

# The Problematic Princess: The Choice

By

Abigail Webster

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Published by Blushing Books®,  
a subsidiary of  
ABCD Graphics and Design  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901

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Webster, Abigail  
The Problematic Princess: The Choice  
eBook ISBN: 978-1-60968-450-1

Cover Design: ABCD Graphics

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## Chapter One

Princess Dulcie was not fooled when Representative Dantonne made a point of speaking to her during lunch. The older woman did not like her, did not approve of her, and she was fearful of losing her position if she did not prove herself ‘worthy’ in Leader Canton’s eyes. That fear was prompting Dantonne’s attempt at being pleasant and accepting the change in dining protocol that Leader Canton imposed as a gift to his new bride. Dulcie was pleased with her husband and amazed at how much the simple change meant to her. It was easy for Dulcie to assume a gracious role toward Representative Dantonne because she knew it would please her husband and she found herself wanting to please Canton. His smile was her reward, and she felt her heart beating a little quicker as she saw desire reflected in his dark eyes.

Canton was aware that her moon time was now over, and Dulcie had to decide if she was going to risk conceiving a child, a child that would have to remain on Anopy should she decide to go home to her father and his kingdom. If Dulcie learned she was with child, she would never be able to leave her baby behind while she went home to all that was familiar. Still, she had given her word to Canton that she would give their marriage a full thirty day trial before she made a decision, and since she honored her word, Dulcie was going to put herself into making a genuine effort to please Canton. That would mean sharing his bed as his wife. She knew she would enjoy his touch; she also knew that he wanted children and he would never agree to taking measures to prevent conception. For one moment Dulcie debated with herself on seeking aid from a healer, but any healer on Anopy would be loyal to their Leader, and Dulcie would not wish to face Canton’s wrath if word reached him that she was trying to keep from having his child.

“What are you thinking of Princess Dulcie?” Canton asked with a smile. “You appear to be elsewhere with your thoughts.”

“I am sorry, Leader Canton,” she said with a smile. “I was merely considering how best I can help you ease poverty. I will want to see reports and studies, if any have been made, and if not, perhaps that is where we will need to begin.”

“We will speak of all of that after we eat. Do you enjoy the fruit?” he asked.

“Yes, it is very good, and different from anything we have where I come from. Also, this bread is delicious, but so light.”

“I am pleased you are enjoying your meal. It is good to see you eat.” He was beginning to believe that it really *was* her moon time that kept her from eating well since they were united. Canton fully intended to make sure Dulcie ate enough; she was much too thin and gaining some weight would be good for her.

Dulcie had to laugh. “You will be shocked to see how much I can eat, Leader Canton.”

"I look forward to being shocked," he replied, his laughing dark eyes letting her know he was teasing her. He looked around the large dining room and noticed that several people were done eating. He stood and excused them at their leisure, and was not surprised when a few people approached the table he shared with Dulcie.

"Princess Dulcie, I am enjoying this new custom," one elderly man stated. "I had no idea how much better some foods taste when they are very hot. However, I think the healers may be treating burned tongues until we all get used to terribly hot food." He meant the words to bring a smile to her face and Dulcie obliged him. He then turned to Canton and asked a question that made no sense at all to her, but Canton answered him with patience, and a suggestion that the man decided made sense. He walked away, obviously relieved to have the problem so quickly solved.

"Are you finished, Princess Dulcie?" Canton stood and asked formally, aware that his wife was still being carefully watched and observed.

"Yes, Leader Canton. Will we be discussing your plans for my position in our rooms or in your office?" Dulcie asked as she got to her feet.

He looked at her, wondering if she was hinting that she would like for him to join her in their chambers, and then he shook his head to clear it. Just because all he could think about when he was near her was making love to her it did not mean that she was entertaining the same thoughts of him. "My office would be fine, Princess Dulcie. I have the documentation you were asking about on file and ready to share with you."

Just as they were about to leave the dining room, Noturo approached them, a smile on his face. "Good afternoon, Leader Canton and Princess Dulcie."

"How is your day proceeding, Noturo?" Canton asked pleasantly.

"Very well, thank you, and even better after I received your invitation for this evening," he said with a smile for the couple. "Thank you for including me, Princess Dulcie. I appreciate your concern for Lady Anne and Fayda, and it is gracious of you to include me in the evening."

"We will look forward to seeing you tonight, Noturo. I am very pleased you could accept the invitation on such short notice," Dulcie replied, not daring to look at her husband. He had expressly forbidden her to do any matchmaking, but it was so obvious that Noturo and Lady Anne were perfect for each other, and Dulcie simply could not resist giving them a little nudge in each other's direction.

"Until this evening, then." Noturo nodded amicably and hurried off. He was a very busy man and his schedule was filled with appointments.

"Come along, little Princess," Canton growled under his breath. "It would seem we need to have our discussion in the privacy of our quarters after all." He took her arm in his and hurried her down the hallways until they reached the suite of rooms assigned to them. He

quickly opened the door and escorted her inside before shutting the door and setting the privacy warning to insure they would not be disturbed.

“Canton, would you at least hear me out before you pass judgment on my actions?” Dulcie pleaded with him.

“Did I not warn you this very morning that there was to be no matchmaking, little Princess?” he demanded, clearly angry with her.

“Yes, you did, but I saw no harm in inviting Noturo to come. I am merely giving Noturo and Lady Anne the opportunity to visit with each other in a social setting. If there is no attraction, then they will not act upon my wishes for them. I am not so pushy that I would suggest to either of them they should become involved. That is for them to decide, but with Noturo and Lady Anne each working so many hours, how are they to meet someone without it being awkward? We shall be here to keep the conversation flowing. It is merely one little visit, Canton,” she said softly, doing her best to persuade the man to her way of thinking.

“I told you there was to be no matchmaking and you deliberately went against my wishes.”

“I wanted to show you that I could do something like this without being an embarrassment to you. There is nothing wrong with inviting both Lady Anne and Noturo. You are the one who is making more of the situation than exists.”

“Dulcie, you are my wife, and I will be obeyed. You have deliberately gone out of your way to defy me, and I will not let such behavior go unpunished. Go into our sleep chamber and remove your clothing and lie over the end of the bed.”

“You are being unfair, Canton!” she accused.

“You choose to disobey me and then call me unfair?” he questioned. “Am I to simply ignore such disrespect and defiance?” he asked in disbelief.

“You could at least wait to see if I am right about Noturo and Lady Anne!” she said, putting her hands on her hips.

“You have added extra punishment, Dulcie. When I tell you not to do something, you will not do it. If you do, you will be punished. There will be no waiting to see if things work out. Go and prepare for a spanking.”

“I am just now recovered from the last punishment you gave me!” Dulcie argued. “Is this the way you expect the thirty days of our marriage to progress? If it is, I can assure you I will leave as soon as possible. I will not be married to a man who refuses to accept me as I am.”

“Dulcie, the longer you stand here arguing, that much longer your punishment lasts.”

“If you punish me for this, Canton, then I promise you will find no pleasure in your bed for the next thirty days!” Dulcie was very angry. Her lavender eyes were full of fire and her cheeks were stained red. She had her hands on her hips and was definitely challenging him.

Canton reached out, spun her around, and gave her bottom a hard spank to start her toward their chamber. When she tried to run from him, he put a hand on her shoulder and gave her another swat. Each step she took was punctuated with a hard smack of his hand. “When you are told to prepare for a punishment, you will not stand there and argue with me. King Betarn should have taught you better, little Princess.” He gave her another hard spank.

“You are being horrid to me, Canton. You do not want me for a wife; you want some meek woman who will agree with all you have to say!” She tried to wrench away from him, but the hold he had on her shoulder was unshakable.”

“It is not horrid to expect obedience from my wife, Dulcie. What is horrid is that you feel you can do as you please without consequence.” Once they were beside the bed, he took a seat and pulled her down over his lap.

“No! Do not!” Dulcie protested, but Canton did not waste time debating the issue with her. He started spanking, and since the dresses on Anopy were so short, he was spanking the bare skin of her upper thighs. “Owww! Owww! Stop! I will not be able to entertain our guests this night if you continue!”

“You will entertain our guests, Princess, make no mistake about that,” he promised, pushing her dress up even farther and lowering her undergarment to bare her white cheeks. “Now we’ll see if I can make your cheeks match your thighs,” he said, and brought his palm down with a crack on her delicate skin.

