeled ‘Leader Canton, Private’. He unlocked the door by using the scanner, and then ushered her inside.

Dulcie did not get a moment to look around before Canton bent her over a small, but sturdy, table right inside the entryway, and brought his hand down smartly over her short skirt. “Ouch!” she complained. “Please, sir, I am still tender!” she reminded him.

“When a punishment is earned, it is given as soon as possible, and it does not matter how sore you are from another punishment.” He gave her another spank, and she cried out again. His hand fell three more times, and then he stood her up. “That is but a small punishment, little Princess. If the circumstances were different, I would have bared you and spanked you thoroughly, but Representative Dantonne was exceedingly rude toward you, and I understand and respect your feelings. But as my wife, you cannot treat anyone the way you did her. It is not done. Are we clear?”

“Yes, Canton,” Dulcie replied. “But she is permitted her rudeness?”

“Her husband will be advised of her behavior,” Canton replied, and then smiled wickedly. “I daresay her spanking will be much worse than the one you just received.” He leaned down to kiss her and asked, “May we put this incident behind us now? I would see a smile on your face when I show you our chambers.”

“I am not going to hold a grudge over this incident, Canton. I was not so upset for her rudeness towards myself as I was at her rudeness toward the two younger women with her. Dantonne should have introduced them immediately.”

“As I shall remind her husband, little Princess. Is there anything else, perhaps?” he asked, but his dark eyes were twinkling.

“No, my husband,” she said. “I can see you are used to dealing with Dantonne,” she added mischievously. Canton chuckled, and then she giggled, only to stop when his dark eyes looked at her in that certain way of his that warned her she might be going too far. “Do not fear, Canton. I have learned that I must be circumspect even if someone is a boor. Now that I know you have your own methods of dealing with such things, there will be no need for me to misbehave and earn myself a punishment.”

“Well put,” he agreed. “This, of course, is the entry. Unless we invite guests to visit, this is where anyone will remain if they are dropping off something, or if they need to speak to me. This should not occur often, and if someone comes while I am away, they are to remain here.”

“Even if I have invited someone?” she asked.

“No, if you invite a friend to come visit, then of course, she is permitted inside our quarters. That is different. What I am trying to say is that you are not expected to play hostess to someone who comes by without an invitation. Those people who wish to discuss matters of State need to come to my office. These are our private quarters, but once in a while someone will need help during an odd hour.”

Dulcie nodded. She understood that well. Her father dealt with that, too. The next room they entered was much larger.

“This is where we relax and entertain.” He watched her lavender eyes fill with pleasure, and he relaxed immediately. “I redid these rooms when I took over as Leader. While I will not waste the money in our treasury to redo the State building as a whole, I could not live with that style in my private rooms. I’m happy to see by your expression that you like these chambers.”

“This is lovely, Canton. Thank you so much. It will not be such a hardship to live here now.” She was sincere.

“You are free to add your own touches and style, Dulcie. These are your quarters, too. The same goes for our home when I can spare the time to take you there.”

“Canton, how long will you remain Leader?” she asked.

“Until I am challenged either in battle or by vote.” He saw her pale. “It was a test of battle that earned my right to be here, little Princess. If I did not do a good job, I could be voted out, or challenged. A challenger must have substantial support before his challenge can be made. It is not a matter of someone waking up some day and thinking ‘I will challenge the present Leader and take over Anopy’. A challenger must have signatures of at least forty per cent of the voters and at least half of the Representatives on the Council must agree to the challenge. It is not a casual thing. If a Leader grows old or weak or disabled in health or body, it is his responsibility to appoint a new Leader who will then be voted upon. A Leader can also decide he does not wish the responsibility any longer and use the same process to resign.”

“It sounds complicated. My brother will take over as King, then his son after him. It is the way of our land. It is my father’s responsibility to train my brother.”

“I think your brother will be a good King.”

“I do, too,” she agreed. “Let’s see the rest of our apartment,” she suggested.

“This is our dining area. We rarely use this room... or the kitchen.” He showed her the room. “Our meals are usually in the large dining room with many others in attendance.”

“Do we use the same protocol as aboard ship?” she asked.

“Yes,” he replied and heard her groan.

“Canton, that is just so wrong on so many levels!” She felt like smacking him. “Meals are a time for laughter and conversation. And, food should be served after people are seated, while it is still hot. It is so foolish to stand and wait until everyone arrives to be permitted to sit down and enjoy the food that is on your plate growing colder by the second. It serves no purpose.”

“Do you not think that a person who is late feels the ire of everyone else when their food is cold?”

“Why should everyone be punished for the actions of one person? That person should be excused from dinner if they cannot arrive on time. And, husband, there are exceptions to that. Sometimes things come up that are out of that person’s control. I am sure there are children here... What if one of them makes a parent late?”

“It has always been done this way, Dulcie.”

“You need to change it, Canton. Truly. It sounds more like a former Leader was on an ego trip when this custom started.”

“I will consider your arguments, but until a decision is made, you will observe the current protocol.”

“It would not hurt a thing to give it a try,” she added.

“I have heard enough on the subject for now, wife,” he said firmly. “Let us see our bedchamber and the bathing chamber.”

Dulcie did not argue with her husband. It was time to let the matter of meals drop for now. But, she promised herself, it was one issue she was not prepared to live with much longer. If necessary, she would take drastic measures to bring about a change.

Chapter Two

Canton was not fooled one bit by his wife's seemingly innocent expression. She was plotting mischief and if he were a smart man he would be giving her a reason to regret what she was thinking... whatever it was.

"Are you going to show me our bedchamber, husband?" Dulcie asked sweetly. "If it is as nice as the rest of our apartment, I will be very pleased. You have excellent taste in furnishings."

"I had some help, wife. My sister came and did most of the work. She gave me choices, and asked my taste from pictures, and produced this. I did very little but enjoy Jallea's expertise."

"You were wise to ask her help, Canton. It is a very time consuming job to make selections of furniture and wall decorations and floor coverings... I am sure that as a new Leader you had very little time for personal matters."

"You are correct, Dulcie. It was a very busy time for me, and I still put in a lot of hours to ensure Anopy continues to grow and prosper and all of our people share in the wealth as we grow. My goal is to see poverty eliminated. Things are better, but we have a long way to go to reach the level I would like to see for all citizens of Anopy."

"What can I do to help you?" she asked, the offer sincere.

"I will consider your offer and find something that will be of benefit, little Princess," he promised, his dark eyes glowing. "I am pleased you would help."

"I am not one to be idle, Canton. I need to be useful."

"Just not as a warrior; I have plenty of those," he said softly. "I would rather have a helpmate who is beautiful."

Dulcie felt herself blush at the compliment. It was obvious her husband wanted her, and it made her feel beautiful.

"I will be very thankful when your monthly time is finished and we can be husband and wife once again." His voice was husky with passion.

"The bed looks large enough for an entire family, Canton!" she exclaimed, finally looking at the main piece of furniture in the lovely room.

"I only wish to share this bed with one person, Dulcie," he whispered, leaning down to kiss her on the lips. Dulcie felt an immediate surge of need sweep through her and she

immediately realized that she was still supersensitive to any sort of stimulation... Waiting for release was once again a problem and she moaned in frustration.

