**Linda's New School**  
by Joreymay

**Chapter 1: Why?**

What makes a girl like Linda turn out the way she did? A child of privilege, sent to all the right schools, and all the right activities, with all the right people? Did she learn too little, or altogether too much?

Why was she caught trying to steal a bottle of scotch from a high street off-license in her home town? It couldn't be a matter of money. Her father, a highly successful lawyer, and her mother, a prominent business executive, made sure she had access to plenty of that. It wasn't some lack of intelligence. She had excelled in all her classes at school until recently, and even with the minimal effort she was expending now she was well ahead of most of her classmates. She certainly wasn't uncomfortable about her looks. Even though she tended to dress down when out with her newer friends, the fifteen year old's English-rose complexion, sparkling emerald eyes, and impish little smile had melted the hearts of her parents and most other authority figures who had tried to control her.

So why was she slumped in the back of a police car, with nothing but the clothes on her back, headed for some school she had never heard of?

Some people thought they knew the answers. It was clear that she was impatient with the status games and values of the other students at the expensive girls' school she attended. And that she had little real respect for authority. To some people in the school and community, her attitude was altogether too reminiscent of the ruthless arrogance of her parents in their respective fields. To her parents, it had to have something to do with those council estate ruffians she had fallen in with.

They were all right. And they were all wrong.

She had found her new friends a refreshing change of pace from the stuck-up, obsessive girls at school. While she could, and sometimes did, dress up and act like nobility, she was far more comfortable in her scruffiest denims, acting out her tomboy nature in the streets and parks of her home town. Her new friends accepted her for who she was. And their exploits were far more interesting than the more socially-acceptable classes and entertainments her parents pushed her into. But they weren't angels. Under their influence, she eventually graduated to less acceptable behaviours such as drinking outdoors and petty theft. It wasn't that she couldn't afford the things she stole, or even that her friends couldn't. But there was the excitement, the challenge. And sometimes, unpleasant things happened to them. On the other hand, sometimes she could use her parents' name to make good things, like part-time jobs, happen for some of them.

Inevitably, she caught the attention of the police. The first time they had escorted her home had been somewhat embarrassing, and the shocked reactions of her parents had been an unpleasant surprise. But it didn't take too long before she regarded her occasional brushes with the law as little more than minor inconveniences. Her parents' influence and money kept things from getting too serious.

But there were limits to what they were willing to deal with. The exercise of that influence had a price, and they were tired of paying it. They were quite aware of the possibility that her misbehaviours could damage their careers, and that if things got much worse they might not be able to keep things quiet. They started exploring their options.

This time may have been too much. She had already been in trouble for swearing at a teacher, and it took a lot of talking (and a healthy donation) to keep it out of her school record. Her parents knew something had to be done, and started making preparations. Unpleasant preparations. Then she got caught with the scotch. The magistrate at the youth court was leaning toward something more concrete than the verbal warnings and lectures she had received, but her counsel convinced him that a period of remedial schooling, away from the comforts of her home and the influences of her newer friends, was the best way to go.

The judge added the condition that she immediately would be escorted to her new residence: the Sands Reform School for Girls. Told that her clothes and other possessions would follow her, she bid a sullen farewell to her parents. If she noticed the triumphant gleam in the look they exchanged, she ignored it. As she turned to go, she stumbled into the person sweeping the hallway. Untangling herself, she was quickly escorted away by a policeman and a policewoman.

This was the part that worried her. Until now, she had been in control, and knew the limited responses her little acts would engender. But now she was on her way to live somewhere she had never heard of, somewhere guaranteed to be less pleasant than her large, comfortable room at home. And she was going there without any of the electronics and things that usually made car trips bearable. And she didn't have any idea how long they planned to keep her in that place.

The young WPC in the front of the car noticed her shocked and depressed expression, and tried to engage her in friendly conversation. Feeling it was important to maintain her image of helplessness and hopelessness, Linda remained slumped and responded with little more than grunts. When those efforts at conversation flagged, She asked where they were taking her. The WPC gave her a mysterious smile and told her not to worry.

**Chapter 2: Arrival**

Two hours later, the car was passing through a heavily wooded area. It slowed, then turned through an unmarked gap in the trees. The track was barely drivable, covered in spots with a thin layer of gravel, and pitted with muddy potholes. As the line of vehicles which had queued up behind them sped up again, the police car slowly bumped its way through the woods and up to the looming front of a sombre looking Victorian manor house, complete with gloomy windows and peeling paint.

The policeman remained in the car and kept the motor running as the WPC freed Linda and pointed her toward the front door. Wearing that mysterious little smile, she stroked Linda's short hair and affectionately told her to ring the bell and she would be taken care of. Linda shook herself free, and the WPC got back into the car and left.

Linda's first thought was to turn around and follow the car out of there, but she knew she couldn't really act on it. As she stood there wondering whether the house was as haunted as it looked, the door burst open. The tweed covered apparition which emerged almost convinced her it was. She was the image of the no-nonsense housekeeper from the old movies, with her muscular arms and legs and impeccably groomed steel grey hair. She smiled in a professional manner as she walked up to Linda.

With a booming voice, she exclaimed "You must be Linda, the new girl. Excellent! My name is Miss James. I am your new headmistress. Welcome to Sands", as she placed a beefy hand on Linda's shoulder and guided her briskly towards the house.

Linda found herself propelled up the walk, through the door, and into an enormous, dimly lit forier. She wondered whether she would be marched up the polished wooden stairway , which dominated the room. At least up there were windows, however small, to let the light in. The solid front door closed with an ominously reverberating thump.

"This way, dear. Come along," the redoubtable Miss James encouraged. "You will be needing your uniform, then you can start your classes."

Linda had been less than thrilled with her previous school uniforms. She shuddered to think what monstrosities this prison would force her into. She found herself hustled along the hardwood floor of a gloomy passage, into a wider, brighter hall flanked by well lit classrooms. At the end of the hall, she was swung to the right and almost collided with a group of girls. Their uniforms were worse than she imagined, navy blue in an antique cut, with white blouses and school ties patterned in depressing colours. To finish the look, sturdy black brogans and straw hats. Ugly, she had imagined. But these girls looked like poster children for the late nineteenth century.

"Ah, excellent," the headmistress exclaimed, "Classmates of yours from 4C. Girls, this is your new classmate, Linda Magnesson. She is joining you for the rest of the term. I am confident that you will make her welcome here. Victoria Gilbert, what is your next lesson?"

The curvaceous young redhead promptly replied "PE, Miss James."

"Very good. Nothing like a bit of exercise to work out the knots of a long journey. That class does not require a uniform, so go ahead and follow these girls. You can join Miss FitzGibbon in the gymnasium. Then you can report to matron afterwards to have a check-up and pick up your kit. Run along now girls, don't keep Miss FitzGibbon waiting!"

As she watched the headmistress march away, Linda was a bit surprised. The girls were not what she had expected. While their antique uniforms and plaited hair were more suited to an historical melodrama, the girls themselves seemed cheerful enough. Dressed more reasonably, they could be in any other school she had visited. She did not trust them enough to completely lower her guard, but smiled and politely replied to the inevitable questions.

They entered the changing room, joining a dozen others who were in the process of getting ready. Victoria seemed to have decided to take Linda in tow, and showed her to a bench with a vacant peg. Then she turned and started undressing.

"O. K. Where do they keep the gym kits?" Linda asked her mentor.

"There aren't any. They say it would be a waste of money. We have to do PE in our underwear. Miss FitzGibbon says it's much better for us to go barefoot and to be able to move around freely."

"She's never heard of Athlete's foot?"

"It's not that much of a problem here. And since it's girls only around here, nobody really bothers too much what they wear in the gym".

It bothered Linda, though. Casual dress was one thing, but this was taking it too far. Despite her good physical condition, she had never really liked PE. She was a bit of a prude, as well. Especially when it came to changing and showering with other people. When she was younger, she had developed early but unevenly. At a time when most of the girls were still quite flat, she was, of necessity, wearing a bra. And she still had occasional nightmares about the ways they taunted her about it. Especially the time in the changing room, when one girl had grabbed her bra and dashed out the door with it. Barefoot, and naked from the waist up, she had unthinkingly given chase. She realized her mistake as soon as she had burst into the hallway, running into a crowd of people, students and teachers alike. She covered herself with her arms and tried to get back through the door, but several girls were leaning against it on the other side and she couldn't budge it. She finally got back in and finished dressing, sans bra, after a teacher stepped to the door and ordered it released. She felt exposed for the rest of the day, even with the rest of her clothes on. And many of the other girls treated her as though she was still topless, taunting her. And then the missing garment had reappeared, on the Founder's Bust at the front entrance. She had been called to the office to explain how it had gotten there.

That teasing still haunted her when she had to do things like gymnastics or dance in what amounted to an extra thin swimming costume. Especially because anything which was, or wasn't, worn under the thing was clearly visible in form if not in colour. And even more so when she was doing so barefoot, as she had been in that hallway. And now she would be wearing even less, in front of a group of complete strangers!

She knew she was trapped, and would stand out even more if she didn't get ready. First, she pulled off her warmup hoodie and hung it on the peg. She stepped out of her laceless trainers, and used her foot to shove them against the partition. She worked her loose denims down past her hips, then sat on the bench. After peeling off her socks and dropping them in her trainers, she pulled her denims the rest of the way off, and hung them over the hoodie. Flinching as her feet met the cold concrete floor, she stood and removed her T-shirt and hung it with the rest. She quickly sat back down, clamped her thighs tightly together, and folded her arms across her chest.