“Oh, not so hard! Please!” Dulcie begged. Her pleas felt on deaf ears as Canton spanked her until she was sobbing. Finally, she could bear no more. “I am sorry! Please, I am sorry! No more; I am sorry!”

Canton stood her on her feet. “I will give you fifteen minutes to compose yourself, little Princess, and then we will proceed to our meeting in my office.” He got to his feet and left the room. Dulcie deserved every last spank. He would not tolerate disobedience or defiance from her, and it was best she learned that right now. He would not tolerate her threats, either, but that lesson would wait until their company left for the evening.

Dulcie’s bottom was burning and so sore she could not bear to touch herself. She hurried into the bathing room and searched for the jar of ointment that Canton used before to ease her pain. She could find nothing that resembled the pain reliever. She raised her skirt to look in the mirror and was shocked to see how red her bottom was. Her flesh looked and

felt angry and swollen, and there was simply no way she would be able to sit through a meeting with Canton, nor would she be able to entertain guests. The spans Canton applied to her upper thighs fell below the hem of her dress, and anyone looking at her backside would be able to see that she had been punished.

She hurried to the relaxing area of the apartment to find her husband pretending to read. It was clear to see that he was still angry with her. "Canton, I am truly sorry I angered you. I did not realize this was so great a matter that you would be grieved with me. I did not see it as flagrant disobedience, but in retrospect, I regret ignoring your wishes. Please forgive me."

"Not only did you disobey me the very same day I made my feelings known to you, but you had the nerve to stand there and tell me I am wrong and argue with my right to call you to task."

"I fear that you are correct when you say my father did not teach me to obey. I have much to learn. I promise I will try harder."

"Are you serious or saying what you feel you need to say to escape the rest of your punishment?" he asked, his dark eyes looking at her accusingly. He watched as her eyes grew wide in astonishment and then fear. "Are you going to stand there and tell me that you thought your punishment was sufficient? I warned you that defiance would be punished separately, did I not?" he demanded.

"But, Canton, you spanked me so hard! I am in terrible pain, and I cannot set foot out of these rooms... or have guests tonight... because my dress is not long enough to cover the area you spanked! I have given you an apology, and it was sincere. You have made your point, and I will respect your wishes on this subject in the future."

"It is not my fault that your thighs show you have been spanked, little Princess. You earned the spanking and life will continue without interruption. You will accompany me to my office for our meeting and you will entertain our guests this night, and you will do so with a smile on your face and do nothing to call attention to your discomfort."

"It would be cruel to ask me to do so!" she tearfully proclaimed. "You force me to dress this way, and now you would parade me in the hallway and let everyone know you punished me?" She shuddered. "I cannot live like this, Canton. Please release me from my promise and send me home."

"When a wife earns punishment it is given and she is expected to accept the punishment and meet her other obligations without interruption. You are the one who earned this punishment, Princess Dulcie, and now you will live with the embarrassment. If you say one more word in protest, we will return to our chamber and I will insert a plug, which you will wear until we retire tonight. The choice is yours. Go and wash your face so we can leave for my office."

Dulcie immediately left his presence. Canton may have punished her but she clearly was not forgiven, and if she understood him correctly, he did not consider her punishment over! She could not bear another spanking, especially if he used the paddle or cane. Her only prayer was to go to his office and do her best to impress him with her ideas for helping the people of Anopy escape poverty. Perhaps he would find it in his heart to relent, and even excuse her from entertaining. She washed her face, fixed her hair, and then tugged her skirt down as far as she could, praying no one would follow them down the corridors leading to Canton's office.

Dulcie joined him and announced she was ready. Canton gave her a meaningful look, but said nothing as he led her from their rooms and to his office. The chairs in his office were not made to be comfortable, and Canton did not change that when he took office. He did not wish for anyone to come and visit for hours when there was so much work to be done. If he truly wished for someone to be comfortable he moved them to the other side of the room. He would not extend that courtesy to his wife. He wanted her to feel the spanking for as long as possible.

"What sort of statistics do you have for me to look at?" Dulcie asked as they entered the office. She was suddenly aware they were not alone. "Oh, I am sorry... I do not believe we have met," Dulcie said quietly, greeting the other woman. It was humiliating to realize she would not be alone with Canton while she was not herself! "I am Princess Dulcie." She held out her hand.

The woman looked at Canton, and then replied grudgingly, "I am Eugenie." She did not take Dulcie's hand, but instead looked down at her desk.

"Eugenie is my assistant," Canton stated quietly, wondering why the woman was acting so rude.

"I see," Dulcie said, even though she did not 'see'. "What are your duties, Eugenie?" She made an effort to be pleasant.

"To keep those who would bother Leader Canton from doing so," the woman replied, her dark eyes making so secret of the fact she considered the Princess one of those bothers.

"Eugenie, did you copy the documents and put them on my desk as I asked?" Canton questioned, all business.

"Yes, Leader Canton," the woman answered immediately.

"Do not interrupt us unless it is very important. Of course, I wish to know when my family arrives to meet my wife."

Eugenie kept her features composed as she nodded, but Dulcie did not miss the hatred she was trying to conceal.



## Chapter Two

“Come with me, Princess Dulcie.” He led the way into another room and Dulcie knew at once it was his private office. The furniture was sturdy and in taste with what was in their apartment. When she saw the chairs in front of his desk she promptly decided she was not going to sit there. She crossed the room to where a less formal setting of sofas faced each other. There was a table between them, and she felt it was the perfect place for her and Canton to discuss issues of poverty. Before she could take a seat he cleared his throat and motioned for her to come over to his desk.

Dulcie did not argue with the look in his dark eyes. He was clearly disgruntled and arguing with him right now would bode ill for her later.

“Take a seat, Dulcie,” he ordered. When she looked at him in dismay, he nodded, “Yes, I know you are sore and these chairs are not comfortable. No one seems to desire sitting on them even when they are not sore from a spanking. I imagine sitting will serve effectively as the rest of your punishment.” He pointed toward the chair and if he was surprised when she sat down, he did not let on. “These are the latest figures we have,” he said as he leaned across the desk to hand her a folder. “The folder is yours to keep. I am aware you will need time to study the situation in order to acquaint yourself with the problem.”

Dulcie tried to block out the discomfort of sitting. She felt it unfair of Canton to put her in this position. He would not expect another woman to sit after she was punished. She used the papers in the folder to keep him from seeing the tears that filled her eyes. After a moment she tried to make sense of the figures.

“As hard as it may be to believe, the figures are down five percent from last year, but clearly we must do better. I believe the answer lies in educating these people, and your job will be to incorporate programs designed to do that. Do you have any ideas we can discuss now, Dulcie, or do you need time to develop your thoughts?”

“All of the education in the world will not help if people are hungry, Canton. When they are struggling just to find food to eat, attending educational classes will not be a priority. First, we need to incorporate a program that will provide food as long as they are enrolled and attending classes.”

Canton looked at Dulcie in surprise. “That makes sense to me, little Princess. We need to make it worth their time to attend the classes.”

“Yes. I will also have to – “ She stopped speaking when the door opened.

“Leader Canton, there is a problem that demands your attention,” Eugenie said.

“What is it?” Canton made no secret that he was annoyed at the interruption.

“Representative Dantonne requires your assistance immediately.”

As he got to his feet Canton vowed he was going to replace the woman as soon as possible. “Excuse me, Princess Dulcie. This should not take long.” He hurried from the office.

“How long have you been Leader Canton’s assistant?” Dulcie asked, deciding to take a break from the hard seat of the chair by standing.

“Several years,” Eugenie replied, giving her a hateful look.

“Eugenie, we have just met; why are you prepared to hate me?”

“Because you are not the right wife for our Leader. He deserves a bride from Anopy, one who will not seek to change our traditions for her own!”

“I take it you do not like to eat hot food?” Princess Dulcie teased.

“I cannot see what he finds so special about you. You are so small you look like a child. Your eyes are wicked, and it is apparent the Leader punished you. Look at your legs. You are an embarrassment to the Leader! I wish he would send you home in disgrace. You do not belong here and I am not the only one who feels this way. So, what did you do to earn punishment, witch?”

“I am not a witch, Eugenie, and what happens between my husband and I is our personal business.”