"I did not mean to arouse you, wife," Canton said contritely. "You are so pretty, and it is natural for a man to want his woman. It was not fair of me to create that longing in you when I could not satisfy it. Your punishment is over, and if not for your womanly time of the month, you would have already had the satisfaction your body craves. I promise I will not touch you in this manner again until we can both enjoy satisfaction."

"Canton, I do not approve of sexual punishment. It is too cruel."

"It is frustrating, but not as cruel as giving you a very painful lesson with a cane." He gave her time to consider that, and then added, "You have no say in how you are punished, wife. That will always be my decision. If you do not wish to be punished, then you will simply behave yourself. It is that simple."

"What if I accidentally break one of your rules?" she asked, tears stinging her eyes.

"Then you will surely remember the next time you are tempted to break the same rule."

"My father was not so cruel!" she declared.

"Your father spoiled you and did not hold you accountable for your actions, little Princess. As your husband, I will always hold you accountable. You are married to the Leader, and, as such, your behavior must be exemplary." He checked his time piece and then said, "Come with me. I think you need to witness a public punishment. It will prove to you that I do not speak falsely."

"No, Canton! I have no wish to do something like that!" She shook her head sideways and backed away when he made to take her hand.

"You will accompany me, Princess Dulcie." There was no compromise in his voice. "If I need to spank you first, I will do so most thoroughly."

"I do not wish another spanking, Canton," Dulcie whispered apologetically, thoughts of the cane striping her already sore bottom making her decide to obey him without further argument. She would simply close her eyes and refuse to watch when the time came. She stepped forward and put her hand in his.

Canton was grim as he led his wife through the hallways of the State Building. It was a long walk to where sentences of this sort were carried out and he had no idea how many people were to be punished on this day, or the reasons for their punishments. He just knew that his wife needed to witness for herself the reality of public chastisements. She would not handle the embarrassment of being stripped and bared for all to see her shame. He had shown her the punishment room aboard the ship, but the one here was much larger and in an open courtyard to accommodate all those who wished to watch. Some

citizens felt it their duty to witness punishments; reporters always came to report the news on large screens all over Anopy. Others came because it was their loved one being punished and they wanted to offer support. The officials responsible were also present. Most of the time, when a wife was to be punished, it was often the husband who delivered the punishment under supervision. Many times the official would insist the punishment be harder than the husband delivered and the process would start again. If the husband did not comply with the official's dictates, the official would order the husband moved aside and one of the Inflictor's would then take over and issue a punishment that was truly painful. Public punishments were not taken lightly in Anopy.

Dulcie wanted to cry and did not know how she could endure such a humiliating scene. She knew that punishments existed in her home lands, but she was never required to be present. In fact, her father would be appalled if he knew that she was being dragged to watch a public punishment! "Leader Canton, please! I fear I cannot handle this!"

"It is necessary, Princess Dulcie. No more arguments; we are in public now, and if you call attention to us by arguing with me, I will have to deal harshly with you."

Dulcie paled. She knew the warning was serious, and his way of telling her that she would earn a public punishment if she did not put on her public face and keep it firmly in place. How could her father give her to such a cruel man?

Canton was relieved when Dulcie remained quiet as he led her to the punishment area. It was a bright, sunny day, and the covering over the entire area was welcome as it provided shade from the sun's glare. On rainy days, it provided a dry area so that punishments would not need to be canceled. In the winter months, warming shields were placed around the actual 'official area'. There were fewer witnesses during the very cold weather.

"Leader Canton, did you come to officiate today?" A worried looking man stepped forward to greet the Leader.

"No, Noturo; I felt it best that my wife witness a public punishment so that she is aware of how seriously we take protocol on Anopy."

"Yes, of course." He motioned for two more seats to be added to the official witness area. "If you will both have a seat we will get started very shortly."

"I am remiss, Noturo. This is my wife, Princess Dulcie. Princess Dulcie, this is Noturo. He is our primary official at these proceedings." He was proud of Dulcie when she graciously greeted Noturo.

"I am aware that some people not born to Anopy find this custom harsh, Princess Dulcie, but I assure you we do not take these matters lightly. The first woman to be punished has been given ample warnings by her husband, but she chose to ignore those warnings. He has asked us to intervene on his behalf. A punishment is intended to be very painful, but

there will be no lasting harm inflicted.” He bowed to them, and then said something to one of the men working with him.

A woman was brought forth and she was struggling to get free of the two men holding her arms in tight grips.

“Cease struggling, Caris,” Noturo said in a very firm voice that carried to every corner of the large punishment area. “It will avail you nothing except to add extra punishment to that which you have earned.”

“Please, I am so sorry and I will mend my ways,” the woman desperately promised.

“Caris, your charge is deliberate and willful disobedience over the course of the first year of marriage to Stobom. You will have a chance to give your side, but first we will hear from your husband as he is the one who brought these charges. Stobom, please state your case.”

“Thank you, Noturo.” A young man stood and addressed the officials and spoke clearly, “I love my wife. As you can see, she is a very beautiful woman. Before we married she behaved in a demure manner, and she was careful of her tongue. She did not find fault with everyone and everything. Once we publicly offered our greetings as husband and wife in front of our families, Caris’ behavior changed radically. She has shown me disrespect in private and in public. She is disobedient in matters concerning our finances, and she challenges every decision I make in our behalf. I have repeatedly scolded her, warned her, and when that did not bring about a change I spanked her. I canceled her accounts; I restricted her; I punished her as only a man can punish his wife. She has scoffed at my attempts to modify her behavior and attitude. As a last resort, before I am forced to send her back to her father to live under his roof, I am asking for official intervention.”

“Why do you feel official intervention will work when the punishments you have given have not resulted in the change you desired?” Noturo asked.

“Sir, I think Caris has a need to feel public disapproval. I believe she thinks a punishment from her husband is to be endured so that she can go and do exactly as she pleases without qualm or fear. She has been pampered by her family, who finds amusement in her outrageous behavior. I am the one who gave Caris her first spanking, not her parents. Instead of supporting me and telling Caris she needs to grow up and behave as a woman, not as an undisciplined child, they were outraged that I applied my hand to her backside. I have no support from the people she does respect, and I feel that public intervention is the last hope I have of making Caris realize she cannot continue to behave with such disrespect and contempt for protocol.”

“Very well, Stobom. Do you have any witnesses to speak in your behalf?”

“Yes, sir,” the young man replied. “I have three witnesses, one who is unwilling to speak, but will speak the truth if asked to do so by the officials in charge of this proceeding.”

“Ask your first witness to step forward,” Noturo ordered.

Princess Dulcie felt bad for the terrified young woman. Caris was openly crying and it was obvious that she was trembling. Dulcie wanted to go to her and offer comfort. How awful to stand there in front of the officials and the witnesses and have her behavior scrutinized. Hadn't she behaved the very same way toward her own husband? The very thought that he would hold her up to public disapproval made her feel sick inside. How would Caris feel about Stobom once this was over? Dulcie was sure how she would feel... She would find a way to kill Canton!

Canton felt Dulcie's burning gaze upon him and wondered if he had made a terrible mistake in bringing her to the proceedings this day. Dulcie was not familiar with the customs of Anopy and she probably thought it harsh of Stobom to ask for public intervention. He took Dulcie's hand and gave it a squeeze, leaning over to whisper, “Be patient, little Princess. We are not a heartless people.”