Looking around, she noticed that she was still at odds with the class. Apparently, the Sands uniform extended through to the skin. The others were wearing oversized navy blue knickers and a sort of heavy vest that reminded her of the whalebone corsets of another time. The vests seemed designed to conceal all signs of development above the waist. Quite a contrast to the white cotton bra and well worn boy-cut briefs she was reduced to. She noticed the girls darting covert glances at her and talking in excited whispers, reminding her even more of the Day of the Disappearing Bra.

She was jolted out of her memories when an athletic young woman strode into the changing room and clapped her hands to gain the attention of the class. She seemed no more than twenty-five, and her blond hair was pulled back from her crown and nape in a severe looking bun. Her eyes were a striking blue-grey and their coldness was complemented to perfection by a cruel little smile that seemed to be fixed permanently on her thin lips. Her attention went almost immediately to the new girl, fidgeting nervously on the bench and whose face and neck were rapidly turning a striking colour.

"You will be the new girl, Linda Magnesson", she spoke rapidly in iron tones that left no doubt that she was in charge. "The headmistress has just informed me of your arrival. Why are you incorrectly dressed?"

Linda knew that this was where things could get dangerous. She would have to play things just right. "Sorry Miss Gibbon," she stammered, unable to keep a vivid image of a monkey out of her mind. She used the tension of trying not to respond to that image as a way to help herself look confused and overwhelmed. "I've only just arrived and Miss James said I was to collect my uniform after the lesson".

"You will kindly note for the future that my name is /Fitz/Gibbon, girl. Well, we obviously cannot argue with the headmistress, but I will not tolerate girls coming to my lessons dressed like tramps, no matter how much that may fit their character. Remove those slutty rags at once".

Linda reacted as though she had been slapped in the face. She had just endured the indignity of stripping down to her smalls in public and now this woman, not much older than herself, was apparently telling her that she would have to go into the gym wearing nothing but her birthday suit! She acted shocked and said nothing.

"Come along girl, I haven't got all day. We've much to get through in this lesson".

Linda had a good idea what kind of lesson she really had in mind, but continued to play the part. The nudges and scarcely stifled giggles emanating from other members of the class confirmed that she had not misheard. And that this was not unexpected. If she was going to be forced to centre stage, she was going to give them the show they wanted.

"If you fucking well think I'm going to take off my clothes for your perverted little lesson, you must be even more of a fucking lunatic than I thought!"

Miss FitzGibbon barely raised an eyebrow at this outburst, too experienced to lose control of the situation that easily. "Kindly moderate your language when speaking to me, young lady. You will do what I have asked you to do in the next ten seconds or I will come over undress you myself, and believe me you will like that even less. Don't be such a silly girl. Do you imagine I, or any of your classmates, have never seen a bare bottom before? We take pride in our appearance in this school and girls who are unable to obey simple rules go without uniforms at all. Why do you think you should merit special treatment?"

There it was, the rest of the setup. An excuse for the teacher to assault and strip her, and a demoralizing vision of a future filled with naked humiliation. It was time to bring things to a head. "Do you think it's my fault that I haven't got any fucking uniform. Just fuck off, you fucking lesbian!" she screamed, rising from the bench and planting her feet in a seeming show of defiance.

The impassive teacher said nothing but strode over to the furious girl and laid a powerful hand on one pale shoulder. With the other she spun her around and whipped down the white knickers in a single movement so deft that Linda had no chance to protest.

**Chapter 3: Flashback**

Time stopped. Linda was back in the alley, hiding with her friends as they saw the assault. The man, who Linda recognized as a powerful politician, had dragged the girl into what he thought was a deserted alley, his hand over her mouth. Linda didn't recognize the girl, but looked on in horror as he blindfolded and gagged the frightened girl, then yanked down her panties, rolled a condom on one handed, and raped her. When he was finished, he choked her until she fell limply to the ground. He removed the blindfold and gag, stuffed the panties in a pocket like some sort of sick souvenir, and left. As soon as he was out of sight, she crept out and checked the girl. She was breathing, barely. She heard his voice again, just outside the alley. He was using his cell to report having found the body. He claimed to have seen another person run out of the alley, just as he had approached. Linda flashed her friends the code for "police on the way", and they quietly made their way out of the alley by a hidden route.

Curious, Linda went around to the front and stood there watching all the excitement. Once the police knew who he was, they fell all over each other to do what he wanted. He gave a brief description of the person he had supposedly scared off, a description so broad it would fit half the men in the area. He claimed to have checked her neck for a pulse, but failed to find one. Finally, he offered to cooperate in any reasonable way, but asked them to keep his name out of the papers. They were eager to accommodate him.

She lived through the experience, but two weeks later she had committed suicide.

Linda was shaken to her core. She had learned, in no uncertain terms, that there were people for whom morality and the law were largely irrelevant. Worse, she recognized her own parents as being among them. And she recognized that her schoolmates mostly fell into one of two groups. Either they were consciously in the same category as her parents, and acting on it, or they were largely clueless and obsessed with trivialities. And some of the teachers were worse, obsessed with what little power they had, and routinely abusing that power. That was when she largely lost her interest in school and her schoolmates.

That was when she started joining her friends in their drinking.

But she had another lesson to learn. Some of her friends had known the girl, and liked her. They started gathering information, and had her gather everything she could about him. About a month later, while he was abroad at an international conference, the police were called to investigate a break in at his house. They found his safe opened and emptied, a few areas of destruction where it looked like someone was trying to find hiding places, and one slightly open panel in his bedroom. Behind the panel, they found a collection of girls' and women's panties and bras, carefully stored in individual plastic bags. One of the younger policemen thought he recognized one of the pairs, and suggested they run tests.

The tests found his fingerprints on the bags and on some of the garments. The other garments did not hold fingerprints. But they did yield DNA samples. Some clearly belonged to him. One set belonged to the dead girl. Others to other rape victims, and one to the daughter of a leading MP. The incident never made it into the press, but the announcement that he was retiring from public life, effective immediately, did.

Surprisingly, Linda learned of it two ways. On the same day her parents dropped some hints that his days of power were over, one of her new friends passed on what his older brother had passed on to him. His older brother, the policeman.

Over that same month or so, she became more aware of some of the rumours at her school. When she heard a couple of classmates exchanging descriptions of the harrowing experiences of cousins of theirs at some mysterious school, she started paying attention. At first, it sounded like the kind of fantasy teenage girls like to horrify each other with. Descriptions of old fashioned uniforms, forced nudity and other humiliating punishments, and sadistic teachers just seemed too out of place to be believed. But the more she listened, the more consistent the stories were.

A girl of a "good family" was misbehaving. She was on the verge of becoming a major embarrassment to her family. She finally went one step too far, and was exiled to the mysterious school. She was deprived of her possessions, even her clothes, and cut off from all outside contact. She was subjected to intense and protracted humiliations.

Here the stories diverged somewhat. Some of the girls had resisted or fought back. They were either returned home in disgrace or subjected to even more intensive punishment. Those returned home were punished in other ways. Some girls returned for another reason: they had suffered complete breakdowns. They ended up under medical care, sometimes for a very long time.

One of the things that caught her attention was the description of the ways the girls had changed. Many of them sounded a lot like the rape victim, before she killed herself. Linda didn't think that those girls could all have made that up that well.

She started to ask questions. Nobody knew the name of the school. Nobody knew where it was, although some said it was in a creepy old mansion a long drive away from there, in a place surrounded by trees. Nobody knew who was behind it, but some claimed it was some unnamed Very Important People.

It sounded like something the Fallen Statesman would be involved in.

Some of the cousins or sisters who had been there briefly were around. They didn't like to talk about it, but maybe she would be able to talk to some of them. She did speak with some of them, after slowly gaining their confidence. They were consistent in some ways, such as their descriptions of their first day at the school and their refusal to say the name of the school. About the latter, some claimed they just couldn't stand to think about the name, much less say it. Others claimed to be afraid what the backers would do if they told. She had a lot to think about.

She had learned a lot about power in a short time. She learned the overt power of people in high places, and the blind arrogance of many who wield it. She learned the covert power of people in low places, and the subtlety with which they can wield it. She learned more about the power of money. And she learned the power of one person.

Meanwhile, she used her own money and some of her influence to arrange for her friends to get more intensive training in combat techniques and other useful skills, without any record of such training. And she took the training herself. She wasn't some martial arts master out of the cinema, but she could defend herself in most circumstances. She had already learned a lot from her friends, but they helped her refine various knowledge and skills.

She used her name to help friends, and relatives of friends, to get jobs in useful places. Some of them tried to get her the records of the girls she had interviewed, but they were unable to. Others were in a position to act if she ever needed their help. Few of them had any real authority, but they had access to things.

Within a few months, she was regarded as somewhat of a leader among her friends. Yet another kind of power. In fact, she had a lot of power, but didn't know how to wield it all. She needed lessons in the exercise of power, and a place to experiment. She pushed her limits, and those of her community, in an attempt to force her parents into using their power in ways she could study. And she was wildly successful. She also knew them well enough that they would eventually find an excuse to send her someplace isolated, somewhere where her behaviours would not continue to inconvenience them.

Somewhere she could experiment with using her power, even though she was supposed to be powerless. Especially because she was supposed to be powerless.

Somewhere like the mysterious School.

So she arrived at Sands, with a record showing a generally good girl, with no history of violence, serious crime, or even significantly antisocial behaviour. An intelligent girl of good, influential family, who was perhaps a little impetuous and a bit too easily influenced by the wrong people. A concerned girl, with advanced certificates in first aid and lifesaving. A girl who had apparently lost her motivation for schoolwork and the like. A perfect victim.

And so she found herself in the changing room. As she had been taught, she had thoroughly but discretely checked her immediate environment for obstacles, corners, and other potential hazards or weapons. And kept her awareness of them as she moved around. And kept her awareness of them when she felt herself being turned around and her panties being lowered.