“I will see you ruined,” Eugenie threatened, hissing. “I have power here, and I will lie and blacken your name. I should be the one heading the poverty program, not you. I have contacts here, and I know that no one on the Council is happy that the Leader lowered himself to take you for his wife. You are a low, vile, creature. I will see you publicly declared a witch and beaten within an inch of your life!”

“You will do so such thing,” Canton said firmly. He had heard enough to know that Eugenie had crossed several lines... serious lines.

“Leader Canton!” It was obvious the woman was shocked to find him back so soon, but she recovered quickly. “This evil woman attacked me!” she accused. “She threatened to bring all of Anopy to its knees!”

“Princess Dulcie did not attack you. Representative Dantonne met me outside the door and said her situation was under control. I returned in time to hear my wife speak politely to you, and for you to attack her with insults and threats.”

“Nooooo!” Eugenie exclaimed, her face red with anger and outrage. “You need to get rid of her! We do not need her on Anopy!”

“What I do not need, Eugenie, is you working in this office. You will be held for trial and if convicted, you will face public intervention.” He pushed a button and in less than thirty seconds the enforcers arrived. Eugenie was hysterical by then and tried to slap them away, but they easily subdued her. “Eugenie needs to be examined thoroughly by a staff of healers, and then incarcerated until she faces trial. I will file the paperwork myself.”

The enforcers escorted her from Leader Canton’s office and took her away. Canton turned to his wife and opened his arms, although he was positive that if the situation were reversed he would want nothing to do with himself! Canton felt like an insensitive jerk, but to his surprise, Dulcie came to him, seeking refuge. “I am humbly sorry, little Princess. I suspected for a while that Eugenie was taking more upon herself than she should be, but she kept my schedule straight, and handled other matters when I was not available. But, I was shocked when I heard her speaking to you with such disdain and disrespect. There is nothing evil about you, and you have the most beautiful eyes I have ever seen. I am sorry that she noticed you were punished. I did not mean for that to happen, little one. I knew the corridors would be empty, but I did not think Eugenie would dare to say anything if she noticed. It was unforgiveable of me to expose a personal problem in this matter. I promise I will do better.”

“It was also wrong of you to insist I sit on that chair instead of those lovely sofas,” Dulcie said, and then looked up at him to permit him to see she was teasing.

“I was trying to make a point,” he replied. “Have I done so?” he wanted to know.

“Yes, you have. I was wrong to disobey you, and to show you defiance. I promise I will do better,” she said solemnly, using his own words.

“We are new at marriage, and we will need to say ‘sorry’ to each other many times, I am sure.”

“I am sure we shall,” she agreed, and then asked, “What will you do for an assistant now?”

“I will have to seek out someone I can trust with all sorts of secrets, who can schedule appointments, and who will not mind living here for his or her own protection. Eugenie could go nowhere without an escort and a driver. It is not an easy life.”

“Could I be of assistance until you find a replacement?” Dulcie offered. “It would help me to understand Anopy better, and I am used to dealing with situations when Father was unavailable. It would only be temporary.”

“Are you sure you want to spend your entire day sitting here?” Canton asked, surprised by her generous offer.

“I would not wish to do this for years, but for a week or two, until you find someone else, I will be content. It will give me time to work close to you and discuss my ideas for ending poverty and for educating the people.”

“Very well, I will gladly accept your help. I have no more appointments this afternoon; my family is coming to visit and to meet you. They will share dinner with us and then leave for home. In the meantime I will file the charges against Eugenie and begin the process of searching for a new assistant. When my family arrives, let me know, and I will be pleased to introduce you.”

“I will look over these figures while we are waiting, and I will familiarize myself with Eugenie’s office.”

Dulcie went into the outer office and started snooping through the desk that Eugenie occupied so shortly ago. There were personal items in the drawers and Dulcie gathered them and put them in a basket she found in the closet. The communicator buzzed and she quickly answered, “Leader Canton’s office. May I help you?”

“You are not Eugenie!” a woman declared.

“No, I am Princess Dulcie,” she identified herself.

“Oh... I need to make an appointment to see Leader Canton this afternoon.”

“I’m sorry, his afternoon is full. May I ask who is calling?”

Dulcie learned the woman had a legitimate reason for wishing to speak with Canton and she gave her an appointment for the next morning.

“You did that very well, Dulcie,” Canton complimented her. “Before my family arrives, I would like for you to change the answering messages on the communicator. I do not wish to have Eugenie’s voice on there asking callers to leave a message. The news will be over the offices soon and by changing the voice on the instructions callers will know there has been a change. Thank you,” he said politely, and then went back to work, although he left the door open so he could hear if Dulcie needed help. Once in a while an irate person managed to get by security and he did not want his wife harmed in any way. She had suffered enough for one day. The things that Eugenie said to her were hateful and meant to hurt.

Dulcie immediately reset the messages and played them back to be certain they were acceptable. Satisfied, she gave her attention to the figures in front of her. The door opened a few minutes later and an older couple walked in and blinked in surprise when they saw her. Dulcie knew at a glance they were Canton’s parents. She rose to her feet, a

sign of respect in her country and said, "Hello. I am Princess Dulcie, and you must be Leader Canton's mother and father."

Canton jumped to his feet and literally ran from his office. "Mom, Dad, welcome!" He kissed his mother and then hugged his father as they slapped each other's backs.

"This lovely little lady is your bride?"

"Yes, Dad. Dulcie, this is my father, Kanteen, and my mother, Annele."

"It is my pleasure to meet you both," Dulcie said with a smile for each of them. "I have refreshments prepared and ready to serve in our apartment."

"Please set the communicator, Dulcie, and I will turn off the lights and lock the office."

"Where is Eugenie?" Annele asked, confused.

"At the moment she is incarcerated, Mom. She attacked Dulcie and for a while now I suspected she was leaking secrets and playing favorites with appointments. She is being investigated now."

"I am trying to help Canton until he finds a suitable replacement," Dulcie explained her presence.

"That is most kind of you, dear," Annele said with a smile. "Canton, Jallea is not feeling well and could not come today. Fragon refused to allow her out of bed and he stayed home from work to help with the children. She is very disappointed."

"She can come and meet Dulcie when she is well. Fragon is only doing his duty to keep her safe," Canton said with conviction. "Kardoe will join us for dinner tonight," he added as he ushered them into the hallway and set the lock on the door. With a guilty expression in his dark eyes, Canton looked at his wife's upper thighs and was relieved the spanking no longer showed. He would not have her embarrassed in front of his parents. Sitting through the next several hours would be painful for her. "Was your trip uneventful?" he asked as they walked toward his quarters.

"Very, but your Mother seems to see danger lurking behind every tree and rock," Kanteen said teasingly.

"Your driving is terrible, Kanteen! You are so busy looking around that you see nothing in front of you!" Annele argued.

Dulcie was shocked to hear Canton laugh.

"Do not dare to laugh, young man! You might be Leader of Anopy, but I am still your mother, and I can still take a paddle to you!" Annele stated with conviction.

Her threat made Canton laugh that much harder. “Mom, you are supposed to be making Dulcie fear disobeying me, not threatening me in front of her.”

“Oh pooh! All you men seem to think a woman does not have a mind of her own. I came here to make sure you are treating this lovely young woman properly. And, if she tells me otherwise...”

“Annele, enough, please,” Kanteen said quietly, but it was all that was needed to stop the flow of words from Annele’s mouth. “Like all newly wed couples, Canton and Dulcie will need to learn each other’s ways. We raised our son to be a good man, and I am sure he will treat Dulcie with respect.”

“You know very well what Kardoe said,” Annele whispered.

“It is none of our business, wife,” Kanteen said in that same quiet tone, but it made Dulcie nervous and she did not wish for her mother-in-law to get into trouble.

Annele had no such qualms. “*It is* our business. Canton is our son.”

“Ahem,” Canton said deliberately as he turned to face them. “Do you think we could take this discussion inside rather than entertain the whole of the building?” He was grinning but Dulcie could see he was also embarrassed. “Mom, I should have known you would automatically take Dulcie’s side,” he said, grinning at her as she walked through the door he held open.

Once they were all seated, Annele said, “It is not so much taking sides, Canton, as it is putting myself in Dulcie’s place. A woman does not like being embarrassed, especially in public. Now, before you say anything,” she held up her hand to stop him, “please know that I understand why you did what you did. I just feel for poor Dulcie. Our customs are hard enough to live with when we are born and raised in this manner. She was not, and you need to use more patience.”