The first witness was a coworker of Stobom's and he described three different occasions upon which Caris came to her husband's workplace, causing a disturbance and earning censure upon Stobom from his employer. Stobom was given an official reprimand and warned that another domestic disturbance would end in his dismissal.

Dulcie wondered why Caris would be so foolish as to risk her husband's employment in such a way. He would not receive a favorable reference and could find it difficult to find another position in his field. She shook her head, wondering at the young woman's audacity.

The next witness was Stobom's brother. He related that on two separate occasions Caris started arguments within the family, pitting family members against each other, and then lying when confronted with the truth. She refused to apologize, and even when Stobom punished her, she still refused to acknowledge any wrongdoing.

The third witness obviously did not wish to speak, but came forward when called by Noturo. “You are the father of Caris, sir?” Noturo asked respectfully.

“Yes, sir. I am Jerbing,” the man replied with dignity. “I feel these proceedings are unwarranted.”

“I, too, am a father, Jerbing. I understand how distressing this must be for you, but our wish is to help Caris and Stobom. Stobom wishes me to question you about matters concerning spending. Is it true that Caris has come to you requesting monies to pay on accounts?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Would you explain, please?”

“Caris told me that they were short the amount needed to pay their accounts on time. I gladly gave her what she needed.”

“Were you aware that she was lying to you, sir?” Noturo asked quietly. When Jerbing looked at him in shock, Noturo continued speaking, “Stobom has submitted proof to the officials, sir. He has a sound financial system in place. Caris came to you for money because Stobom was punishing her for foolish spending and closed her accounts.”

“Is this true, Caris?” Jerbing asked, the look on his face one of utter disbelief.

“Yes, Father. I beg your pardon. I was so angry with Stobom and wanted to prove to him that I would have my way regardless. I regret my behavior and I promise I will mend my ways if Stobom will give me another chance to prove myself worthy of his love and affection.” She looked at him pleadingly. “Please, husband. Forgive me...?”

“I will forgive you, Caris, but as much as I would like to do so, I will not call off this proceeding. It is up to the officials to decide what is in our best interests. We will abide by their decision.” His voice was firm, but Canton could hear the pain beneath his words. In Stobom’s place he wasn’t sure he could go through with the humiliation and pain the public punishment would cost his wife. He glanced at Dulcie and could see that the scene before her held her attention.

“Caris, do you have anything to say in your defense?”

She nodded. “I am sorry I have caused so many problems. I behaved as a child wanting my way all the time, mostly at Stobom’s expense. I am ashamed of myself, and I promise I have learned from this proceeding. I ask for mercy and promise I will never stand before this assembly again if given another chance to prove I can change.” Caris was crying so hard it was difficult to understand her.

The officials consulted and then Noturo stepped forward and said, “Caris, you are found guilty of the charges brought forth and you are to be punished with a sound paddling. You will receive fifty on your bare seat. Since the officials feel the remorse you have expressed is sincere the spanking will be given with the lightweight paddle. You will disrobe completely and step forward to be strapped down over the spanking block. The straps are to prevent you from moving or putting your hands back and being injured.”

Dulcie could feel the other woman’s shame as if it were her own. She looked at Canton, silently begging him to intercede. “Punishments are given bare for a reason, Princess Dulcie,” he explained in a hushed whisper. “No one wants to harm Caris, and it is necessary to see her skin to make sure the spanks are evenly spaced. It is safer this way, and the embarrassment is part of the punishment.” Canton was secretly pleased that the

officials were going light on Caris. The lightweight paddle would sting, but in a couple of days, all that would remain would be a memory that should last forever. He hoped that Caris learned her lesson. If she was brought forth again for any reason in the next few years, the punishment would be severe.

Dulcie watched in growing horror as Caris made no move to do as she was told by Noturo. She feared what would happen to the other woman for disobeying.

Noturo finally spoke in a very stern voice. "Caris, you have been instructed to remove your clothing and step forward. If I have to ask for someone to assist you, a penalty will be added to your punishment. You will submit now or suffer the consequences of your refusal."

Caris looked at her husband and he nodded in encouragement. She unbuttoned her dress and it was soon lying on the chair behind her. She stepped out of her shoes, and then removed her undergarments, trying to shield herself from those witnessing her shame.

Chapter Three

Canton could see that Jerbing was shielding his eyes, and he felt sorry for the man. These proceedings were never easy, but something about this one was extremely difficult to watch. Canton was sure it had something to do with the fact his own wife behaved a lot like Caris at times.

Once Caris was completely undressed she stepped forward on the platform until she was in front of the spanking block. Two men stepped forward and within a short time she was bent completely over the padded table, her backside elevated by the bolster located at the edge of the spanking block. Her wrists were secured by padded cuffs, and no matter how she tried, she would not be able to protect herself from the spanking she was to receive. She closed her eyes, telling herself over and over not to allow her legs to spread while she was paddled. The thought that others could look upon her sex was more than she could bear and she vowed she would do nothing to ever earn another public punishment. The horror of it was ten times worse than she thought it would be.

“Stobom, as is customary at these proceedings, you will be given the option of carrying out sentence yourself, or asking for an Inflictor to assist you. What is your decision?”

“Caris is my wife, sir. I will issue the punishment myself,” the young man stated clearly.

“Very well. You may begin at any time.” One of the assistants handed him a lightweight paddle and Stobom accepted it with a nod.

Dulcie quickly realized the paddle was made of the same material as the one Canton used on her bottom aboard the ship! She remembered the intense sting and wanted to cry for Caris. The spanking would hurt unbearably by the time it was over.

Stobom walked to the front of the table and leaned down to look Caris in the eyes. “I am not doing this out of anger, Caris, but in the hope we can salvage our marriage and make it strong. Each of these fifty strokes is given with intense love.” He kissed her cheek and then rounded the table and took his place. He put his left hand on the small of her back to reassure her, and then he raised the paddle and brought it down with a loud crack on her right cheek. Caris cried out in pain, but Stobom continued the spanking and did not stop until all fifty were given as soundly as the very first. Caris’ pale bottom was a burning, scalding red when he finished, and she was sobbing pitifully. As soon as the spanking was over, the assistants removed the cuffs holding her, and Stobom helped her up, lifting her in his arms and carrying her into the facility and into a private room where she could be comforted and assisted if need be.

Jerbing got up to follow and Noturo stepped in front of him and spoke quietly, but Dulcie could still hear him. “It is best now that you give them privacy to discuss their future, Jerbing. I know this was difficult for you, but it was even more difficult for Stobom. He

needs your support now, and your daughter does not need sympathy from her parents. She needs to see that you support her husband or else she will be here again soon, and the results will be harsh.

Jerbing nodded and replied, "I do not like being deceived by a child I raised with love and affection. I intend to let Caris know I will not tolerate such behavior in the future." He paused, and then said, "It is probably best if I do give them time to reconcile today. What I have to say will wait for another day." He turned then and left the officials area.

Dulcie looked at Canton and leaned close to whisper, "May we leave now?"

"No. It would be rude if we did, and lead to speculation as to why I attended just part of the hearings. We must stay until the end. There are only two more, Dulcie." He realized that sitting through these punishments was difficult for her and a form of punishment in and of itself. He could only hope it would make an impression on his problematic princess.

Noturo spoke again. "Our next situation is simply the carrying out of a sentence imposed by the courts. A matter of petty theft. Bring in Beverlia, please."