**Chapter 4: Attacks and Coverups**

And as her body automatically reacted as she had been trained, grabbing the shoulder hand, moving one foot between her assailant's legs, squatting and turning past the intended point. This had the effect of throwing the woman across her body as she refocused her attention to the here and now. She guided the fall to make the woman's ribcage impact sharply on a corner of the bench and her head hit both the corner of the divider and the floor with a bone crunching thud. And all the while making it look like she had tripped and was now draped over Linda like a dead weight. As she struggled out from under the dazed teacher, she used her hidden hand to deliver a short, sharp blow to a nerve plexus, effectively paralysing her.

After gaining her freedom, she rolled the teacher on her back. She looked around at the other girls, who were frozen with shock. "She's unconscious, and it looks like she is badly hurt. You," she pointed at the girl closest to the door. "Run get Matron. Tell her the teacher tripped and is badly hurt. Then find Miss James and tell her that we will need an ambulance immediately. GO!" The girl jumped, spun around, and dashed through the door.

"You. Victoria. Take the other girls into the gym and have them run laps or something. Just keep them there until someone comes and gets you. The rest of you," She looked around at the other girls. "In a few minutes, there may be men in here. Stay in the gym and do what Victoria tells you, and everything should be alright. GO! NOW!" The others vanished.

She stood and put her hoodie back on. She made an educated guess about where the camera would likely be, and moved into position to partly block it. She squatted over the hand the woman had used on her panties. Using two fingers of that hand, she poked a large hole in the panties from the inside out, then ripped them open from there. Discarding them for a moment, She moved the hand up to where it would be somewhat visible, and pretended to try and find a pulse at the wrist. She shook her head, then seemed to get tangled as she put the arm down. In the process, she drew the middle finger to her labia and flinched as she scratched herself painfully with it. She then stood and pulled her jeans on and fastened them. She stuffed her torn underwear into a pocket, and slipped her feet into her trainers.

She had two more pieces to add to the picture. She checked the woman's mouth and found a superficial but copiously bleeding injury. She tilted her head so some of the blood ran out over the lips. Then she quickly reached a hand down the woman's waistband and checked her still-erect clitoris and moist labia. She pulled her hand free, untucking the blouse in the process. She quickly removed the woman's blouse and bra, exposing the damage to one breast and her ribcage. She then wadded the garments and slipped them under her head as a cushion. As she finished, she noticed that she was stirring.

Holding her hand over one of her own ears, she leaned close to the woman's head and quietly said "I know you can hear me. I could have killed you then. I still can. It could look like an accident or self defence. If you ever assault me or any friend of mine like that again, you will not live out the day."

Removing her hand from her own ear, she sat up and continued in a normal voice. "Can you hear me? You were badly hurt in that fall. It would be best if you didn't move. You might puncture an organ with a broken rib." She continued, as the door opened. "That fall could have killed you. Take it easy."

By that time, Matron was starting to kneel beside the fallen teacher. "What happened here?"

"While she was trying to rape me, she tripped or lost her balance and fell. She hit her head on the floor and her ribs and chest on the corner of the bench. She was unconscious for several minutes, and is coughing up blood. I was just about to check her ribs when you walked in."

"What do you mean by that nonsense about her trying to rape you?"

"She talked dirty to me, using sexual language. Then she demanded that I get naked for her. When I refused, she ripped my panties off and stuck her finger in my privates. From the way it stings, she must have cut me or something. Then she fell, pinning me under her."

As she gently probed the damaged ribs, Matron replied "Forget that rape nonsense. It didn't happen. And what are you doing in those clothes?"

With Matron looking at the fallen woman, Linda took something out from behind her ear and stuck it under the seat of the bench. "Since her injuries are that serious, there will probably be ambulancemen here soon. I wasn't going to meet them half naked, so I put the rest of my clothes back on. I haven't been given a uniform yet. And what do you mean the rape didn't happen? I was there, and it did."

"It could not have happened, so it did not happen. And you will get in a lot of trouble here if you spread such rumours."

"Does that mean you are not going to report her actions? Isn't that illegal?"

"Nonsense, girl. There is nothing to report. Except your assault on a teacher."

"My assault? She was the one who assaulted ME!"

"That is enough! You are here because of your criminal activities. If you think you can get out of this by attacking a teacher and making preposterous charges against her, you are very much mistaken. If you repeat your slanderous claims to anyone you will be severely punished."

"How many ribs are broken?"

"That is none of your concern. Now go to the Headmistress' office and wait for her."

"The ambulance people, and maybe the police, will want to talk to me."

"You are not going to speak to anyone. Now do as you are told!"

Linda grabbed her socks and made for the door. She ducked around a corner at the sound of heavy footsteps. When she heard the door open and then close, she continued on her way. She saw a group of girls in the hallway, and asked the way to Matron's office. They pointed the way, and she set off. As she had hoped, Matron had left so quickly the door was unlocked.

She entered the office, and saw a set of clothes on a chair. She noted that there were some small problems with the clothes, which she suspected would be used as another excuse to "punish" her. She quickly changed into them and rolled her own clothes into a small bundle. Moving to the desk, she found her file folder with its blank intake form. She grabbed a couple of examination gloves and a pen. Then she took another file from the pile on the desk and looked at the form from it. Carefully copying Matron's handwriting, she filled out the form, including the things she would have found in the examination. She was especially careful when copying the initials, signature, and the date (correcting it for the current day). She then put the folder on the stack marked "To Be Filed", two places below the top. She disposed of the gloves, grabbed her bundle and headed to the front door. En route, she stashed her bundle in a utility closet.

She got there just as an older girl was letting the ambulance crew in. She hurried up to them and offered to show them the way. As the other girl was about to speak, she continued, "I was there when it happened. And I was the one who suggested you be called."

They set off with her, easily matching her quick walk with their longer strides. On the way, she told them her story. They took particular note of the rape allegation and the description of the injuries. They asked her which hand the teacher had used, and she told them. She then produced the torn panties, and one of them sealed them in a plastic bag. She then slid the bag into a drawer of the medical kit her partner carried. As her partner closed the drawer, he failed to notice her handing Linda something, or Linda hiding it in her pocket.

She pushed open the door and they entered. Matron looked angry to see her there. "I told you to wait in the headmistress' office. What are you doing here?"

"I was trying to find it, when I saw them come in the front door. I guided them here and described what had happened. I figured it would save some time."

"You can't believe everything she says. Her court referral to this school makes it clear that she is not entirely trustworthy."

The ambulancewoman spoke up. "Are you saying that the injuries are not as she described them?"

"Without knowing what she said, I really couldn't say."

"Then let's take a look." She took her blood pressure, temperature, and a brief listen to her heart and lungs. She looked unhappy at the latter. She then gently probed the injured ribs. She verified the broken ribs and the probable punctured lung. They carefully strapped her to the stretcher, and took her out to the ambulance. The others escorted them there. Despite her lecture to Linda in the changing room, she was embarrassed to be seen topless by the male attendant and the two policemen who stood beside their car. Once she was secured in the ambulance, the male attendant started hooking her up to various units.

The ambulancewoman turned to the headmistress. "Now the other matter. Whether or not you find her trustworthy, she has reported an attempted rape. We are required to perform an examination and file a report. Just as you are required to file a report. I can perform the examination here, in your dispensary, or I can transport her to hospital and have her examined there. Given the nature of this facility, I would guess that you would prefer that I do it here." As she said this, the male attendant covered the patient's hands with examination gloves, and secured them with surgical tape.

"Yes, of course. It would be best to do it here."

"Would you like to be present for the examination?"

"Hey, don't I get any say in the matter?"

"No." They both answered.

The headmistress went on. "Of course I want to be there."

The ambulancewoman grabbed a special kit, then signalled her partner that it was ok to leave. He covered her body with a sheet, closed the door, and signalled the driver. The ambulance pulled away, but the police car remained. The four of them went to Matron's office. The attendant stopped Matron from entering. "You made statements which could be taken as an attempt to prejudice these proceedings. I cannot allow you in here for this."

"That is preposterous! This is my office, and medical issues are my job. You cannot keep me out!"

"I'm sorry ma'am, but you can not come in. If I must, I will call the police in and have you restrained to prevent your interference. Is that clear?"

"Just wait out here, Matron."

"Yes, headmistress."

"Miss James?"

"Yes, child?"

"Maybe Matron could go let the girls in the gym know that the men are gone?"

"Perhaps that would be for the best. Matron? Would you see to the girls, please?"

The woman closed and locked the door, leaving a fuming Matron in the hallway. After a moment, she turned and bustled purposely toward the gym.

"Where does Matron keep the gowns?"

"We do not have any. It did not seem necessary in an all female institution."

The ambulancewoman started a small voice recorder and gave the date and a string of numbers. "I guess we will have to do it the hard way, then. Please remove your clothes and stand at the end of the table. I will be recording this examination, and photographing any potential evidence."

Linda didn't like it, but she did so.

The woman noted minor bruising on the shoulder, consistent with the description of being held, and several other minor bruises consistent with the described fall. To Linda's surprise, she found a scratch on one hip, consistent with the described removal of the panties. With each notation, she took a photo with a macro setting on the digital camera and read off a number from its screen. She then told Linda to get up on the table, lay back, and lift and spread her legs. Linda did so, feeling extremely exposed. The ambulancewoman noted and photographed a scratch on her labia minora, consistent with the description. She couldn't help adding "That had to have hurt!"

Linda acknowledged "It really did. That was what made me jump, and probably what made her trip or whatever."

The woman told Linda she could get dressed, pulled out a clipboard, and used it to fill out a form. She signed it, then had Linda and Miss James sign and date it. She then dropped the pen in the holder on the desk. She then asked Miss James for Linda's medical file. She looked through the piles of folders, and found Linda's. She opened it, saw the filled-in sheet, and frowned.