“You are quite right, Mom,” Canton surprised everyone by agreeing. “I learned that today. Dulcie forgave me, and I consider myself fortunate.”

“I will serve refreshments now,” Dulcie said, deciding to be diplomatic. She went into their small galley and poured the drinks she fixed earlier, and she served the tiny cakes she had worked so hard to prepare. They were not sweet, but were meant to encourage appetite since it was close to the dinner hour. The tray was quite heavy, but Dulcie was very strong and she carried it to the large social room and sat it down on the table in front of the sofa.

“Oh, these look good, Dulcie,” Annele quickly complimented her efforts.

Canton took one and popped it into his mouth. "They taste good, too, Mom. I did not know you could cook, little Princess."

"I can do a few simple things, Canton, but I am not a cook. That requires much knowledge I do not have."

"This fruit drink is delicious, too," Kanteen remarked. "Son, before Kardoe arrives, is there anything you need or wish to discuss with us? Marriage is a serious undertaking, and with your position, it makes it even more complicated, I am sure."

"One of the problems that Dulcie and I face is the public element of our marriage. The things that most couples can work on in private and take their time learning does not work for us. Dulcie has a need to know proper protocol every time she steps through that door. Her life in her father's kingdom was much different than it is here. Dulcie was not punished if she defied the King's wishes. He spoiled her too much, and we are struggling with that."

"Is this how you see the situation, Dulcie?" Annele asked kindly.

"It seems that Canton wishes to change me completely and transform me into someone I am not. I do not mean to displease him, but I do so much too often to suit me. Some of the customs here seem so harsh to me, and others seem foolish. I do not wish to create problems for Canton, but I am not one to be silent when I feel a need to speak my mind."

"I well understand that," Annele declared.

"Yes, but the difference is that you speak to me in private, not in public, and that is what you must learn to do, Dulcie. Canton would have no choice but to deal with you publicly if you speak so in public. Do you understand this?"

"Yes, sir, I do, and I am trying," she replied, sensing the man was truly trying to help them, and not just take Canton's side.

"It is obvious to me that you care for each other a great deal, and I am thankful for that reassurance. Dulcie, you are a pretty woman, inside as well as outside. I can see why my son sought to make you his bride." Annele kissed Dulcie's cheek and then held her hand. "Would you mind sharing this recipe with me, dear? It is truly delicious, and if I do not stop eating them I shall have no room at all to eat dinner."

## Chapter Three

Kardoe arrived and gave each of them, including Dulcie, a big hug. He also tasted the cakes and declared he was famished since he missed the noon meal. Dulcie simply leaned against Canton and listened to his family talk. She decided she liked them and when it was time to go to dinner, she was smiling and feeling accepted as part of the family. Thankfully, she was also aware that the spanking was no longer stinging, and she hoped the evidence was gone as well. They all took their places at the main dining table and once everyone arrived, Canton bade them all sit and enjoy their meal and visiting with family and friends.

Kanteen was obviously shocked. "You have changed the protocol, son?"

"It was my wedding gift to my wife, Dad. I wanted to give her one of her customs here on Anopy, and it is truly a blessing to enjoy hot food. My kitchen staff assures me they are pleased with the change as well. I allowed them to add the staff they need to ensure food arrives to everyone hot and fresh, and there are fewer complaints. We implemented this change successfully." Canton seemed proud of himself.

"I think it is a good change," Annele announced. "I also like the fact we can talk to each other instead of eating in silence."

"That is not a surprise, wife," Kanteen teased, and his sons chuckled.

"Are you sure you cannot stay longer?" Dulcie asked. She was truly enjoying meeting Canton's parents and seeing him so relaxed.

"We cannot, Princess Dulcie," Kanteen said with regret. "I have an important business meeting tomorrow morning and Annele is entertaining the wives while the men are in negotiations. It has been three months in the making to get this far, and I cannot afford to cancel. Perhaps Leader Canton will be able to bring you for a visit very soon." He looked at his son.

"I will do that, Dad," Canton promised. He was very pleased that his wife seemed to like his parents and vice versa. Kardoe approved of Dulcie as well, and Canton hoped that he could convince Dulcie to stay when the month was over. He was going to take his father's advice and be more patient."

Canton rose when he heard a child fussing across the room. "Everyone may leave at their pleasure."

"Leader Canton...?" A man stood and addressed him. "I would like to speak if I may?"

"Yes, Dento, you may speak." Canton sat, giving the man the floor.

“Is it true that you have dismissed Eugenie from her position, and if so, why...? There are many rumors, and I feel the truth should be public knowledge.”

“Yes, Dento, it should be made public knowledge,” Canton said as he rose to his feet. “I had hoped to do so in the morning, but if we are already rife with rumor it is best I set the record straight. As the Council knows I have appointed Princess Dulcie to head a committee to fight poverty on Anopy. She was in my office for an official meeting this afternoon when Representative Dantonne had a problem and needed assistance. Eugenie sent me out of the office, but I met Representative Dantonne right outside the door in the hallway and she had managed to handle the problem herself, and very well,” he added, giving the woman the credit she deserved.

Dulcie saw Dantonne nod modestly and she sent the woman a smile, which was returned.

Canton continued. “I stepped inside the outer office and heard my wife ask Eugenie how long she had been my assistant. Eugenie accused Princess Dulcie of all sorts of things, calling her evil and a witch, and threatening her with a public beating based on lies. I was shocked by Eugenie’s behavior. She talked and talked when I confronted her, admitting that all of the Council was against my marriage and planning to use lies to discredit my wife. Since I returned from my voyage I have discovered that sensitive material was made public to the press, and other documents had been copied and given to businessmen in order to give them an advantage of government planning. I have asked that Eugenie be examined by healers to make sure she is capable of understanding what she has done. When that is determined she will face trial. I hope that answers all of the rumors...?”

Representative Dantonne stood to ask for permission to speak. “Leader Canton, I wish to assure you that the Council is not plotting behind your back. You have our full support in your marriage.”

“Thank you, Representative Dantonne.” Each of the other Council members rose and unequivocally denied Eugenie’s claims.

Healer Madorina rose, and once she had Canton’s permission to speak she said, “I have been assigned Eugenie’s case and would ask that we spare her our distress and disgust at her actions toward Princess Dulcie and toward the Council. Eugenie is ill in mind. Leader Canton, I will offer a full report as soon as the assessment is complete. None of us realized that she was so ill until today.”

“Thank you, Healer Madorina.”

“One more thing, and perhaps this is improper, but since I have heard this rumor, I think it best it also be made public. Eugenie has claimed intimacy with you, Leader Canton. I can state this is not so. Eugenie was examined and she has been with no man. I

apologize, Princess Dulcie. I do not mean to shame you, but this rumor is hurtful and needs to be set right.”

Dulcie rose and looked at Canton. He held his breath, but nodded, giving her his blessing to speak. “Healer Madorina, thank you for speaking so frankly. Leader Canton is a man of principles. He told me that once he decided he wanted me for his bride, there were no other women. I believe this to be true. I also feel sad for Eugenie and hope that we can all show her mercy now and after she recovers.”

Canton was embarrassed, but could see that his wife’s declaration endeared her to the people of Anopy. He dismissed everyone again and this time they left, the truth ending all the speculation.

“Oh my, how embarrassing!” Annele declared, but then she hugged Dulcie and said, “You were so brave to stand up and defend Canton. I am so happy he showed some good sense when he chose you.”

“Mom, I was raised by you; of course I have good taste,” Canton said quietly. They bade his parents a safe trip home, and then Canton walked Dulcie to their apartments. They had over an hour before their guests were due to arrive, and he needed to talk to her and make sure she was truly alright.

“I hope I did not displease you...?” Dulcie asked quietly, dreading Canton’s answer. He had been so quiet as they walked to their rooms, and she feared she may have overstepped once again.

“Displease me?” Canton repeated, looking at her in surprise. “Dulcie, I am not the least bit displeased. You showed me honor and respect tonight, and while I will admit I was embarrassed to have my private habits scrutinized and made public, what you said pleased me. Thank you for your belief in me. And, the fact you were able to handle such a difficult situation with grace amazed me... and every last member of the Council. Those rumors were damning and now they are put to rest. Thank you, little Princess.” He took her in his arms and kissed her thoroughly.