Dulcie was shocked when a completely nude woman was led into the officials' area. Her hands were already cuffed and it was obvious she was to be punished. The redhead had a defiant look on her face as she faced the officials.

"Beverlia, it was determined by a judge and jury that you are guilty of stealing from family members and you were sent here to receive punishment, which will consist of twenty cane strokes on your bottom. After your punishment is complete, your husband is to take you home, where you will be confined for the next three months. You will then be required to spend at least one day per week for the following six months doing community service in whatever capacity you are assigned. Failure to perform satisfactorily will earn you another public chastisement for each infraction. Do you understand your sentence, Beverlia?" he asked, his voice stern and uncompromising.

"I understand that my sister has lied and talked the others into siding with her."

"The items were found in your possession and investigation proved that you are the person responsible for stealing them. You are showing no remorse for your actions and another five strokes will be added at my discretion." Noturo nodded at the assistants and the woman was brought forward, cursing loudly, and strapped across the table. Unlike Caris, Beverlia also had her feet cuffed to the legs on the table and another about her waist to completely immobilize her. Dulcie thought the woman had no dignity at all, and it was foolish not to express remorse even if it was a lie, and even from where she sat she could see the woman was lying about her innocence. Still, she did not think she could watch her be spanked with a cane.

“Your husband has refused his right to issue punishment, Beverlia. An Inflictor has been appointed. You will first receive the twenty ordered by the court, and then the five I added for your lack of remorse, and you will receive another five for cursing the officials.”

“No!” Beverlia gasped. “No! It is too much to bear!”

“Your behavior against your family is unbearable, and your mockery of these proceedings is unbearable. The punishment stands. Start, please,” Noturo said, his voice cold and impersonal.

Dulcie was shocked at the first stroke of the cane. This was no simple spanking! This was a full-fledged caning she was witnessing, and Beverlia’s screams of pain were hard to tolerate. The Inflictor barely gave her time to recover from one stroke before he delivered another. The lines across her backside quickly turned red and raised in welts! The Inflictor delivered the first twenty, and Beverlia was given a few minutes to anticipate the rest of her punishment.

“Do you now wish you had expressed remorse for stealing from your family, Beverlia?” Noturo asked quietly.

“Yes,” she admitted. “Please spare me the rest,” she begged.

“You earned the strokes, and you will have them. Administer five more,” Noturo said.

The next five were given to her sit spots and Beverlia was sobbing when they were over. “I beg for mercy, sir. I am sorry for cursing. I was simply afraid and trying to be brave!”

“I believe you are telling the truth now, Beverlia,” Noturo said kindly, “but it does not take back the names you called the officials present. I do believe another five strokes will remind you not to use those words again in public... or in private.” He nodded at the Inflictor, and despite Beverlia’s pleas for mercy, the last five were given, this time on her thighs.

Noturo gave permission for Beverlia to be released and led away by her husband, who was crying as hard as she was. He helped her, aided by another female, who was also crying. Beverlia’s punishment was harsh, but she made matters much worse by her attitude and Canton hoped his wife understood that. Dulcie was quiet and he could see she was trying to control her emotions. He patted her hand to let her know that he understood she was having a difficult time. There was only one more punishment to witness and Canton hoped the situation was mild.

Noturo called for the next case to come forward and two women approached. “You are Lady Anne... and this is your daughter, Fayda?” Noturo asked, consulting his documents.

“Yes, sir,” the older woman answered. “I have come to ask for public intervention for my daughter. She thinks she can do as she pleases because she is fully grown and I can no longer punish her. She pushed me the last time I tried to correct her for staying out past a time I felt she should be home and in her bed.”

“Is this true, Fayda?” Noturo asked, looking at the young woman.

“Mother is too bossy and old-fashioned. I am grown; I am in university; I should have more freedom than she permits.”

“Did you dare to push your mother when she attempted to spank you?” Noturo was not happy and it showed.

“I am too old to be treated as a small child!” Fayda replied.

“On Anopy no female is considered too old to be spanked. The women involved in the two cases before yours were older than you are, young lady, and they were treated to corporal punishment. When your mother decides it is time for you to marry, your husband will have the right to spank you when you earn a punishment. You surely know this, Fayda?” Noturo spoke in a fatherly tone of voice.

“I know the law, sir, but I do not agree with it. Men are permitted to do as they please!” she argued, and Noturo raised his hand to hush the murmurs of the witnesses.

“Fayda, men are most certainly not permitted to do as they please. They are charged to behave by even higher standards than the women of our land. Men’s punishments are harsh compared to the ones meted in this session. How can a man be a good leader in his home if his behavior is below standards? Fathers are harder on their sons because they know this to be true. Do you have a brother, Fayda?” he asked.

“No, sir.”

“Then you have not witnessed how a boy is raised to manhood, or the standards of behavior set for him.” Noturo turned to Anne. “Lady, why is it you ask public intervention? Have you no husband or brother to help you with your daughter?”

“My husband died when Fayda was only three years old. I have no brothers close enough to be of help. I manage a business as well as our home, and until Fayda went to university a few months ago, she has been an obedient daughter. She has given me very little worry, but it is too soon for her to marry. I would see her educated and able to support herself in the world in case she should find herself in my position someday... widowed with a small child to raise. She has earned a spanking, and physically I am not strong enough to address the situation. There is no one I can ask to do this that Fayda would accept a punishment from.”

“Perhaps it is past time you should seek another husband, Lady Anne,” Noturo said kindly, giving her an understanding smile. “I can see you have done well with Fayda, but it is time to think of your future. When Fayda marries, and that time will come very soon, you do not wish to be all alone. Now, that is not official advice; I have no right to make that a requirement, but that is the advice I would offer if you were my sister. I hope you will accept it in the spirit offered...?”

When Noturo glanced worriedly in their direction Dulcie quickly realized the man knew he had overstepped his authority and was concerned that Leader Canton would criticize him. She glanced at his husband, but his expression gave nothing away. Dulcie personally thought that Noturo had given the same type of advice her own father would have given... in a more paternal manner, of course, given his age.

“I thank you for your concern, sir. I will take your words to heart,” Lady Anne said graciously. She then asked, “Perhaps this matter was too mild to waste the officials’ time, but I do not want to wait too long to see what else my daughter will do to test her wings. I do not want her to make irresponsible decisions that could badly affect her future.”

“I understand, and I know how much courage it took for you to bring your daughter here today.” He looked at Fayda. “Do you have anything else to say, Fayda, before I consult the other officials?”

“Yes, sir, I do.” She turned to her mother. “Mother, I know you love me and I am very sorry I disappointed you. I am sorry I lost my temper and pushed you away. I regretted that the moment I saw the look of hurt on your face. I love you, and I promise I will never embarrass you, or myself, in this manner again.” Fayda’s face was red with embarrassment, and her blue eyes full of tears. Lady Anne gave her a big hug, and whispered that she loved her, too.

Dulcie felt tears fill her eyes. She squeezed Canton’s hand and looked at him questioningly, wanting him to intercede. He barely moved his head, but she knew his answer was ‘no’. He was not going to interfere with the proceedings.