"Well?"

"Here it is." She passed it over. After noting the examination record, she asked for a photocopy. Reluctantly, the headmistress complied. The attendant added it to her papers, and the headmistress returned the file to the stack.

Once she saw that Linda was dressed, she unlocked the door and allowed Matron to enter.

"There is certainly enough evidence to warrant a further investigation, in my opinion. The final decision will be made by the police and the prosecutors. I am required to warn you that any attempt to punish her for making this report, or to coerce her into recanting her accusation, or to deny her confidential access to legal counsel of her choosing, would constitute a felony irrespective of the outcome of any primary case. I have also noted certain statements by Matron which can be interpreted as having interfered with the process, specifically by illegally ordering the victim not to make the report. If such a prohibition is found to be a policy of this institution, you may be subject to criminal prosecution, civil penalties, and closure of this facility. I suggest you confer with your attorney at your earliest opportunity. Do you understand these warnings?" After everyone answered yes, she read another string of numbers into the recorder and shut it off. She separated the copies, and gave one each to Linda and Miss James.

"Well, that unpleasantness is done. Off the record, I feel I have to warn you that elections are coming up fairly soon, and certain officials would like nothing better than to turn this into a big, juicy scandal. So would certain publications. I really would advise getting the best legal advice you can, as soon as possible. Also, as a practical matter, you would do well to avoid doing anything to her which might be misinterpreted by the general public. In addition to the police, Social Services and the Ministry of Education might get involved. In that case, the chances of a leak skyrocket. Also, be very careful about her health and wellbeing. I would hate to see this place, and your personal reputations, destroyed by the criminal acts of a single rogue teacher. Do you have any questions?"

"No? Well, if you think of any, here is my card. Call me any time." She handed each of them her card. "Since the ambulance already left with your teacher, I guess I'll be riding back with the police." She turned to Linda. "Take care of yourself, sweetie. You did a good job with the first aid and the observations, under difficult circumstances. If you want a therapist to help you deal with this, I'm sure the school can provide you with one. If you just need someone to talk with, give me a call. I'm a good listener." She winked. "Would you like to walk me out?"

"Sure." Linda turned to the headmistress. "I will be back in a moment." She was relieved to know that the listening post in the woods was working, monitoring the listening devices she carried and those planted in the changing room and clinic.

"I will join you. The girl has scarcely been here longer than you have."

The ambulancewoman paused a moment, looking surprised. "Wow. So that was your welcome to the new school?"

"Pretty much." Linda responded, as they again moved toward the front.

"Rough. Well, I'm sure Miss James here will make sure things get better for you after this. There are a lot of groups who can help. If you need a sponsor, you know where to look." She made a small gesture for emphasis.

Linda nodded. "I'll keep that in mind." In particular, she would keep in mind that verification that His Lowness was one of the sponsors of the school.

**Chapter 5: Power Plays**

Once they closed the door behind her, the headmistress turned to Linda. "Now, before there are any more unfortunate incidents, I believe we should adjourn to my office." She held up her hand. "I will show you the way."

Taking Linda firmly by the arm, she bustled down a short corridor to a room at the corner of the building. Releasing her, she unlocked and opened the door. She gestured her through the door, then followed her and locked the door behind them. "Have a seat. I think it would be best to have a bit of privacy for this discussion."

As she moved to the windows and drew the curtains, Linda noticed her eyes in the glass. Clearly, she was covertly watching Linda as she sat. She steadied herself on the edge of the desk, and lowered herself into one of the available chairs. She noticed that the chairs were low enough to keep her a bit off balance. She also noticed that Miss James' chair was slightly elevated, to allow her to look down on most visitors.

As she moved to stand behind her desk, she began. "The time has come for a frank discussion of your situation. Wouldn't you agree?"

"In that case, the chair trick is a little old fashioned, don't you think?" Linda shifted easily from her uncomfortable, off-balance posture in the chair. She leaned back slightly, and stretched her legs out in an almost indolent show of relaxation. In the symbolic battle of status, her move was risky but effective.

"Posture, girl. I know you were raised better than that, despite your recent history of disrespect for authority."

"Oh, I'm sorry," with a clear lack of remorse. "I thought we were here to be frank, not to play pointless games." One side of her mouth quirked upward in an almost-smile. "You have some things you want to say to me. Why don't you just sit down and say them?"

"I am still headmistress of this institution, and you will address me with due respect." She glowered down at the girl.

"You are in danger of losing that title and finding yourself in another role at a related institution. How long do you intend to try fencing for advantage before you get to the point?"

"This is the kind of disrespectful misbehaviour that brought you here. Do you understand that?" Her voice deepened slightly, and became more resonant. "And do you understand that you will remain here, under my authority, until I say otherwise? And that, should I choose to expel you, you will find yourself again before the judge and in all probability be remanded to a much more disagreeable institution?"

"Oh, I would doubt that." she replied casually. "There are some things the judge takes much more seriously than my petty misdeeds. Especially after the events of the last year or so." The woman did not respond visibly to the last part, so she pressed on. "Rape, for one. Abuse under colour of authority is also high on his list." She reacted to that, but only to the apparent reference to the day's events and the inferred threat. From the reactions chasing each other briefly across her face, Linda suspected she was taping the discussion.

Miss James' next gambit seemed to confirm it. "I thought it would come to that. Next, I suppose, you will be telling me your demands. Alright, what would it take to ensure your cooperation in keeping this scandal from damaging this school?" She sank to her chair, in a feigned show of defeat.

"You do realize that even asking that question is probably a felony, don't you?" Linda countered. Before the headmistress could respond, she pressed on. "I have to wonder just how serious you are about this. You act like you are not aware of half the trouble you are facing. For instance, what do you think those ambulance people do when they are not on duty?"

With a puzzled look, "I would not venture to guess. But you somehow know? And their hobbies are germane to this discussion how?"

"The ambulanceman was wearing some discreet but expensive jewellery, and his shoes were custom made. You don't get that kind of money manning an ambulance. He is almost certainly an independent source for one or more publications. Probably the tabloids. I can see the headlines now: 'Exclusive School Hunting Preserve for Sexual Predators!' Hardly the sort of thing your supporters will want to be associated with."

Her face paled a little. "And the other, the woman?"

"From what she said, and how she said it, she probably spends at least twenty hours a week as an advocate or counsellor for rape victims. Maybe beaten women as well." Actually, Linda knew this to be the case. "For you, she is the dangerous one. You might be able to buy off the man, with money or access to other profitable stories. But she is an idealist, with a solid history of acting on those ideals. If anything were to happen to me, she would be the one leading the charge on your gates. There is only one way you could possibly buy her off, and I seriously doubt you would be willing to pay the price."

"And just what would that price be?"

"You would have to fire the rapist, and proclaim that she was acting on her own authority."

"She has a name, girl."

"Not to me. She lost that when she attacked me. You would have to actively aid in her prosecution, and renounce any use of forced nudity or other humiliation by the teachers and staff of the school. Would you really be willing to throw her to the lions like that, just to save yourself and your school?"

"To save the school? Absolutely."

"And would you do the same to Matron?"

"Matron? Why?"

"She made the mistake of showing her hostility and abusiveness in front of the ambulance crew. In the eyes of a rape advocate, ordering a rape victim not to report the crime is almost as bad as the rape itself. And she would always wonder how many other rapes and abuses Matron had acted to cover up. Of course, you could handle it a little more gently, announcing her resignation or retirement and then distancing yourself and the school from her. So, would you be willing to throw Matron to the lions as well?"

"If I thought it was necessary to do so to save the school, yes. I would. Now let me ask you something: even if the story were to get out, what makes you think anyone would take it seriously?"

"The ambulance crew already do. And when her hands are examined, they will find traces of my skin, my very tender skin," She shifted a bit in the chair, "and my blood under some of her nails. And probably some threads from my panties. But as a practical matter, they wouldn't have to. Just a hint of it would be a complete disaster for one of your more prominent supporters. Well, formerly prominent. And that, in turn, would be very bad for your other supporters and the school."

"What on Earth are you talking about, child?"

"I'm sure you know who I mean. Are you trying to tell me that you don't know why he suddenly left that conference and announced his immediate retirement from public life? And why he then ceased his overt support for this school?"

"Yes, I am saying that I do not know those reasons. And I suppose you do?"

"As a matter of fact, yes. He was a serial rapist, who drove at least one of his victims to suicide. He kept souvenirs of his victims. Those souvenirs were found while he was at that conference, and the forensics people tied them to several unsolved rapes. It was not necessarily enough to convict him in court, but the trial would have ruined him and the politically powerful people he associated with. They used their influence to keep it out of the courts, with several conditions. He resigned, and renounced public life. His victims, or their families, were compensated. He is undergoing intensive psychotherapy. And he must avoid any possibility of any related scandal. There are those who would literally kill him to avoid that last bit."

"And you know all this how?"

"One of his attacks was seen. A group of people were hiding in the alley he chose. I was one of them. I was the only one who recognized him, in fact."

"Did you report it?"

"Yes, but very quietly. I knew he had the money and power to buy his way out of it, and to possibly destroy my parents if he chose. The policemen I spoke with agreed that the case would have been weak at best, and helped me hide my involvement." She didn't feel the need to mention that one of them was the brother of one of her friends. "I didn't even tell my parents. When he fell, the police quietly let me know some of the details. When his associates learned of my role, and my discretion, my parents got certain advantageous business opportunities without knowing why. All I got was a little peace of mind. Very little."

The silence seem to stretch for a lifetime. Finally, "Very well. The situation is more serious than I had imagined, and you have it within your power to cause this school serious harm. What do you want?"