Dulcie immediately felt the tingles of passion and knew her body craved his just as much as she did on the ship coming here. She moaned and he gently held her at arm’s length before saying, “I promise to ease your need this night, little one. I need to give you pleasure as well as seek pleasure. It has been too long since our one night together.” He watched her tremble with desire. “I wish we had more time before our guests are due to arrive.”

“I agree, Canton. This need is powerful; I hope I can behave normally this evening.”

“You will be fine. I simply will not touch you again in the meantime. Is there anything I can do to help you prepare for our guests?” he offered.

“It is done. I prepared some desserts for refreshment, and I will mix drinks when they arrive.”

“I am pleased you thought of that. I rarely entertained here, and I am sure my parents were stunned to actually have something offered to them. They took to you, Dulcie. My Mom thinks you too good for me,” he said, grinning.

“Your Mom is nothing like I thought she would be, and I love her already. You are like your father. Tall and stern.”

“I hope you don’t think me too stern. I don’t want to frighten you away by being too harsh with you. I should have held our meeting here instead of forcing you down the hallway while your legs were red from the spanking.”

“I disobeyed you, Canton,” she admitted. “Then I made matters worse by my defiance and my threats. I am a warrior and I do not know how to retreat gracefully. I was in the wrong and deserved the spanking,” she confessed, the admission costing her in terms of pride. “I can only tell you that it will probably happen again. I am not the most obedient person, even though I do not wish to cause you upset and distress. I am too used to having my way.”

“I know that was difficult for you to say, little one; I will try to be a bit more patient and try to see things from your side as well as mine.”

“I hope your parents did not notice my reddened skin peeking from beneath my dress,” she whispered.

“They did not,” he reassured her. “After Eugenie’s comment, I checked before we left my office. I would not have you embarrassed further. A spanking between a husband and wife should be kept private when it is a private matter to begin with. You did not misbehave in public or in front of others.”

“Today has been a good day for discovery, has it not, Canton? You know more of my feelings and I know more of yours. I loved seeing your parents and how much in love they are. And, I was impressed with how you handled Eugenie and were open with your people regarding the matter.”

“I was impressed that you defended me. I was so proud to know I had your trust.” The chime announcing a visitor rang then. He watched Dulcie smooth her dress and then he went to answer the summons. It was Lady Anne and Fayda and both were smiling happily. “Welcome,” he greeted them.

“Thank you for inviting us,” Lady Anne said. “Fayda has been so excited all day. You made quite an impression on her yesterday, Princess Dulcie.”

“You both made a good impression on me,” Dulcie replied as she motioned for them to take a seat. “I have not had much of an opportunity to meet other women and I hoped we could be friends.”

Fayda seemed delighted when Dulcie asked about her schooling, and they talked non-stop. The chime rang again and this time it was Noturo. Fayda’s face turned pink when he entered the room, but after greeting her politely and asking after her health, his attention was centered on Lady Anne.

Canton could see the satisfied look on Dulcie’s face and he was stunned to learn that she was right about the two people. Fayda seemed to notice what was going on, too, and she winked at Dulcie, pleased to see the animated look on her Mother’s face. Canton was pleased when Lady Anne announced she and Fayda needed to get home because Fayda had an exam in the morning and she needed to study. Noturo immediately offered to see the women safely home and Lady Anne smiled and accepted his offer.

“That went very well,” Dulcie remarked. “Sometimes matchmaking is as simple as issuing two people an invitation and putting them in the same room.”

“And sometimes it ends with two people getting angry and blaming the person who brought them together,” he pointed out.

“That could happen,” Dulcie admitted, not about to argue and tell him that only happened when the person bringing people together was a fool and not good at pairing. Dulcie was quite talented at making people happy.

“Your little party was a success, Dulcie. Your refreshments are all gone because they were so delicious. The next time we have a social function, I will suggest the person responsible for the food contact you for ideas.”

“Thank you, Canton,” Dulcie replied, quite surprised. She quickly cleaned up after their guests, well aware that Canton was watching her every move.

“I want you, Dulcie. The time of waiting is now over and I wish to take away that need I created aboard ship.”

“I... I would be lying if I said I did not crave your touch, but I am uncertain of our future. What if I conceive a child? I would never be able to leave then.”

“I would love for you to have our child. I think you are afraid for no reason, Dulcie. Your words in front of the entire dining hall proved to me that you have feelings for me.”

“That might be true, Canton, but it does not mean that I can conform to your laws and traditions and forego everything dear to me. What if we end up making each other truly miserable and neither of us can change? It would not be fair to bring a child into a marriage like that. It would not do for your people to learn you are trying to prevent a child from being conceived, either. Perhaps we should simply forget... Canton! What

are you doing?" she asked as he swept her into his arms and headed for their bed chamber.

"You worry too much, little Princess." He captured her lips with his and kissed her hard and long. Dulcie's response was all he could reach for. The effects of the cream he had used to punish her were easily ignited and she was soon begging for his touch, and doing her very best to make him crazy with desire. He placed her on their large bed and soon had her clothing scattered on the floor, along with his own. His intentions to take things slow and easy were quickly forgotten when she touched him. He was hard and throbbing and when she guided him to her, he gave her what they both wanted. It was a wild ride and the first climax caught them by surprise with its intensity. Dulcie screamed and Canton nearly drowned her out with his own yells of pleasure.

"That was not supposed to happen, young lady," Canton told her with a smile when he could speak again. "I was going to take it real slow and give you pleasure several times before joining with you."

"It was wild," she agreed, slightly embarrassed that she had behaved in that manner.

"Now, do not pull away, sweetling. We are not done. We have a few days to make up for."

Dulcie thought of all the reasons she should not be making love with her husband, but none of them seemed to matter when his hands touched the sensitive parts of her body, causing her to desire him once again. He teased and tormented her, but in the end, it was Canton who surrendered once more to her sweet warmth. They slept then, only to wake several more times during the night and turn to each other again and again. By morning their immediate need for each other was finally sated, but they were tired and overslept and had to rush to get to the dining hall on time for breakfast.

They were the last to arrive and Canton apologized for keeping everyone waiting, even though it was only one minute past the appointed time. No one said anything but Dulcie was positive that everyone in the room knew exactly why they were running late. Canton did not seem to be affected and his appetite was hearty. He ate the food on his plate and called for seconds from the person assigned to serve their table. "Are you not hungry this morning, Princess Dulcie?" he asked, noting she was pushing the food around her plate instead of eating.

"I ate too many sweets last night," she complained. "I am in need of my tea more than anything. I need to clear my head so I do not sound like an idiot to those who call for you today. I do not wish to make problems for you."

"You will not," he said calmly. When it was clear that people were nearly finished eating, he dismissed everyone, wishing all a good and prosperous day.

Noturo once again intercepted them as they were leaving the dining hall, and this time it was to thank them for the lovely evening he had. “Lady Anne invited me to dine with her this evening,” he shared, and then walked off whistling.

## Chapter Four

The next few days passed without incident, for which Dulcie was grateful. She worked hard as Canton's assistant while he interviewed countless applicants for the job. The search was finally narrowed down to two people, and Canton promised to make his decision soon. The reports were in about Eugenie's health, and it was discovered that she was only pretending to be ill. Proof was found that she was accepting bribes for appointments, and doing her best to keep the Council members angry with each other. Her monetary accounts were looked into and people were shocked to learn she was extremely wealthy on a salary that was within guidelines for public officials.

A trial was promptly held and Canton insisted that both he and Dulcie give witness to the court. Other people told of being charged for appointments and Canton was silently furious at the games Eugenie played with people's lives. Sentence was passed and Dulcie hoped that she and Canton would not have to attend, but Canton nixed that idea before she had a chance to voice her opinion. He said they would have to be there to see justice enforced. Dulcie knew he was right, but she did not like the idea.

Noturo called the assembly to order and announced that the only matter to be dealt with that day was the one concerning Eugenie. The woman was brought forth, completely nude. Noturo gave her the opportunity to speak but she vehemently shook her head. Without an expression of remorse the caning would be severe. The enforcers led her forward and she was bent over the padded table and her hands, feet, and waist were secured. Noturo announced the number of strokes at seventy-five and said the sentence was harsh because of the nature of her crimes against Anopoly. A healer was assigned to the process to watch the proceedings and interrupt if it was necessary. In the event that happened, a break would be called for assessment, and the caning would commence again as soon as possible.