The deliberation did not take long. It was obvious to Canton that the other officials were leaving the matter to Noturo to handle. The girl had done nothing that was worthy of a public intervention and everyone knew it, even the mother who asked for help. Refusals to help were very rare indeed, but occasionally the officials took the side of the one accused. Canton did not think Fayda innocent, but she certainly did not deserve a public, bare bottom caning or paddling. Canton was anxious to see how Noturo handled Fayda. Even though he did not wish to interfere, he would if it was necessary. He would not allow his wife to think him unaffected by Fayda’s genuine apology to her mother. If she were his daughter or sister, he would haul her over his knee for a hand spanking, but that was not an option in this setting.

“The officials have deferred to me in this matter,” Noturo stated. “First of all, the punishments we mete out in this session are too harsh for this situation. I cannot in good

conscience assign a paddling when a paddling is not warranted. But, that is not to say I am criticizing Lady Anne for asking for help... Most women in her situation would turn to a father, brother, uncle, son, or a close male friend and ask for assistance. Lady Anne has no family here she can turn to.” He looked at Lady Anne and said, “I am going to dismiss this case, Lady Anne, but I am going to offer to be a friend of the family and with your permission, and with Fayda’s permission as well, give her the spanking she has earned. I will dismiss everyone else and give you time to discuss the matter with Fayda. If you accept my offer, the spanking will occur inside, in the privacy of my office, with you as witness, Lady Anne. Fayda will not need to remove her clothing, just pull up her skirts.”

Dulcie looked at Canton in surprise as Noturo dismissed everyone and asked them to file out in orderly fashion. It was obvious he wanted everyone to leave. Lady Anne and Fayda were seated and talking to one another in quiet tones. Fayda’s face was beet red, but she nodded meekly at something her mother said to her.

Noturo came over to speak to them. “Leader Canton, Princess Dulcie, I hope today’s proceedings were not too upsetting for you?” he asked, and Dulcie had the opinion he was truly concerned for her. “It is sometimes needful to be harsh, as with Beverlia. I want you to know I take no pleasure in adding to what the court assigns a woman by way of punishment, but I cannot allow a woman’s attitude to interfere with the lesson. It was a harsh punishment when judged by this session’s standards.”

“I understand, Noturo,” Dulcie replied quietly. She could not help but feel the man was sincere. “I am sure you are very experienced in these matters or Leader Canton would not have put you in your position.”

“I picked an unusual day to bring Princess Dulcie, Noturo,” Canton said quietly, and then added, “I feel you handled each situation with due consideration and care. I feel quite justified in choosing you as primary official for the women’s public interventions.”

“Thank you, Leader Canton.” The man was obviously relieved.

Canton nodded in acknowledgment, and then said, “I think Lady Anne and Fayda have reached a decision. If they choose the spanking, Princess Dulcie and I will stand witness for you so no impropriety can be claimed after the fact. It is not that I do not trust the two women, or that I do not trust you, Noturo... It will be more difficult for anyone, reporters included, to suggest anything improper happened if we bear witness.”

“Thank you, Leader Canton. I would be pleased to have your support. Please excuse me while I go and speak to the ladies.”

Chapter Four

Leader Canton got to his feet and offered Princess Dulcie his hand. She took it and he followed after Noturo, wanting witness to all conversation taking place since the situation was so unusual and bound to draw attention. Dulcie understood that and did not waste time.

Noturo spoke quietly, ignoring the reporters standing close by, hoping to overhear the decision made in private. “Lady Anne, Fayda, have you made a decision?”

“Yes, sir. We wish to accept your kind offer,” Lady Anne replied. There was sadness in her eyes, but also a strong resolve to do what she felt was right and in Fayda’s best interests.

“Is this your wish, also, Fayda?” Noturo asked, his tone of voice gentle as he looked at the extremely embarrassed young woman.

“I need to make things right with Mother, and I will accept your offer, sir. Mother has worked so hard all of these years and she deserves my respect. To refuse now would be an insult to her, and to you after you showed me a kindness by refusing public intervention. I will submit to a spanking.”

“It is true your Mother deserves your respect, young lady,” Noturo agreed. “Leader Canton and Princess Dulcie will be witness so that all proprieties are observed. This is for your safety as well as my own. Is this agreeable to you both?” Noturo asked, giving them one last opportunity to refuse his help.

Lady Anne said, “I would be pleased to have witnesses no one can dispute. Thank you, Leader Canton, Princess Dulcie. My biggest concern was that someone would write something untrue and it would affect my daughter’s reputation in a negative way.”

“We will go inside now and deal with the matter,” Noturo said. “Follow me, please,” he said, and they all walked inside the State building. Canton held Dulcie’s hand as they followed. The reporters were not permitted in this section of the building and would be prosecuted and punished if they dared to test the rules. Noturo turned and walked down another hallway, and his office was the last one on the right. “Please enter,” he said as he held open the door. It was protocol for the Leader and his wife to go first, and they did. Lady Anne and her daughter followed and then Noturo. His secretary was at her desk and rose, flustered, when they came in. “Dennae, you may leave early today. I require privacy for this meeting,” he said. “Have a lovely evening with your family.”

“Thank you, sir,” Dennae said nervously as she gathered her belongings to leave. “I did not finish the last correspondence...” she said, concerned.

“It will keep until morning. Thank you.” Once she was gone for the day, Noturo set the lock and added the privacy warning. That was to tell others he was occupied. Using the privacy warning meant that unless there was a life and death situation, he was not to be disturbed. The warning was observed as sacred on all of Anopy, and since it was rarely set on Noturo’s office he was positive they would not be disturbed. But as soon as he had the thought the telereceiver beeped. He answered, and then said, “No comment.” He reset the machine to go to a standard ‘leave a message’ response and set the machine so it would not beep. “My apologies for the delay. The reporters are asking for an interview. You may be sure that I have no intention of telling them what happens here today, and if you wish, I can get a judge to issue a stay order preventing them from approaching either of you for information...?”

“I will issue the order myself,” Canton said firmly. He took out a communicator and within a minute the order was issued to all reporters. Violating someone’s privacy after an order was punishable and most reporters would not dare cross the line.

“Thank you, Leader Canton,” Lady Anne said in relief. “I had no idea that I would be calling so much attention to our situation.”

“Reporters are like that, Lady Anne. They want the story that no one else can get. Unless a stay order is issued, they would keep after you for months. Now, if someone does contact you while this order is in effect, all you have to do is call the enforcers and report it. It will be dealt with.”

“Thank you, Leader Canton.” Noturo was grateful the man was on his side in this matter. “I think it best we get on with why we are here. Let us go inside my office. Everyone, but Fayda, please have a seat. Fayda, you will not be standing very long,” he assured her. He took a straight backed chair and seated it in front of his desk before sitting down and then looking sternly at the red-faced young woman. “Do we need to discuss the reason we are here, young lady?”

“No, sir.” Her voice was a barely audible whisper.

Before Dulcie could stop herself, she was on her feet. “I can see that Fayda is truly sorry for her actions. Should she not be given another chance to prove herself capable of self discipline?” she asked, hoping her tone was respectful enough that her husband would not be shamed by her behavior.

Noturo looked at her in surprise and then smiled. “You have chosen a wife who has compassion for others, Leader Canton.”

“Princess Dulcie is still learning our ways, Noturo. I thought it best for her to witness the day’s punishments in the hope it would inspire her to understand us better, but it would seem that she is a bit overwhelmed.” Canton looked at Dulcie and said quietly, “Noturo is doing Lady Anne and Fayda a favor, Princess Dulcie. Fayda is feeling guilty for upsetting her Mother, and Lady Anne is worried that if she does not see this through,

Fayda's behavior will get even worse. While it is embarrassing for Fayda, she understands her Mother loves her very much to go to such lengths. That Fayda is also willing to submit to a spanking in private from Noturo speaks well of her. If you were feeling terribly guilty about something, would you not want a way to make it right again?" Canton asked quietly, being very patient with her.