"For starters, some honest answers. It is perfectly clear that you deliberately engineered my humiliating experiences in the changing room and Matron's office, including that Victorian era physical exam..." Miss James gathered herself, as though she was going to object. Linda cut her off. "Please don't try to insult my intelligence. The only reason any girl would fall for that little pantomime of yours would be that she was already off balance from her trip here and was not thinking clearly. Nobody with a brain in her head would doubt that you knew my anticipated arrival time before I even left the court. Nor would anyone of your position and experience fail to know that class schedule, or to have the necessary clothes ready. And the attack rang false as well. My underclothes were quite ordinary and modest by current standards. But to hear her talk, you would have thought I was wearing a thong and a black lace peekaboo bra. And the whole scene didn't surprise any of the other girls. No, you had to have deliberately engineered the whole thing."

"And why would I do that?"

"And here I thought you were going to be honest. How disappointing. Clearly, you did so as a demonstration of the power of the teachers, as well as a way to further disorient, humiliate, and demoralize your newest victim. Pardon me, student. And it probably works, most of the time. But my first question, and you would do well to answer it honestly, is this: Was the rape attempt part of the plan, or was she adding to the script?"

"I am still not convinced there was a rape attempt. The normal pattern would have been to goad you into the confrontation, strip you, and then spank you in front of the other girls. I was not able to ask her, but I suspect that she was preparing to spank you when something shifted unexpectedly. Either way, rape was not any part of the 'script' as you choose to call it."

"And the whole business of sending the girl through the hall naked, and Matron's barbaric so-called physical?"

"Some of it is a real physical, as required by law. The rest, as you surmised, is to increase her humiliation and disorientation."

"What do you do with the girls it doesn't break?"

"That depends. Most are put into special groups and subjected to more experiences until they do break. Some reason is found to send the others back as unsuitable. I do not track what happens to them after that."

"And they don't tell anybody about your perverse little games?"

"They do or they do not. Most do not. They are aware that we have friends in high places. If they do, it merely sounds like the rantings of a spoiled child who is trying to blame us for her problems."

"So nobody believes them?"

"Only the people who already know. And they help us keep our proper image."

"And so you keep on turning out mixed batches of dispirited little sheep, sexual sadists with protective colouring, and broken toys."

She bristled at that, but thought better of it. "Perhaps. But we also take rebellious, unmotivated, disrespectful academic failures and create well behaved, academically superior students." The passion was rising in her voice. "If not for this school, many of those girls would have been dead, or in prison, or worse."

Linda was not impressed. "So you are saying there is something about this place that is worth saving." She shook her head. "I'll have to see that for myself. I haven't seen any signs of that so far."

"You are not in a position to judge. You have not attended a single class. You have not seen the older girls study. Or spoken with them. And you disposed of the only teacher you met."

"The rapist? If I had the power you seem to think, I would have killed her and called it self defence. I had her there, alone. Even I have seen enough television and taken enough first aid to know that I could have pushed her broken ribs through her lungs and maybe even her heart. She would have been dead before the ambulance could get here. No, I had the chance to dispose of her. I didn't. I sent for help, and did what I could to make her comfortable. She disposed of herself."

"I will reserve judgement on that." Her tone softened, to a semblance of reason. "So what happens now, child? Will you destroy this place, without having seen any of the positive? And what of the other girls? What do you suppose will happen to them? Some sort of fairy tale happy ending? No, you are too old, too intelligent for that. Or do you have that planned, as well?"

"Yeah, right. I somehow have this large organization of people in key positions, monitoring your phone lines and computers, using super spy gadgets to watch and record your every move, and just waiting for my signal to swoop down on this place. Sure I do. I am a fifteen year old girl who just survived a rape attempt in the first half hour I was here. I am figuring this out as I go along. But you are right about one thing. It is time to deal with a few things. If I don't call my parents before they get the reports, there will be hell to pay. They will take steps to cover themselves, and they won't care what happens to you or to the other girls. You know who they are, and more importantly, what they are."

She paused a moment to let it sink in. Then, "But first, I need some more specific tokens of good faith from you. I will need complete access to this place and the grounds. That means a set of keys. The ones Matron took from the rapist should do fine. More immediately, I need access to your monitoring facility."

"What are you talking about, child?"

"Since I arrived, I have seen at least three security cameras and a large number of microphones. There is a room here which allows one or more people to monitor those things. It probably also records them. I need access to that place right now. I need to be able to assure my parents that I have secured all such records of my day here, before someone thinks to erase them and claim they do not exist. It is only a matter of time before the police return with a warrant for them. You can keep the recording you have been making of our conversation here." She stood. "We should go now. If you don't have my keys here, we can pick them up after we visit that facility."

The headmistress looked at her for a moment. With a sigh, she pulled herself to her feet and moved to the door. She methodically unlocked and opened the door, followed Linda through it, then closed and locked it again. With Linda following close behind, she moved deliberately down the hall. As they ascended a rear staircase, Linda lost all doubt that she was stalling. She couldn't help the brief flicker of a smile at the thought. They were the off balance ones now. That recording might have helped them refute her charges if they had preserved it.

As they approached a door with signs which indicated a utility cupboard, she thought she heard a humming noise. It stopped just before they reached the door. Miss James carefully unlocked and opened the door. They stepped inside, facing a wall-sized panel covered with pegs and wires. She turned on a light, then closed the door behind them. The panel opened, revealing a room with several television-like monitors, and a variety of electronic equipment. With a glance, Linda decided that the equipment was not the newest or best, but probably more than adequate. They seemed to have both videotape and disk drives for their recording. She also noticed the high powered server computers in the corner. While that made her think of streaming video and audio, she decided against mentioning that suspicion just yet. The equipment in there might be generating too much interference for her poor little bug, anyway.

She told the woman at the controls to teach her how to operate the controls. Miss James nodded her agreement, and they went through the video, audio, and recording controls. She was a quick learner, and very little of it was really new to her. She also noticed that the technician made no mention of the computers. Nor did she mention the feed to Miss James' office. Linda flipped through the the feeds, noting the locations of some of the cameras.

She then demanded the recordings of the attack. As predicted, the technician claimed there were no such recordings. She claimed that a hardware failure had prevented it, and indicated a drive set tagged for repair. She offered to let Linda pop the tape and watch it from another drive. She went through the motions, knowing that she would find nothing.

She gave up and they left, returning to the headmistress' office. She remained standing as Miss James went around her desk, then "Now I will need the keys, and then we both have rather urgent phone calls to make."

The headmistress paused a moment, then shook her head and pulled a ring of keys from her desk and handed them to Linda. "There is a conference room next door. You may use the telephone there. As you correctly pointed out, I have some rather urgent business myself. Press 9 to get the trunk." With that, she sank in her chair, lifted the handset, and looked pointedly at the door.

Linda turned and left. She let herself into the conference room with only a little fumbling to find the right key. She locked the door behind herself, then sat and made her calls.

The first was to her father. She warned him the phone was not secure, told him about the rape and injuries, and mentioned that he should be receiving two sets of relevant documents any time now. Then she mentioned that the whole thing was quite volatile and could have a significant impact on some very prominent people, and suggested he get there as soon as he had the documents. She asked him to bring his confidential briefcase, a client cell, and her blue bunny and pink bear. She said they were her equivalents of the briefcase. She also suggested he have someone else drive, so he could study the documents.

Then her mother. She repeated the warning and description. She then told her that the situation could become another Harriman, referring to a time her mother engineered the takeover and restructuring of a company that was facing ruin due to an imminent scandal. She suggested that she have someone bring her as soon as she had the information she needed.

While she was talking on the phone, she dropped her free hand to her lap, dug a small object from her pocket, and stuck it to the underside of the table.

After the call, she returned to the door of Miss James' office and knocked, thinking the politeness would confuse her more. She waited until she heard "Enter," and went in. The headmistress was just finishing a call.

"Yes. I see. Thank you for your help in this matter. Yes. Goodbye." She put the handset down and looked up at Linda. "It would seem that you and that ambulancewoman were largely correct. Now, I have more calls to make. Here is the packet you would have received at the end of your classes today. It has your schedule, room assignment, and orientation materials. For obvious reasons, it stresses rules and discipline. You should find the information useful. Now please go and let me do my job."

"You should be receiving calls from one or both of my parents soon. And they will arrive here before the day is over. Try not to underestimate them. Even with your backers, either of them could eat this place for tea. Both, together, are much more formidable. Camera girl should have no trouble finding me when they come." The older woman bristled at the impertinent description, but said nothing as Linda left.

Linda opened the packet and looked at the schedule. She noticed that her group would be getting out of their last class of the day soon, and headed for that classroom. She had won the opening skirmishes, but she knew she was a long way yet from winning the war.

**Chapter 6: Allies**

As she walked down the hall, she noticed that the clocks in some of the classrooms disagreed with each other. In particular, the clocks in the empty classrooms displayed a later time than those in the occupied ones. She suspected that it was deliberate, yet another way to disorient and depress the students.

She also noticed that the girls ranged from stark naked to fully dressed. One of the naked girls was bent over a teacher's desk, her red-striped bottom facing the class. Another stood tearfully, head bowed, hands at her sides, while the teacher was saying something to her. Linda was determined that some things would change at that school.

Eventually, her classmates were dismissed. She walked up behind Victoria, linked arms with her, and began in conversational tones "So, are you going to show me to my room, or what?"

Victoria jumped. "I didn't expect to see you again! After all that, I figured they would get rid of you or something. What happened?"

"Miss FitzGibbon was taken away to hospital, after being taken to the ambulance naked from the waist up. There is a good chance she will face criminal charges for what she did to me. And Matron is in much the same position. Miss James is walking on eggshells, because if she does anything to me she could end up facing charges and the school could be shut down. Even the school's backers are spooked, because of the possible scandal. If I know my parents, we could end up owning this place."