Dulcie tried not to wince when the cane fell the first time but Eugenie's scream tore through her heart. It was a serious punishment and if not given carefully, the woman could be seriously harmed. A second scream followed the second stroke. The healer stopped the proceeding when it was obvious that Eugenie had fainted. She was revived and the caning resumed. After the fifth stroke she begged forgiveness and asked for mercy.

"I cannot be merciful now that the punishment has started, Eugenie. You were given an opportunity to express remorse before sentence was announced, and you refused to do so." Noturo was obviously uncomfortable. Eugenie's screams were loud and it was obvious she was screaming to gain sympathy. He finally ordered a gag after warning her that her screams were out of line, and said it would be in place until fifty were given.

The caning went on and on and Eugenie was limp and sobbing after the fifty were given. The gag was removed and she was told she would be given ten minutes to rest before the rest of the caning was carried out. The healer examined her carefully and Canton could

see that she was concerned. Canton did not think Eugenie could survive the rest without a risk of serious injury, and it was certain that his wife could not tolerate much more of the punishment. It was time to call a halt. He stood and addressed Noturo. "Noturo, if I might have a word." He was aware it was unusual to interrupt a proceeding but this was an unusual situation.

"Yes, Leader Canton," Noturo responded, silently praying the other man was going to intercede. The sentence was too harsh and the Leader was the only one with the power to offer a reprieve.

"As Leader I wish to intercede. While Eugenie's crimes were serious, she also did many good acts while in her position. I am asking that the rest of her caning be postponed until the end of her confinement. If, at that time, it is determined she has expressed sincere remorse, and has obeyed the rules of her confinement, the caning will be forgiven. If there is issue during her confinement, or if remorse is not willingly offered, then the rest of the caning will be meted out as ordered by the Courts. Does this meet with your acceptance as the one in charge of these proceedings?" he asked formally.

"Yes, it does, Leader Canton. Thank you on Eugenie's behalf. Healer, will you please give Eugenie your assistance and we will bring this proceeding to a close."

People walked away in silence and Dulcie did not think there was one person present who was not thankful for Canton's intervention. "Thank you," she whispered. "Thank you."

"I have never before done that, Princess Dulcie. I felt an exception was necessary. The punishment needed to be severe, but there is a difference between severe and cruel."

"She has no tolerance to pain," Dulcie stated.

"Her body could not handle the rest today," he said. "Let us change the subject. I want you to know that I have selected my new assistant and the announcement will be made at dinner this evening. Today will be your last day, and I want you to know that you have done a wonderful job."

"Good. While I have loved helping you this week, I would prefer to have more time to work on the issue of poverty. I need to have a drive about the area and see for myself," she said.

"You are not to go alone, Dulcie," he was quick to say. "I will accompany you."

"Very well. When can we do this?" she asked. She well knew his schedule. The man did not have much spare time. Since it was discovered that people asked to meet with him, but were turned away because they did not have money to get past Eugenie, he was scheduling more appointments in an effort to be more available, and he had everyone working to fix grievances as quickly as possible.

“My time is limited at the moment, as you know. But we will go as soon as is possible.”

They returned to his office and Dulcie greeted his appointments as they came to see Canton. Most of the people were pleased to meet her, and some asked her questions of her home. A few were rude, mistrusting outsiders. Dulcie remained polite to all of them.

At dinner that night Leader Canton announced his choice for his new assistant and Dulcie was not surprised by the announcement. She was positive from the very beginning that the young man was the right person for the job. Canton also thanked her publicly for assisting him until a replacement could be found.

A few days passed without Canton finding any time to take her on her tour of the areas where poverty was at its worst. Dulcie finally tired of asking him and sent for a car, determined to go on her own. Canton gave her a job to do and she was determined to do it to the best of her ability. Nurick pulled up in front of the building just after lunch and she quickly hopped into the vehicle.

“Where are we going, Princess?” he asked with an easy grin, but after Dulcie told him, his grin turned into a frown. “Are you sure about this? What would Canton have to say?” he questioned, reluctant to take her.

“Canton gave me the responsibility of working on this problem, Nurick. I need to go and see the area, and perhaps talk with one or two people and get an understanding of their thoughts and feelings regarding the issue.

“Okay, but I hope he does not end up kicking my butt for taking you there.”

“I will assume any and all responsibility.” With any luck at all, she would be back long before she was missed.

But, as luck would have it, there was an arrival on Anopy from another land far away and Canton had his new assistant cancel his appointments for the afternoon to escort King Betarn to their quarters and surprise Dulcie. However, there was no sign of his wife. He called around to see if anyone had seen her, and learned that she had left in a car with Nurick. “Sir, your daughter is in trouble if she is up to what I think she is up to.”

“My daughter is always up to mischief, Canton,” the stately man said with humor.

Canton called security and asked where the car Nurick was driving was located, and quickly had his answer. He called for a car for himself, and Betarn invited himself along, anxious to see what his daughter was doing that had her husband looking so frazzled all of a sudden. Canton took the wheel himself and rushed to find his wife before harm came to her.

Completely oblivious to her husband's worry, Princess Dulcie got out of the car to talk to the group of mothers gathered in front of an apartment building. She learned that while some of them were married, most were not. The men in their lives simply disappeared or were dead, leaving them with small babies to care for. Dulcie asked how they were providing food and was shocked at their answers. When she asked about getting a job, they laughed and said that no one would hire them because they did not have any skills. "Would you go to school to learn a skill if you were given an opportunity to do so?" she asked of them.

"How are we going to feed our kids in the meantime?" one woman asked.

"If food for you and your children was provided, and all you had to do was attend classes and do your best to get an education, would you come?"

"That is not going to happen, lady, a man spoke up from a few feet away. He had several other men with him. "You got no cause to be spreading talk like that down here. These women are good for one thing, and maybe that is all you are good for, too." He eyed her up at down.

"You can see she is not one of us, Yalmon. Leave her be," one of the ladies spoke up and got a slap in the face for her efforts.

"Why did you do that?" Dulcie was instantly angry. She got to her feet and faced him. "That woman was not doing anything wrong and you had no right to hit her."

"I do as I please."

"Then why does it not please you to get a job and support your child?" Dulcie demanded furiously.

"Who do you think you are?" Yalmon asked, showing signs of temper.

"More importantly, who do you think you are that gives you the right to interfere in a conversation that has nothing to do with you?" Dulcie faced him and said, "Go on and get out of here before I decide to have you arrested."

"Big talk for a woman," Yalmon said sarcastically. "I think you need some of what I gave her!" He stepped toward Dulcie and raised his hand to her. In the next moment he was lying on the ground, howling in pain.

"I am not like the women you are used to, Yalmon. I can and will defend myself, and these women, if need be." She heard Nurick come up behind her, fully prepared to defend her if necessary. "I suggest you men go about your business now."

The men seemed uncertain about what to do, but when another expensive vehicle pulled up behind the other, they decided to take off.

“Are you hurt, Princess Dulcie?” she heard Canton asked as he rushed to her side.

“No, Leader Canton,” she replied. “The ladies and I were discussing how best we could help them when Yalmon decided to take umbrage. He slapped this woman and then threatened me, but quickly learned I am not helpless.”

“You may thank your lucky star that my lady is unhurt, Yalmon,” Canton said. His voice was low and all the more threatening. “Get into the vehicle, Princess Dulcie,” he ordered.

“May I get their names first, Leader Canton. I wish for them to be among the first when we start our education program.” He nodded his permission and spoke with Nurick, sending him back to the State House without his passenger. Nurick offered his apologies, but Canton knew he was not to blame.

Dulcie was happy with what she had learned, and the women were excited to realize they were actually speaking to their Leader and his wife, who was a real Princess. Dulcie promised she would contact them once the classes were set up and ready to be filled. She pretended not to notice when Canton handed the women some of his own personal money to help with food. She turned to get into the car and let out a squeal of surprise when she saw her father! “Papa! You are here!”

“In time to see that you have not outgrown your penchant for getting into trouble, daughter.”