"Fayda...?" Dulcie was still not convinced. Her lavender eyes were full of concern and sympathy, but her body was tense and ready for battle; Canton suspected she was planning to fight to save the younger woman from her fate.

"Princess Dulcie, I truly wish we were not meeting under these circumstances," Fayda said with a sad smile. "It is comforting to me to know that you care so much when you do not even know me. Mother and I discussed this, and she gave me her blessing to say 'no' if I wished. I fear that both Leader Canton and Noturo are right about the guilt I am feeling. Ever since I raised my voice in anger to Mother I have been ashamed of myself. I need this consequence to be able to live with myself, and Mother is right when she says that some of my new friends do not have my best interests at heart. If they were truly my friends they would not urge me to do the things Mother has asked me not to do. I would like to get this over with and be at peace within myself once again."

Dulcie nodded in acceptance and then sat on her chair once again. She was sure that Canton would have much to say to her on the subject when they were alone. To her surprise he took her hand in his and held it, offering comfort.

"It pleases me to hear your words, Fayda. There will be no more waiting. Lie over my lap, please." Fayda did as she was told, although she was already in tears. Noturo easily flipped up Fayda's short skirt and commenced spanking her rounded bottom. The spanking seemed to go on and on, with her skin turning from white to pink to red to deep red. All the while Fayda did her best to remain silent, but she finally could not tolerate any more and she started saying she was sorry and begging Noturo to stop. The spanking did not last much longer; Noturo scolded and asked questions, punctuating them with hard spans to Fayda's tender sit spots. Her answers seemed to please him, and he gave her one final spank before declaring the spanking over. When Noturo stopped, he pulled down her skirt and then helped her up off his lap. Fayda permitted him to hug her, and a silent communication passed between the Lady Anne and Noturo.

Anne hugged her daughter and thanked her for agreeing to the consequence. It did not take long for Fayda to dry her tears, but Dulcie could see she was still embarrassed. She knew the feeling; Canton spanked her before the people in her father's court when she refused to greet him properly. And he spanked her in front of the crew on the ship. It was beyond humiliating for her, and she knew that Fayda had to feel the same, even if she agreed to the spanking.

After a few more minutes Lady Anne and her daughter left the State Buildings, a guard picked to escort them to their transportation. Canton was taking no chances with the

reporters who were constantly on the grounds. He had a few words with Noturo, and then walked his wife back to their apartments.

“Are you upset with me for speaking my mind, Leader Canton?” she inquired.

“You were respectful, Princess Dulcie, and I am grateful for that much. I know you have questions and comments, but I really do need to call my Council together. Will you manage until I come to escort you to our evening meal?”

“Yes, I will be fine.”

“I would appreciate it if you would write your feelings about this afternoon’s punishments; include your questions, and we will discuss everything this evening.”

“Is this a punishment?” she inquired, looking up at him.

“Are you expecting a punishment?” he wanted to know.

“I am not sure,” she admitted. “I feel very unsettled and as though you are upset with me in some way.”

“I am upset because I wish for time to discuss your thoughts and feelings. It will sometimes be like this, little Princess.”

“I am the daughter of a King; I understand your responsibilities.”

“Write of your thoughts, then, and when I return, we will discuss what you have written.” He gave her a kiss on the cheek and then left, planning to call his council together and take care of any matters that could not possibly wait until the next day. Surprisingly, the meeting with his council did not take long. The dire situation that Representative Dantonne wished to discuss with him was nothing more than a simple matter that was settled with his signature at the bottom of a paper. Once the meeting was over, he bade her to remain seated while he sent for her husband. Once Hutton arrived, Canton wasted no time in coming to the point. Hutton was ashamed of his wife’s behavior and promised his Leader that she would be reminded of her manners that evening. Canton excused them from the dining hall that evening, well aware that would be a punishment in and of itself, and one that Dantonne would find difficult to bear. Appearances were too important to the vain woman, and depriving her of her presence in the dining hall would be harder than the spanking she was sure to receive from Hutton that evening. But he had to do something, because if Dantonne did not mend her ways, he would have the chore of replacing her on the council.

Once Canton dismissed them he hurried to see to his own sweet wife. He was relieved to see that she was more relaxed than when he left her. “Our clothing was brought from the ship. I put everything away,” she added.

“Thank you,” he replied. “Did you write down your feelings about the punishment sessions?” he asked.

“Yes, although I am not sure what you wished me to say.” She handed him a very brief, handwritten, description that more or less outlined what happened, but had nothing to do with her thoughts on the subject.

“This is not what I asked of you, little Princess. You did not tell me your thoughts about the punishments.”

“My thoughts do not matter, Canton. Your laws and customs are different here, and it is not for me to come here and find fault.”

“You found fault with today’s proceedings?” he asked, disappointed.

“I found fault that they were held in the open so that just anyone could witness the women’s shame. I felt embarrassed when they were bared in front of everyone. That is shameful for a woman.”

“Yes, as it should be,” he reasoned. “It is an effective deterrent.”

“Why did the first husband not tend the matter at home? I cannot see you permitting me to behave as she did, and then bringing me in front of officials to have them tell me I behaved badly and decide upon a punishment for me. I would lose all respect for you if you brought a private matter before others.”

“I will keep that in mind.” His wife was serious, and he was right to think she needed a very strong husband to keep her in line.

“However, it seems to have worked for them...” Dulcie shrugged. “I do wish them well. I do not think she realized the extent of his disappointment in her. I would ask that you not hide those feelings from me, Canton. I would rather face our problems than have them made the business of others.”

“I agree, little Princess,” he said, nodding. “What of Beverlia?” he asked, dreading her reply to this one most of all. The punishment had been very harsh for a public punishment for what was essentially a family matter that should have been handled by her husband. While Canton thoroughly approved of Noturo’s handling of the situation, Canton was sure his wife thought it cruel. He braced himself.

“Beverlia deserved her punishment, Canton.” He was stunned to hear Dulcie’s reply. “She was full of resentment and pride, and the time she was incarcerated awaiting her punishment did nothing to encourage prudence in her words. She earned the extra punishment she received. The one I felt sorry for was her husband. He was a good bit older than her, and it was obvious that he wanted to indulge her and pamper her, and

because of that she felt she was above common decency. You do not steal from family, Canton.”

“I am relieved you see it that way, Dulcie. I feared you would think Noturo harsh and cruel.”

“The man is neither. He cares about people, genuinely cares. He proved that beyond words when he publicly dismissed Fayda’s case, and then offered his help to Lady Anne. I have nothing but respect for the man. He is very intelligent and sees beneath the surface to what people are thinking. Is he married?” she suddenly asked, shocking Canton.

“His wife died about three years ago,” he answered. “Why?”

“I think he and Lady Anne would be a good match. I believe they each think so, too, if the looks passing between them were any indication.”

“Do not tell me you like to play matchmaker, little Princess?” Canton asked with a smile of amusement.

“I am quite good at it, actually,” she declared.