"I've seen girls come here with that kind of confidence before. Sooner or later, they were either broken or sent away."

"Not this time. I mean it literally. My mother eats bigger outfits than this for breakfast. My father handles bigger legal challenges for highly placed people all the time. I really mean we could end up owning this place."

"Wow! So why are you still here?"

"It's going to take a while to get everything sorted out. I have some decisions to make, and I need more information. So, which would you rather see, changes or closing?"

"That depends. What kinds of changes? And what would happen to us if you closed the school? I don't fancy going to some prison."

"I really doubt it would come to that." She paused as they reached the utility closet. She retrieved her bundle, then asked "Which way to the room?"

Victoria told her it was up the stairs, and they resumed walking.

"We all are in here for some pretty small stuff. If the school closes because of the scandal, most judges will weigh the crimes of the school against yours, and see who the real criminals are. Probably ask whether you've Learned Your Lesson and then, if you don't smart off to him, let you off with time served. You might even get Victim's Assistance for what they did here. So, is there anything here worth saving?"

"Most of the teachers are not too bad. And we tend to do well on the comprehensives. If you got rid of the real sadists and perverts, and the whole humiliation thing, it might be an ok school."

They turned a corner in the hallway, and found themselves alone.

"Victoria, why were you there, waiting around that corner, when the headmistress brought me in?" This would tell Linda a lot about how far she could trust her.

"We were chosen. The same thing happens to every girl when she arrives. It is not wise to refuse an assignment they choose you for, even a dishonest one. Besides, I like meeting the new girls."

"Yes, but why you?"

"I honestly don't know. Maybe it is because I come across as friendly. They probably think it throws the new girl off guard, or something. I've been chosen a few times now. Here's the room."

"Which bed is mine?" She asked, as she looked around for the camera she knew would be there.

"This one. They gave you the one the sun hits in the morning."

"I see what you mean. Kind of them," she added sarcastically. Moving so her body blocked both the camera and the other girl, she stashed her bundle under the mattress. "And such a comfortable mattress. Are the lumps supposed massage my back or something?"

"Something like that. Seriously, they want you uncomfortable and off balance. They say you have to earn your comforts."

"Of course they do. Which dresser is mine?" She held her arms as though she was still cradling her bundle.

"You get the bottom drawer over there. It sticks, of course."

"Of course." Moving her body again as a shield, she opened the drawer with difficulty. She moved as though she was puting her bundle inside, then shut it.

"Now," she returned to the bed and sat. "After the PE attack and the so-called checkup, what other joyous experiences would I have had today?"

"As soon as you went to class in that outfit, you would have been stripped and punished for the missing buttons and the like. After attending the rest of your classes naked, you would have been sent to the supply room to 'explain why you could not take proper care of your clothes,' punished yet again as publicly as possible, and then given your real clothes and a lecture on taking better care of them."

"oh, joy. And later?"

"When you take your shower, your clothes would disappear and you would be last in line to share the towel."

"You \*share\* towels here? Ewww, gross."

"Gross is when you are last in line to share it. Makes you feel like you need another shower. But the scented powder helps a little. We share that, too."

"Wonderful. What else? Do they put something in the food?"

"I hear that they used to do something at meal time, but the mess got so bad that even a paid off health inspector couldn't overlook it. They will make you stand up and introduce you, but then it's time for food. It will be something hot and probably messy, because they expect you to be naked by then. If you are not, you will be after they catch you getting anything on your clothes. Either way, you will be encouraged to take that shower."

"Oh, how jolly. So after my clothes disappear, I have to go beg for more?"

"Pretty much. One way or another, your butt hurts so much by the time you get to bed you barely notice the lumps."

"And in the morning?"

"Nothing special. They probably figure the usual will be enough. We all go down to the pool for our morning swim. Naked. After we shower, we share the towels and powder again. Then we go back and get dressed. I think they want you nervous, wondering where the next thing will come from."

"Sounds about right. So when do we eat?"

"About an hour. Right after the daily Staff meeting."

"So I have time to get my clothes. Good."

"Not so good. The supply room is closed for the meeting."

"Even better." She pulled out the map in the orientation packet. "Where is the supply room? I would bet real money that this map is wrong."

"No bet. Another of their games. It's right there. What are you going to do?"

"You don't want to know. What would you be doing now, normally?"

"Homework, in the common room. There," she added, pointing to the map.

"Get going then. I'll see you at tea." They left, and she headed for the staircase with her envelope in hand. On the way, she passed a girl who was squatting, stark naked, in a corner of the hallway. She recognized her as the one she had seen in the classroom. As much as she wanted to help her, she knew she couldn't. Yet.

**Chapter 7: Dressing for Dinner**

It took her a few tries to find the right key to the door. Letting herself in, she closed and locked the door behind her. She went through the inner door, into the stockroom. Consulting the list, she helped herself to the appropriate clothes. She also grabbed a washcloth and towel for herself. Moving to the counter, she found a clipboard with a log sheet on it. She filled it in for the things she took, then left. She made sure the door was locked, then returned to her room. On the way, she noticed that the crying girl was gone.

Back at the room, she blocked the camera again as she opened the drawer and put the things away. She changed into proper clothes, and went in search of the common room. By the time she reached it, the others were getting ready for dinner. She found Victoria, and joined the others en route to the Refectory.

Once there, Victoria guided her to her seat. She noticed that, like the chair in the headmistress' office, this chair was a little smaller than the others. She looked at Victoria, who shrugged apologetically. The girls stood in front of their chairs, waiting. The faculty walked in and took their places at the head table. Once they sat, the girls sat. Linda was struck by the old fashioned formality of the ceremony. As selected girls brought food to the tables, the headmistress rose to make the announcements.

"As some of you are aware, Miss FitzGibbon suffered a mishap this afternoon and is now in hospital. While she is expected to recover, she is likely to be gone for an extended period. Arrangements are being made for an interim replacement, and we should have more information at the morning assembly."

"Victoria Gilbert, please rise." She did, uncertainty on her face. "After that mishap, Miss Gilbert took charge of her PE class and kept them safe and out of the way while the ambulance crew tended to Miss FitzGibbon. I commend her initiative." Victoria looked at Linda, concerned about her reaction to that description of events. Linda just smiled at her, and nodded slightly.

"Over the next several days, there may be a number of outsiders here at the school as a result of the mishap. Some of those people may be men. Because of that, there will be some changes in procedure for the interim. These will be explained at the morning assembly as well."

She paused briefly, taking a sip of water.

"We have a new student among us today." She looked pointedly at Linda. "Please rise, so the others can see you." Linda stood, conscious that the students and faculty would be surprised to see her in proper clothes.

"Linda Magnesson joins the girls in 4C. As a few of you are aware, Miss Magnesson's introduction to this school was unusual and unfortunate. I hope you will all join me in making her feel comfortable and safe here." There was a brief hum of reaction at this unusual introduction.

Linda sensed some movement at her back, but restrained herself from reacting.

Miss James looked around the room until it was silent again. "That concludes the announcements. Please bow your heads for the benediction." As the others bowed their heads, Linda reached back to her chair and sat. She noticed that the chair had been replaced with a regularly sized one. She bowed her head for the mealtime prayer.

The prayer ended, and she saw the others start to eat. She joined them, finding that the stew was surprisingly good and the bread was fresh. The rest of the meal proceeded without incident.

After the meal, she joined Victoria and the others in their migration back to the common room. Along the way, she answered some of the questions from the other girls and evaded others. When they arrived at the common room, she was met by a senior student, who told her that she had visitors. This set off a new round of questions and reactions, since visitors were rarely allowed. She ignored the others and followed the girl toward the front door.

**Chapter 8: War Council**

When she arrived at the entry hall, she was unsurprised to find her parents waiting there, along with the headmistress. She was pleased to note that both parents had briefcases, and each carried one of the stuffed animals she had requested. She was especially happy to note that her father's briefcase was the one she had suggested.

Miss James showed them to a small meeting room just off of the entry hall. She requested a chance to speak with them once they were finished with their meeting. Their response was noncommittal.

Once they were settled and alone in the room, her mother hugged her and asked how she was. She replied that she would live. She also said that she would be a bit more comfortable if the room was a bit more private. She looked significantly at her father's briefcase as she added that last bit. He nodded, and set the case on the table. As he opened the case and adjusted some device inside, she scanned the room for the camera she knew was there. She found it, pointed it out to her parents, then blocked it with her hat. Her father took a boxlike device out of his briefcase and walked around the room with it. He found two microphones, which he was already jamming, and an additional camera. Once they were done, she asked whether they had received and read the materials. They both said that they had. Her mother added that she had been given an envelope for Linda, as well. Linda accepted the envelope, and glanced through it. Satisfied, she turned to her father.

His first question was why she wanted the toys.

"The Gainsboroughs aren't just toys. Blue Boy is a jammer, similar to the one in your briefcase. The ears hide the antennas, and the speakers are at the sides of the head. Pinky is a digital camcorder. Each has a locater that I can use to find the other. I assume the cell is a secure line, voice and text?"

"Of course. The full confidential client package. It is also preloaded with our office and personal numbers."

That out of the way, they got down to business. First, they went over the official reports. Linda verified that the copies they got were accurate. She was gratified that they had found the expected evidence under the teacher's nails. She added her observation that most of the event had been staged, and was apparently operating policy there.

Then they moved on to the other reports. Each report stressed different information. Her father's report listed the major backers of the school and the legal and political ramifications of the situation. In particular, it described the history and downfall of one formerly active backer.