“I was not trying to get into trouble, Papa. I have been needing to come here and see some of the people and get an idea of their needs. Canton has been working so hard he has had no time to bring me, and each day that no decisions are made to help these poor women is one more day they suffer, and their children suffer. Nurick did not know you asked me not to go alone, Canton. I take full responsibility for my actions.”

“Why did you disobey me, Dulcie?” he asked.

“Because I did not think I would get caught,” she admitted. “It was important to me. You know this area and these people, and while I heard tales from you, it does not give me the same picture as seeing through my own eyes. I am very sorry if you were worried, Canton. That was not my intention.”

“Daughter, you should have waited as you were told to do.”

“Yes, Papa,” she said meekly. She was no fool. The second Canton got her alone he was going to set her bottom on fire once again... even if her intentions were the very best.

“Why did you not tell us you were coming?” she asked Betarn.

“I wanted to surprise you. You know how rare it is for me to travel, but I have missed you, child.”

“I miss you, too, Papa,” she freely admitted. She asked of each of her family members and was delighted to learn the King brought letters from one and all. She told him of Canton’s parents, and some of the nicer things that happened since she arrived three weeks ago.

Canton felt it was the worst possible time for the King to show up. He had hoped to have Dulcie’s undivided attention for the next several days and make the best impression possible so that she would not ask to leave when the thirty days was up. Every so often he still saw a sad look in her eyes and he knew she was missing her family.

“While I know you are upset with me, Canton, I want you to know that I have some marvelous ideas for making our program work. Instead of focusing on everyone at once, we need to focus on helping small groups at a time. Once those are helped, we move on, and help a few more. In time, our program will grow and acquire more funding. Education is the key, but more importantly, providing food and people to care for small children while that education is given will make the difference between success and failure. I am so excited.”

“What kinds of classes and education are you speaking of?” Canton was interested, in spite of his determination to give little Dulcie a sound paddling.

“These women do not have even the basic skills, husband. If we teach them to read and do arithmetic, combined with some household skills, then they could work in people’s homes or take care of children for those who work. Many stores are providing people to watch small children while the mothers shop for items. Some women would make good medics to work with healers.”

“Do you have anything for men?”

“Men can work if they want to, Canton. There are jobs that require nothing more than strength and a desire to support self and family. I think there needs to be some sort of law passed that makes it illegal for a man not to support his children provided he has the health to hold a job. I am not saying that men do not deserve education, but I think it should be offered in the evenings for those men who work during the day. The others should be hauled in and given a reason to work.”

“And should the same apply to women?” Canton asked quietly.

“Yes, if they are able to work and are simply being lazy and using a child as an excuse to live in poverty.”

“I will discuss these findings with the Council. Please prepare a report stating the facts as you see them, and your proposal for starting the educational program.” Canton would be

lying if he did not admit to himself that he was proud of Dulcie for coming to the conclusions she had. Her advice to start small and build up was wise. It would also give them a chance to see if the program was working before they invested heavily into it. He also felt that those men who had children they refused to support should be punished and given a chance to seek employment. If they did not do so within a short amount of time, then they should not be permitted their freedom and assigned to a work program run by the government, with all of their salary going to pay for their children's care.

## Chapter Five

Dulcie was shocked to realize they were already back to the State Buildings, but it was only seconds before they were parked by the door. Her parent opened the door for her on his side of the vehicle and Dulcie got out, very reluctant to be alone with Canton, but it was still early in the afternoon and she was aware he had appointments.

“I am sure the guest apartment is all prepared for your use, King Betarn. Dulcie and I will show you there so you can rest from your journey. Dinner is in three hours and we shall come to pick you up and escort you to the dining room.”

“I look forward to a nice bath and a nap,” Betarn said with a smile. “Young lady, you apologize to your husband for frightening him.”

“I will, Papa,” Dulcie dutifully promised and then stood on tip toe to kiss her father’s cheek. “Thank you for coming all this distance to see me, Papa!”

“I missed you, daughter, and wanted to be sure you are happy in your new life. I can see your husband is smart enough to put you to work and give you something to do. I am not so sure I care for the dresses the women wear here, however. I prefer the long skirts of home.”

Dulcie giggled. “I had a problem getting used to them at first, but now that I am used to wearing them, I do not mind.”

Betarn smiled and then entered his apartment. He did look very tired and Dulcie was concerned. “Papa does not travel often because it wears him out. Do you suppose I should ask a Healer to examine him?”

“If he is ill, he will speak up, Dulcie. Some rest will make him feel better, I am sure.” He took her hand in his. “We have a matter to discuss, do we not?”

Her face flooded with color. “I am very sorry you were worried, Canton, but I admit that I did disobey you.”

“Did I not warn you it could be dangerous out there?”

“Yes, you did, but I am not like the women of Anopy. I am not helpless. Besides, I had Nurick with me, and he was vigilant. Yalmon was looking for trouble, but I have bested bullies before.”

“That is not the point, wife. The point is that you were told not to go there without me, were you not?”

“Yes, Canton,” she admitted. “I am sorry for your worry and concern.”

“I know you mean that, but you are not sorry for your disobedience, are you?”

“Only in that it has upset you. I felt the need to see for myself, and to speak with the ones we wish to help. I knew your schedule was completely full and I did not wish to nag. Still, I made the decision to disobey your wishes.”

“Do you agree you have earned a spanking?” he asked, wanting to be sure they were in agreement.

“I may have earned one but that does not mean you need to give me one,” she answered.

“Yes, I do need to spank you, wife. When you disobey me, it will always be punished. Go into our chamber and remove your clothing and put your nose in the corner. I want you to think about what might have happened if every one of those men with Yalmon decided to help him teach you a lesson.”

Dulcie did not want to obey Canton. She especially found standing in the corner to be frustrating and a waste of her time. However, she did as she was told, removing her clothing and moving to the corner to stand there completely nude. She hoped Canton would not keep her standing there very long. It was taking every ounce of her patience to stand there and keep her head bowed and appear penitent. Dulcie had no doubt that she would be penitent once the spanking started. Canton’s hand was hard and would make her sting. She would also have to go to dinner and sit there as if nothing was wrong. Ten minutes later she was growing very impatient. Thinking about the other men with Yalmon was pointless. She was capable of defending herself. She knew that; her father knew that, but her husband did not.

Finally, a good twenty minutes later Canton entered the room. She heard him go to the drawer and heard it slide open and close. That did not bode well for her bottom. He had either the paddle or the cane! “Well, Dulcie, have you come to any conclusions you wish to share with me?”

“Yes. You were worried because you have never seen me train, husband. There were only three others besides Yalmon. I was in no danger. You may ask my father of this; he will support my claim, knowing I speak the truth. He would also chide me for disobeying you and tell me that he agrees with you in this matter. For that, I apologize. I should have asked you to assign someone you trust to take me about. That would have given you peace of mind.”

“You expect me to believe that you, as small as you are, could handle four men bent on harming you...?” Canton was incredulous.

“I know how that sounds, but yes, it is the truth.”

“You cannot escape me.”

“No, I cannot,” she calmly agreed. “I do not wish to risk harming you in any way. I never have, or you would have been buried on my father’s land.”

“Dulcie, I am not amused.”

“I am not trying to make you laugh. I know my capabilities; you do not. I was in no danger today. In fact, I am in more danger right now from your hand than I was from all four of those men put together.” The look in her lavender eyes was solemn and he could see she was telling him what she believed to be the truth.

“By the time this spanking is done, you will have no doubt as to what I think of your actions today. While you may believe you were safe, I do not. You are my wife, and you will obey the rules I make for your safety. Is that understood?”

“Yes, sir.” Her knees were trembling. He had taken the paddle from the drawer and she was certain he meant to use it. That thing delivered a terrible sting and if he used it very much she would not be able to sit down to eat dinner.

“Come here,” Canton ordered, taking a seat on the side of the bed. Dulcie did as he asked, and he was positive she was trying to minimize the punishment with her obedience. “Over my lap,” he instructed.

Dulcie closed her eyes, swallowing hard. She took another step toward him, biting her lower lip. “I am trying but my legs will not cooperate,” she whispered. He offered her his hand and she put hers in his. He gave her a gentle tug and she landed right where he wanted her. Dulcie did not have a moment to catch her breath or to worry about how hard he would spank. Canton started the very second she landed over his knee, giving her rounded cheeks spank after spank. She made an effort to lie still and accept the spanking, but it was difficult to do. It hurt and within a short time, her butt was burning and felt scalded. He spanked lower, making sure her sit spots regretted her behavior.