“Matchmaking is never a good idea,” he said. “Do not attempt such a thing, Dulcie. There are professional services one may use if interested.”

“What fun is there in that?” she asked. “Besides, hiring a service is so impersonal, and it is expensive, too. I never charge, and I am very successful.”

“I am serious, Dulcie. There is to be no matchmaking.”

“Is there anything about me that you do approve of, Canton? I am not permitted to say anything if I am insulted. I can only smile and defer to you to handle things in your own way... lest I give insult. I am not permitted to train as a warrior, which I am very good at. And now I am not even permitted to gently guide two people who are perfect for each other into a relationship...? Am I permitted to breathe, husband? Perhaps you would like for someone else to do that for me as well?”

“You are being disrespectful, Dulcie.”

“No, I am being honest about my feelings, which you seemed to want just a few minutes ago. You are making me feel strangled, Canton, and I wonder why you greeted me as your wife when you find so much to dislike and disprove of?”

“Your customs do not belong on Anopy,” Canton remarked.

“It is I who do not belong here, Leader Canton. I wish to return to my father.”

“You are wed to me and as you well know, marriages are not dissolved.”

“I do not wish to be married to you if it means I must lose every bit of myself to be the wife you want. I am unhappy, Canton. You will not even permit me the use of my own clothing. I am not of Anopy, and in my heart, I never will be.”

Chapter Five

Canton felt that his wife needed a sound spanking, but he heard the bells announce that dinner would be served in fifteen minutes. “We must appear in the dining hall, little Princess. I am sure you would rather remain here, but there will be talk and speculation should you not join me for dinner.”

“By all means we cannot be the cause of talk and speculation, and we must not keep anyone waiting lest their food grow cold.”

“You have earned a sound spanking, Dulcie. I suggest you consider how your behavior tonight will affect that spanking.” He took her arm and led her to the large Dining Hall.”

Dulcie was quiet but anyone looking at her would never guess that she was feeling sick to her stomach. How on earth could she remain with a man who wanted to change her completely? They stood at attention while the food was served to every person present, and when the bell sounded on the hour, the tables were full of men and women, and even small children. Canton gave everyone permission to sit and enjoy their meal. The silence in the room was deafening. She looked at Canton and rolled her expressive eyes, telling him silently what she was thinking.

As soon as he was finished eating, Canton rose and dismissed everyone at their leisure and excused himself and his new bride. When they entered their apartment, he made sure the lock was in place before turning to face her, and finding her gone.

He went to their bed chamber, and she was not there. He heard her in the bathing chamber, and realized she was crying... and hiding from him. He tried the door and it was locked against him. “Open the door, Dulcie,” he ordered. “Why should I, Canton? So you can punish me again? Because I told you the truth and you did not wish to hear it? You do not wish to have me for your wife. You wish to have a fantasy for a wife. There is no love. I have lost everything I treasured while you have lost nothing. I insist you send me home to my father. If you do not do so, I promise I will make you rue the day you ruined my life.”

“Dulcie, you are behaving as a child. Enough of this. Come out here and we will discuss this like adults.”

Dulcie wiped her face with a tissue and then exited the safety of the bathing chamber. Canton was sitting on the bed and he appeared to be upset.

“I am deeply sorry I have made you feel this way, little Princess. There is much I admire about you. You are such a kind and good person, and you have compassion for others. You have already won over Kardoe’s heart, and I am sure the rest of my family will love you, too. I have demanded too much, too soon, but it is my concern for you that has

made me demanding and critical of your ways. I would not have you judged harshly by the people I serve as Leader. In the private sector, I could give you enough time to adjust, but here, it is a luxury I cannot afford you, little wife. I hate that you think me cruel and I promise to do what I can to make this adjustment easier for you.”

“How will you do that, Canton? You have said yourself that I must adjust quickly lest I cause talk and speculation.”

“We will find a way, Dulcie. I ask you to give Anopy a full month before you ask to be released. If, at the end of the thirty days, you still feel unhappy, I will send you home to your Father.”

“I have your word?” she asked tearfully.

“You have my word as your husband, and as the Leader of Anopy,” he answered, speaking the words he knew he had to say.

“And will you agree not to punish me unless I do something truly worthy of punishment?” she asked.

“Punishments will occur if I decide they are necessary, wife. You have no say in the matter.” He would not give in on this matter.

“I will not be punished for expressing my thoughts to you in private,” she warned, her lavender eyes full of fire and determination.

“In private does not mean rolling your pretty eyes in the Dining Hall,” he reminded her with a gentle smile.

“You really must do something about that, Canton. I would prefer to take all of my meals alone rather than sit in the presence of so many people and be afraid to open my mouth for fear of offending someone or flouting protocol.”

“It is my fear you will fade away into nothing if you do not eat more tomorrow than you have this day.” He was only half teasing. His wife had barely touched food since they greeted each other.

“I will not fade away. It is my moon time that affects my appetite. I will be of normal appetite in another day or two.” She looked at him and said, “I am very tired, Canton, and would sleep now. Please excuse me while I prepare for bed.”

Canton knew that he promised her a spanking but felt it was best to let it go just this one time. “I think I will retire early this night as well,” he said, and while she was in the bathing chamber, he made their bed ready and was already in bed when she returned.

She was still wearing a nightgown and he hoped that she would soon be done with her time. He felt their marriage would take on a new depth of meeting once they could be intimate again.

When Dulcie approached the bed she was full of trepidation. She had not forgotten his promise to spank her, but she truly hoped he had. He made no move to sit up and she got into bed. Canton immediately put his arm around her and pulled her close.

“Relax, little Princess. I have not forgotten my promise but decided to show you that I can be lenient, too. Go to sleep. Tomorrow is another day and things will not feel quite so strange. Some of my family will be here to meet you, and hopefully there will not be any serious State issues to demand too much of my time. I look forward to showing you off to them and only hope they are on their best behavior in front of you.”

“I would think you would worry about my behavior in front of them!”

“Not so. A mother does not care if her son is the Leader. She is still a mother and will say exactly as she pleases.” He heard Dulcie giggle and smiled in the darkened room.

“You must release me, Canton. I am growing distressed,” she informed him.

“So am I, sweet wife. So am I. How much longer do we have to wait?”

Dulcie did not know how to answer her husband. Her body craved his attention, but she felt certain that if there were no other feelings between them it would not do to create a child. If she happened to conceive, then he would never let her go. This she knew for a certainty.

“Dulcie, I do not like what you are thinking. You agreed to stay for thirty days, and in that time, to be my wife. Do not deny us pleasure because you are feeling unsettled at the newness of everything here.”

“I will think on this, Canton,” she quietly agreed, wondering what she would do when her moon time was over.

The next morning saw Canton in a good mood, much to Dulcie’s surprise. He smiled at her and told her how pretty she looked. Dulcie felt herself blush, but much to her surprise she realized that she actually felt pretty. Canton held her hand as he walked her to the Dining Hall. Her lavender eyes immediately spotted Representative Dantonne, and the hateful look in the other woman’s eyes was swift, although she quickly hid the expression when Canton glanced in her direction. She managed to appear penitent then, and Dulcie wanted to giggle, but wisely kept her composure. It was not until they reached their places at the head table that Princess Dulcie realized the food was not yet served!