"The last thing in the world those others want is a scandal like this. It could tie them to him, and bring his history out in public. They rewarded my earlier silence with opportunities for the two of you. I'm sure you remember those. Now I am the key. If the prosecution goes through, in public, these people will be very unhappy and probably face serious problems. And they are not the only ones. Look at the judges who have consistently sent girls here. Even if they did not know what was going on, they could be hurt badly by the scandal. And even without the rape, there are things about this school that would not survive the light of day."

"We will not be party to blackmail."

"Nothing so crude or dishonourable. If you play this right, they will be more than willing to give me what I want and give you more of those profitable, and prestigious, opportunities."

"And what is it that you want?"

"We'll get to that. But keep all of this in mind while we have a bit of girl talk."

She called her mother's attention to her report. It listed the backers and "customers" of the school, indicating the likely sources of cash flow and the opportunities for leveraging the influence of the customers and backers. It went into some detail about their holdings, positions, and other areas of influence. It also briefly mentioned other goods and services of the school, without going into detail.

"If the school is destroyed by a major scandal, it will not only harm the backers. It will hurt the students and their parents, the judges, and others. If we do not effectively stop the events that are already underway, this school, this company, is worse than worthless. It is a net liability to everyone involved, including you. A person paying one pound for anything but the physical plant and the grounds would be overpaying. But if a person were to gain control of the school before it hit the fan, and took steps to eliminate the problems before they became fatal, the benefits could be enormous. You've done it before with other companies. We can do it here."

"I'm not sure I follow your reasoning."

"On the surface, we have a useful school. It specializes in taking undermotivated, mildly delinquent daughters of prominent families and turning them into good students and respectful members of society. Beneath the surface, we have a dungeon specializing in sexual humiliation and turning out a mixed batch of pathological submissives, sexual sadists with effective camouflage, and complete basket cases. Those who survive do well on tests and in classes. The others are quietly institutionalized. It also somehow serves the interests of certain people with a taste for the domination and humiliation of schoolgirls, like our friend the former statesman."

"Now, because of the attack on me, that dungeon threatens to be exposed to the light of day. The ambulance crew who came have their own reasons to expose it. The easier one is the man. He is a well paid anonymous source for some of the less reputable tabloids and the like. He can be handled with a combination of money, influence, and pressure."

"The woman is more difficult. She is an energetic advocate for rape victims and the like. She is outraged by what that woman did to me, but she is also outraged by Matron's inadvertent admission that she had tried to prevent me from reporting the attempted rape and that she had no intention of filing the required reports after I had told her about it. She also strongly suspects that school policy supports or even encourages sexual abuse of the students. No amount of money or pressure would get her to back down. If I am harmed, or if she suspects that I have been co-opted in some way, there is little or nothing that could stop her or her associates. If anything happens to her, there are others who would pick up the fight."

"On top of that, some of the school's own listening devices and phone lines have been compromised. People with their own reasons to hate this place, probably including some former students, have recorded certain individuals here making some very damaging statements. They are also the people who compiled your reports. And mine. Needless to say, this part of the information should not be used unless absolutely necessary."

"How did they find out about this place, and how did they find it?"

"Some of my friends heard about it from girls who had been expelled and ended up in other programs. As to how they found it, two simple ways. A group of them followed the police car which took me there. The driver wasn't expecting it, and didn't notice. I was given a small voice transmitter, which also helped. When we arrived, they slipped into the woods and set up a repeater, to relay my signals to them. They also used the time to compromise some of the communications at the school itself."

"The other way was less energetic, but in some ways more useful. Some of them were in a position of being able to read my file, and other similar ones, at the court. It didn't pinpoint the location of the school, but it gave them what they needed to find the other information."

"So they used you to find it."

"I used myself. Now, the situation is in danger of getting completely out of hand."

"Neither the ambulancewoman nor the others can be fought or bought in any conventional way. There are two possible ways to keep them from blowing this up into a full public scandal. One would be to close down the school and ensure that none of the more abusive teachers or staff ever work in such a position of trust again. That may be trifle excessive."

"The other way would be for a trusted person to gain control of this place, eliminate the policies and culture of abuse, and dismiss the worst offenders with prejudice. And right now, there is only one such trusted person they all would agree on."

"You."

"Yes, me. There are other benefits to this approach. Instead of having full control of and responsibility for a disastrously compromised institution, the current holders would have some reduced control over a successful and unblemished school. The lawyer who could arrange that for them would be a friend they would not soon forget. And the businesswoman who could put this together and shield them so effectively would certainly be able to solve their problems with other businesses or those they want to acquire."

"So basically, you want them to give you the school, to run as you see fit."

"Not necessarily give. It could be structured as a private settlement over the assault or the like. But it would work to everyone's advantage. Well, almost everyone. Certain teachers and staff members would not exactly benefit. Nor would the former statesman, who would have to give up his connection entirely."

"And you expect Miss James to agree to this?"

"Not Miss James. You will have to negotiate all of that with the real people in charge. The people on the list. What you will have to convince her to do is much less difficult. First, you will have to convince her that the situation is even more serious than she realizes. That should be easy enough. Then, convince her that you can present a solution to those in a position to act. She has already contacted some of them. You can have her put you in touch with them to present the proposal. Some of them may try to bribe, bully, or bluff you into dropping it, but if you give in you will lose every advantage you stand to gain." She saw the look they gave her. "Ok, you already knew that. Sorry."

"More immediately, she needs to give me full access to all files, people, supplies, and facilities here, inside and outside the building, and to make sure nobody tries to harass or interfere with me. Directly, or indirectly through the students I have befriended. I must be allowed to keep and use the animals and the cell. I will also need a secure office to work from. Make it clear that the only other option for her is complete ruin. I know you can handle that. If she is too reluctant, I do have some other information you could use. But for now, it is better that you not know such things. My job will be to put together the plan to keep the beneficial parts of the school intact through the transition and into the future. Her only hope is my success."

"What do you two think?"

"You certainly think big."

"I learned from two of the best."

"It will take some time to put all of this together."

"Time is one thing we have little of. If I don't get immediate access to those things, we may lose vital documents. If you don't have the transfer worked out by the time Miss Rapist is fit to face a court, things may be out of our hands. You can stress that, if some of them try to stall. Final personnel details and the like can wait a little longer, if necessary."

"I suppose you want to come home right away?"

"There is no way I can do this from there. The accommodations here may be a bit spartan for my tastes, but they should be adequate for the moment."

"Alright. Now, we had best restore the room and go face Miss James."

**Chapter 9: Signed and Sealed**

When the room was back in shape and the jammers were turned off, Linda held up her new cell. "Call me when you're done, or if you need me. I'll be off interviewing resources."

"Gossiping with the other girls?"

"I always said you were smart. Good hunting!" With that, she walked them to Miss James' office door and, as her father knocked firmly, walked off toward the common room.

When she walked into the room, the first thing she noticed was the posture. At her old school, half the girls would have been sprawled over and across the furniture and the floor. Here, they were all sitting up as straight and neatly as they did in class. A moment later, many of them sagged a little. They kept their general positions, however. At least they talked like girls she had known.

She turned to Victoria. "Let me guess. If I had been a teacher or staff member, anyone caught slouching would have been punished?"

"That's about it. We keep people near the door, listening for footsteps. Those wooden floors are good for something, anyhow. I hear that there used to be watchers, as well, but they were seen too often. They seem to know just when some of us are at our worst, too."

Linda responded, her voice too soft for anyone but Victoria to hear. "They do. They have a video camera and microphone in here." Then she spoke in a normal voice. "Are they really that good at it?"

Victoria looked startled, but quickly recovered. "Quite. And you don't quickly forget what they do, let me tell you."

"I can imagine. Well, some things may be changing very soon."

"How did the meeting with your folks go?"

"Kind of tense at first. But they had the reports and large amounts of background materials, and they liked my ideas. They're in a meeting now with the headmistress. Knowing how they work, I almost pity her." She gave a short laugh. "So, how about some introductions?"

Victoria introduced her to the other girls in the room, and she began to get a feel for the resources they represented. After answering and asking some questions, she asked about the teachers. Who were the worst of the lot, and who the best.

She was surprised to learn that Miss FitzGibbon was one of the better-liked teachers there. It seems that once you got past the first day, she wasn't all that bad. If you challenged her or the like, she could punish you as badly as the others. But if you behaved and gave your best effort in her class, she wasn't that bad. Unlike some of the others, she didn't routinely try to provoke confrontations with anyone after the first day. She was almost sorry she had chosen her to make an example of. Almost. Most of the girls assured Linda that they did not hold the attack against her, and many commented that they wished they had had the nerve their first day.

Just then, her cell chirped. The display showed her father's number.

"Hello. Getting ready to leave? Ok, be right there." She ended the call and turned to the other girls. "Gotta go. Time for the next step in my plan to take over the world!" She gave her best evil laugh as she left the room.

She hurried to Miss James' office. Once there, she knocked and waited for her invitation. It came immediately. As she entered, she noticed her parents' expressions. Her father was wearing his Lawyer face, but her mother was wearing her predator face, with the slight smile of a cartoon shark who has just eaten. They had won, substantially, and there were formalities to go through.

"We have been speaking with your headmistress," her father began, "and she has agreed to certain steps. You will be given an office, and full access to the files. You will be able to keep your toys, but they must remain in your office when you are not actively using them. The headmistress feels that they would be disruptive if kept in your dorm. You will be allowed to keep the cell with you at all times, but the ringer must be set to vibrate or silent when in class or meetings. You will receive calls or text messages at random intervals to verify your continued possession of the cell, and to exchange time critical information. Use of the cell during classes should be kept to a minimum, and be done in the least disruptive manner practical. Do you understand these conditions?"

She nodded, her face a battle between an attempt at seriousness and a grin of victory.