Finally, Dulcie could not stand any more and she begged Canton to stop. She told him she was sorry, but the punishment seemed to go on and on. “No more, Canton! I cannot bear this another second!”

“I cannot bear it when you disobey me, wife.” He picked up the paddle and Dulcie cried out in pain from the first crack on her reddened skin. “You are not to disobey me again.” He gave her another hard crack, on her left cheek.

“Please stop! I am sorry! I promise I will not do it again!” Another hard crack, this time on her right cheek. Dulcie started sobbing so hard she could not speak. The paddle continued blistering her scorched skin until she had received a full twenty-five.

Canton hated making her cry in pain, but he needed to make the lesson sharp so she would remember the next time she was tempted to ignore his wishes and do as she pleased. Of course, with her father here, she was liable to decide that she had had enough of his husbandly lessons in obedience and decide to go home. He prayed she would not.

Dulcie felt herself lifted and gently placed on the bed. Canton continued to rub her back and talk to her, telling her it was all over and that she was forgiven. Still, she continued to cry. The spanking hurt terribly, and burned so much she could not imagine sitting down to eat dinner, no matter how hungry she was. She would simply have to excuse herself tonight.

“You have over an hour to lie here and rest before you need to dress to go to dinner, Dulcie.”

“I am not going,” she declared, feeling sorry for herself.

“Yes, you will go. It is only right since your father is here.”

“Then you should have had more care when punishing me. I cannot sit down. My skin is burning from the paddle.”

“I only gave you twenty-five. That is a mild lesson, wife.”

“Maybe to women who are used to being spanked, but I am not! I have told you this before. I feel ill from the spanking.”

“Once you have rested for a while, this will pass.”

“No, it will not! I am not going to dinner this night. My decision is made.”

“You are sulking and pouting, and my Dad’s cure for that would be another sound spanking, perhaps with the cane...?”

“No!” Dulcie was horrified at the suggestion.

“Then I suggest you pull yourself together right now and get your attitude in check. I will not tolerate childish sulking.”

“What about what I will not tolerate, Canton?” she demanded and then picked up a pillow and covered her head.

Canton forced himself to leave the room. This was not the time to lose his temper. Dulcie never reacted well to a spanking. This was one more example of her temper, only this time he would not permit her to provoke him in return. The next hour passed slowly. He went into the bed chamber a couple of times to check on Dulcie and each time he was shocked by the sight of her bottom. Darcy’s skin was sensitive, but perhaps the last ones

with the paddle were too much. He could feel the heat radiating from her skin. He heard her moan when she turned over in her sleep and then she was on her feet, running for the bathing chamber. She emptied the contents of her stomach while Canton held her hair back and out of the way.

When she was done, he filled a glass with water and had her rinse out her mouth.

“I am sorry, Canton,” she whispered. “I suddenly felt sick.”

“Is it the pain from the spanking?” he asked, feeling terrible.

“No. Nurick and I stopped for something to eat, and it tasted funny. He complained, too. I hope he is not ill...” She was pale. Canton helped her back to bed and put a gown over her chilled body before putting a quilt over her.

“You rest,” he ordered. He immediately sent for a healer and called to check on Nurick, and was told he was ill. “I will send a healer to him,” Canton promised, and made another call, requesting help for his friend.

The door chimed and Canton asked Healer Madorina to come inside. He led her into the bed chamber, only to find that Dulcie was in the bathing chamber, throwing up again. The healer gave Dulcie something soothing to drink, and she was soon sound asleep. “The symptoms will pass by the time she wakes, Leader Canton. She should rest in bed tonight and tomorrow, and I will come and check on her.”

“Thank you, Healer Madorina,” Canton said in relief. He walked her to the door, and then called and asked for two dinner trays to be sent to his apartment. “My wife is ill, so her father will be joining me for dinner. Will you ask Representative Dantonne to lead the meal this evening?” The man on the other end promised. Canton checked to make sure his wife was sleeping and he hurried to get the King.

“Are you sure she is not poisoned?” the man asked fearfully.

“No, she is ill from something they put in the food. So is Nurick. The healer gave her something to make her sleep, and she is to stay in bed all of tonight and tomorrow.”

“Dulcie will not like that,” the King predicted.

Dulcie was too ill to argue that night, but when morning came, she felt much better and wanted to rise. “Why should I stay in bed?” she asked with a frown.

“Because Healer Madorina said you should,” he answered, and then added, “and because you would not appreciate another spanking for disobedience so soon.”

“No, I would not,” she admitted. “That really hurt, Canton.”

“It was supposed to hurt; it is meant to discourage you from doing something so dangerous again.” When she looked at him with hurt-filled eyes he added, “I did not enjoy making you cry in pain.”

“My butt is very sore today,” she declared.

“Then be thankful you get to stay in bed instead of having to sit on a chair in the dining room.”

“I wanted to be there when you introduced my father!” she said with a pout.

“As you will be. He took dinner with me last evening, and everyone was told you were ill.”

“Oh. I do feel much better today.”

“I am thankful for that, little Princess. Nurick is sitting up in bed, too. It is fortunate that neither of you ate much of that tainted food.”

“Do you not have appointments?” Dulcie asked suddenly.

“I had Zequor cancel them. My wife is much more important than discussing state matters or private concerns.” The chimes sounded. “Perhaps that is Healer Madorina...?” Canton said as he hurried to answer the door.

He was back in a couple of minutes, but instead of Healer Madorina, it was Representative Dantonne. She was carrying a small basket of flowers, which she sat on the bedside table. “You look so pale, Princess Dulcie. I hope you are feeling better?”

“I am feeling better, but my husband is insisting I stay in bed,” she said with a pout.

The other woman smiled. “He loves you and is taking good care of you. I just stopped by to wish you well. If there is anything that either of you need, please feel free to call on me.” She did not stay, but let herself out.

“This was nice of her,” Dulcie said, reaching out to touch one of the blooms.

“You have impressed her with your willingness to help the people of Anopy.”

“They are good people. Some of the customs still seem strange, but I am sure they would feel equally out of place at times in my father’s kingdom.”

King Betarn came to see her and shook his finger and told her she was to obey the healer. She told him she had little choice in the matter, given the fact her husband stayed right at her bedside. “He loves you, daughter.”

Healer Madorina finally came to check on her patient and only smiled and shook her head 'no' when Dulcie asked to get out of bed. "The medicine I gave you is very strong, Princess Dulcie. You may get up tomorrow morning if you are feeling fine."

"But, I want to spend time with my father!" she argued.

"I am sure Leader Canton will permit him to visit with you here," the gentle woman said with a smile.

"He is treating me like a babe!" Dulcie pouted, glaring at him.

"He merely loves you, and is doing his best to be a good and caring husband. You get plenty of rest now and no more fussing."

Dulcie finally fell asleep but Canton could not help but wonder if she heard the three separate people tell her that he loved her. He did love her, and he was sure she loved him. What would he do if she decided to leave with her father in a few more days?

Dulcie was sad as she packed a bag. It was full of things she would never use on Anopy and she decided to get them out of her way and send them along with him, but it was breaking her heart to see him go. She truly loved her parent. She lifted the bag and hurried to take the bag to the transport hauling him to the ship returning him to his lands.

"You were going to leave without saying goodbye?" Canton asked, his voice hoarse with tears as he looked from the bag to her, his own eyes full of sadness.

"Leave...?" Dulcie looked at him in surprise and disbelief. "And where would I be going?" she asked.

"I saw the bag and thought you were going to leave with your father. You mean, you are not leaving me?" he asked.

"Canton, I know you love me, so why is it so difficult for you to believe I love you?" she asked. "I have told you so..."

"But the thirty days is up today. I promised you that you could leave if you wished."

"Oh, you may be a smart man when it comes to running a country, but you are blind when it comes to women. Did you think I could leave after we made love so many times? I would not share your bed if I did not love and respect you. I cannot promise I will be easy to live with, my darling husband, but I promise you I made my choice when I permitted you to take me from my land and bring me here. It is you I love and would have father my children."

Canton did not care who was watching. He picked up his little Princess and kissed her tenderly, cherishing her as never before.

King Betarn mentally patted himself on the back. His problematic little princess was well loved. What more could a father ask for...?

The End

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