“I would like everyone’s attention, please,” Leader Canton spoke so that his voice carried across the large room. “It occurred to me last night that I have yet to give my bride a wedding gift. She has expressed a desire to bring one of her customs to us on Anopy, and since I and most of my crew have witnessed this custom, I have decided to make a change in Dining Hall procedure. From now on, food will be served when all have arrived, and conversation will be encouraged. Princess Dulcie has convinced me it brings pleasure to dine pleasantly, and I wish to give this a try. I still expect everyone to be on time for meals, but no longer will everyone suffer a cold meal if one person is late. Only that person will go hungry... unless his or her reason for tardiness is acceptable. I will not tolerate rudeness nor arguments in the Dining Hall, but instead hope we will find this new custom as pleasant as they do where my wife is from.” He motioned to the kitchen staff to bring in the food, and then turned to look at his stunned wife.

“Thank you, Leader Canton,” she said quietly. “Thank you so much.”

“I want you to be happy in your new home,” he replied, taking her hand and holding it. Her pretty lavender eyes were shining with happiness at his gift, and Canton vowed he would find other ways to keep his new bride happy.

The food was hot for a change and Dulcie actually had an appetite. It was nice to hear people talking quietly, although there were some, like Representative Dantonne, who maintained silence throughout the meal. Canton used the time to speak to his wife of his plans for easing poverty, and Dulcie was pleased to hear that he was planning to create a special position for her in helping to educate the people. Canton was of the opinion that educating the poor would help them climb out of poverty. Getting their children to school, and attending some classes for adults would make a difference. Providing jobs would help, too, but people needed education. He was sure that Princess Dulcie could organize that, and encourage the people to attend.

Once breakfast was over, Leader Canton rose and said, “I hope you all enjoyed this change in procedure as much as I did...? You are all dismissed to go about your duties this day.”

He offered Dulcie his hand, and she immediately accepted it and rose to her feet, her tummy full. Once they were clear of the room, she said, “Thank you for your gift, Leader Canton. It was lovely to have hot food.”

“It was delicious,” he agreed, and then added, “It was a pleasure to see you eat a full meal, Princess Dulcie. I was beginning to fear for your health. You can ill afford to lose more weight.”

“I am fine now that my time is over,” she replied, then felt her face flood with color. Dulcie was planning to keep that a secret for another day or two while she considered her marriage. She truly did not want to bear a child if she was going to leave Canton in a few weeks time.

Canton was careful not to react to the news that his wife was past her time of the month. He sensed that making love was going to have to happen naturally, and he would not force her compliance. Instead, he would woo her into his arms. He unlocked the door to their living quarters and ushered her inside. "Dulcie, I would like for you to continue your study of the customs and laws on Anopy while I am attending Council this morning. This afternoon I will sit down with you and we will discuss your new position, what it entails, and how we will go about putting it into action."

"Very well," Dulcie agreed, but then broached another subject. "I would like to invite guests for this evening, Leader Canton," Dulcie said softly. When he looked at her in surprise, she continued. "I would like to get to know Fayda better," she explained to him. "Of course, I would invite Lady Anne, too."

"I see no harm in that. I will show you how to use an insta-mail." In fact, he was delighted his wife was showing an interest in entertaining. By rights, she should be entertaining Council members first, but he understood that she would like to know Fayda much better because the young woman was close to her own age. He helped her send the communication, and then made sure she had the right programs to study during the morning. "I will quiz you later," he said, smiling. "Study hard or I will be forced to take a hickory stick to you."

"What?" Dulcie exclaimed in horror, only to realize he was teasing her when he chuckled.

To her surprise he sang the lyrics of an ancient song to her:

*School days, school days
Dear old golden rule days
Readin' and 'ritin' and 'rithmetic
Taught to the tune of the hickory stick
You were my queen in calico
I was your bashful barefoot beau
And you wrote on my slate
"I love you, so"
When we were a couple of kids*

Dulcie smiled. "You have a nice voice, Leader Canton. But, I promise you will have no need of a hickory stick. I am diligent in my studies."

"I already know this to be true; I would not have teased you were it not so." He leaned down and kissed her cheek before saying, "I will come to escort you to lunch. I am already looking forward to hot food," he admitted, and was rewarded when she gave him a hug.

"Thank you so much, Canton. I know you will hear complaints this morning, but I promise you that in time people will look forward to these breaks in their day. It is

strange and new to them, as most of your customs are to me. I am willing to try if they will accept this change for me.”

The expression in her pretty eyes was earnest, and Canton nodded in understanding. He bade her a good morning and then left to meet with his Council of Representatives, positive that Dantonne would argue over the change he made. He would be polite, but firm, with her.

When Canton entered the room all talk ceased and everyone stood at attention. He motioned for them all to be seated, and then helped himself to coffee from the large urn at the side of the room. There were also pastries and salty snacks to choose from, but Canton took fruit and cheese and put it on a small disposable plate before taking his seat at the head of the large table. He took charge immediately. “I wish to thank all of you for your cooperation this morning. I found it extremely pleasant to eat food that was still hot, and a bit of pleasant conversation is a good way to start the day. It also makes my wife feel more at home and will make it easier for her to adjust to the ways of Anopy since she knows we are trying to make her feel welcome.”

“I feel you should have discussed this change with Council before making it, Leader Canton,” Representative Dantonne said, her voice full of outrage and anger. “We should not have to change our traditions for one outsider.”

“Meals are at the discretion of the Leader, Representative Dantonne, and not a matter of state to be discussed and voted upon. I chose to change the tradition, and anyone not approving is free to take their meals in their apartments.”

“You would see all of us punished to please one insignificant female?” the female representative spoke in anger, and without thought to her words.

“That insignificant female is the wife of your Leader, and, as such, due your respect, Representative Dantonne. For some time now I have questioned your presence on this Council. You are argumentative and disruptive, and you continue to belabor a point, even after a vote is called for. Frankly, I think it is time to seek a replacement from your sector.”

“No!” The woman blanched at the thought of being sent home in disgrace. “I am sorry I spoke without discretion, Leader Canton. I had no idea that it was so important to you that the Princess be accepted in our lands. I thought her merely a price to be paid for the building materials we needed so desperately. I apologize for my mistake.” Dantonne knew she had lost all the power she had worked so hard to gain over the last year, and if Leader Canton sent her home in disgrace, she would never be able to set foot in public again! “I am truly sorry,” she said.

“My wife is new to Anopy, Representative Dantonne. She needs help adjusting to our ways, which are very different from those in her homeland. It would please me if you

would help her, and make it a special project to include her in the things you do that might be of public service.”

“I would be honored to do that, Leader Canton. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to redeem myself.” Dantonne was not a fool, and she would do whatever he asked of her, even if it meant introducing Princess Dulcie in public.

“I am grateful, Representative Dantonne.” Canton was sure he had made his position clear, and he hurried on to discuss the day’s business, attending to matters in his normal, thoughtful way. They finished in time for him to go and escort his wife to lunch, and once again he was pleased with the hot meal they enjoyed. Dantonne made a point of speaking to Dulcie, and Canton was pleased when Dulcie replied politely, and even paid the older woman a compliment on her new hairdo, which Canton had not noticed.

Canton was pleased when he looked at his wife. She was naturally sweet, in spite of the fact she was spoiled too much as a child. He was happy with his choice, and soon Dulcie would realize that she belonged to him... and to Anopy.

Look for Part Four of *The Problematic Princess* next month. *The Choice* will be the final chapter of this story.