"Disciplinary actions involving nudity or corporal punishment will be suspended immediately, pending the outcome of these events. This is a practical step, given the likelihood of unscheduled visits by representatives of various agencies. Other disciplinary actions, including but not limited to suspension of privileges, physical exertion such as running laps or doing specified exercises, or restriction to certain parts of the building, will remain in effect. In your case, it is further stipulated that no such disciplinary action will be undertaken if it would have the effect of interfering with the project at hand. Do you understand?"

She nodded again.

"Until these matters are resolved, the school will not be accepting any new students on a routine basis. If exceptional circumstances arise, the school must obtain permission from you, your parents, and any other formal members of your negotiating team, before accepting such a student."

"In addition to your research and other duties as a party to these negotiations, you will be required to attend and participate in classes and other mandatory activities with your classmates. You will be expected to maintain the appropriate demeanour during these activities. Outside of the times of such activities, you will be able to summon people to your office or interview them in more convenient locations. You will be expected to limit the disruptions caused by these interviews. Your office will include a computer with read-only access to all electronic files. You will have full access to all physical files, but will be expected to avoid changing them in any way. You will also be expected to respect the confidential nature of the files. You will also be expected to respect the confidentiality of information gained in your interviews. To help protect that confidentiality, your office will be cleared of listening devices and cameras. Do you understand these provisions?"

"Yes." She wasn't best pleased with the limitations and participation requirements, but they didn't seem too bad.

"Then I will need you to initial here, and sign here." He indicated a short line by the part of the document dealing with confidentiality, and a longer line at the bottom. She glanced through the document, recognizing most of it as his standard boilerplate and the rest as the provisions of the agreement. She glanced at her parents, seeing brief glimpses of approval for the act of reading the document before signing it. There were a few provisions they hadn't discussed, but nothing she couldn't live with. She initialled and signed as indicated.

They moved on to her office, a few doors down the hall. Her father swept the room with his equipment and located the camera and microphones. He disabled those, then reswept the room. Finding nothing more, he nodded to Linda. She checked the desk, finding it stocked with supplies. She checked the window, and verified that she could open it and lock it. Depositing her animals on a file cabinet, she followed the others out.

She walked her parents to the front door, and there they said goodbye to Miss James. She walked them to their car. Their drivers had taken the larger one back to the city, and left the sports car. They said they were impressed with her preparation and perception, and expected things to work out well. They also cautioned her about overconfidence. She acknowledged the warning, and they said their farewells. As they started to drive away, she waved and then turned and walked back toward the door.

Once they were out of sight, she pulled out the cell and made a brief call. She didn't bother identifying herself, but gave the number for the cell and said that things were on schedule. She asked for news, listened for a moment, then ended the call. Things were well underway.

**Chapter 10: Bedtime**

Linda was dragging her feet a bit as she made her way back to the common room. It had been a long day. When she got there, she found that Victoria and several of the other girls were still there. She gestured Victoria over, and asked her to come back to the dorm room with her. She agreed, gathered her books, and left. As she waited, Linda was asked a number of questions by her curious classmates. She promised they would find out most of it at morning assembly, and they could ask her more after that.

On the way to their room, she asked whether Victoria was aware that anything they said could be heard by hidden microphones. She answered that most of them suspected as much, but they weren't sure. Sometimes it seemed like the adults knew everything they said. Other times, it was as though they had not heard a thing. Linda outlined the monitoring centre, and said that the times they had not heard were probably those during a time when someone else was being watched closely. Then she told her about her office, and the way it was microphone free.

When they got to the room, she found that her first uniform was gone. She checked her drawer and found that her things had been moved around, as though someone had been searching for something. On the other hand, the drawer opened more easily than it had before. She shrugged, straightened out the contents, and removed her towel. She told Victoria that she planned to take a shower, and asked about any procedures she was supposed to know. She learned that there was a small shower room near the dorms, in addition to the showers in the changing room. While technically there were no limits on when they could use the showers, the towels were only available at limited times. Without individual towels, and with no changing room in the showers, the usual procedure was to undress in the dorm room and walk to the showers naked. Then, after washing, drying, and powdering, they return to the room the same way. Most of the girls sleep that way, but some sleep in the used blouse.

Thinking of the cameras in the halls and rooms, Linda was not thrilled with that idea. But after that long, wearing day she really needed a shower. She offered to share her towel with Victoria in exchange for company and light guard duty. She agreed, and showed Linda where to put her dirty laundry. After they undressed, Linda considered wearing the towel to the shower. But she realized that she would attract far more attention that way than she would as just another naked girl. So, towel and cell in hand, they set off for the showers.

At first, they didn't meet anyone. But as they passed the door to another dorm room, an older girl stepped out to confront them. "Hey, peachfuzz," she began, looking pointedly at Linda's unshaven but sparse mound, "how do you rate your own towel?"

Victoria spoke up. "She knocked out a teacher, and they're afraid it might be catching."

"What did you use, your breath?"

Linda caught the mood of the exchange. "No, just my armpits. That's why she's making sure I get to the showers." She indicated Victoria. "She has to share a room with me."

"What's her excuse?"

"I was there when she undressed," Victoria replied, waving her hand in front of her face. "I got too close to the cloud."

The girl barked a laugh, and set off down the hallway. They met a knot of girls, who needled them about their nakedness. Once they were past them, Victoria advised the beet red Linda "Don't pay any attention to them. We'll all be naked for the morning swim, and they know it."

Somehow, that didn't reassure Linda all that much.

When they entered the showers, they had the room to themselves. By the time Linda had enjoyed a luxurious, hot shower, two other showers were in use. A number of other girls were waiting around for the towels to show up. Linda took her towel and cell, and gestured Victoria in to take her turn.

As she finished towelling down her legs, the cell chirped. She saw that it was her father's number, and answered. They exchanged greetings, and he told her that he was just making sure she still had it. For once, she was very happy that the cell was not one of those with a camera. That reminded her that the room had its own camera, and she wanted to hide again. She hurriedly finished the call and then finished towelling off.

She was barely ready when Victoria returned for her turn with the towel. Linda went to the powder box. Taking a small handful, she brought it to her face and gently sniffed. Not a scent she would have chosen, but pleasant enough. She shrugged, and powdered herself down. Victoria joined her, just as an unfamiliar voice sang out "Hey! Don't hog the towel!" There was a generally ominous murmur from the cluster of naked girls.

Things looked like they were going to get ugly, when a voice from the rear of the crowd piped up. "Let me through! I have the towels! I want to take my shower!"

As the crowd surged in that direction, Linda grabbed her towel, her cell, and Victoria and made a hasty exit. After edging around the naked chaos, they struck out for their room. After they got two doors away from the showers, they couldn't contain their giggles any more. They were careful not to break into a run, but they walked as fast as they could. They got to the room, and collapsed on their beds, breathless from their laughter.

After a few minutes, Linda collected herself. She slipped the cell under her pillow. She took the towel in hand and sat up. Using the towel and her motions to cover her actions, she quickly checked under the mattress, finding that her own clothes were still there. She stood up and hung the towel from the curtain rod, between the curtain and the window. She positioned it so that the early morning sun would be blocked somewhat at the head of the bed.

With that, she crawled under the covers, wished Victoria a good night, and settled in for the night. She barely had time to notice that she still had the lumpy mattress, before she fell asleep.

**Chapter 11: Morning Swim**

The next morning came much too soon, after a night filled with dungeons and disasters. If this was what these high stakes games did to people, she understood why the noises coming from her parents' bedroom at night had not always been those of passion.

As the electric bell faded into the morning air, she got up and hurriedly made her bed. She noticed the other girls doing the same. None of them were getting dressed, so she thought that they would be walking to the pool naked. She blushed at the thought. She tried to reassure herself that it would be just like being in a very large changing room, but that didn't help much.

She saw that the other girls were laying out their outfits on their beds, and went to do the same. The drawer opened easily at her pull, and she noticed that her things had again been moved. Probably while she had been showering. Since she didn't keep anything but the school-issued clothes in there, she wasn't overly concerned. She pulled out a set of clothes and briefly inspected them for flaws. Satisfied, she laid them out on the bed. She noticed that her room-mates were starting to leave, so she grabbed her towel, cell, and keys, and followed. She toyed with the idea of wrapping the towel around herself, but decided it would just make her stick out in the sea of naked bodies.

In the hallway, the girls were lined up two abreast. As she fell in beside Victoria, the girls from the room joined the ends of the lines. Once they were in position, the entire line marched to the changing room. It was a long walk, and she felt exposed every step of the way. At various points along the way, teachers stood and examined the passing line.

Once inside the changing room, the girls briefly showered and then made their way through a side door into the pool area. While she showered, Linda left her things on a bench that she could watch from the showers. She saw one of the senior girls start toward them, but one of the teachers stopped her and had a quiet word. She paled a bit, and returned the way she had come.

Once showered, she retrieved her things and followed the other girls through the door and into the pool area. She saw that the girls were forming eight lines at the edge of the pool. She found Victoria, and got in line behind her. As she watched, she saw that the girls would dive into the pool, swim two laps, and then climb out and head for the changing room. As each girl climbed out, the next girl would dive in and start her swim. It all looked very efficient. As she neared the front of her line, she considered what to do with her things. Finally, she left the line and approached the teacher who was watching from her side of the pool.

"Pardon me, Miss?"

"Yes?" the teacher replied, with a certain professional aloofness.

"Have you been told about these?" Linda held up the phone, keys, and towel.

"I have been told that you are authorized to carry them, and that they are not to be taken from you or damaged." She raised an eyebrow, indicating that Linda should continue.

Since I am about to enter the water, I will need someone responsible to watch them for me. It is also very important that I be notified immediately if it rings. Unfortunate things may happen if I do not respond to it within a short time. Would you please take care of the matter for me, while I'm in the water?"

"I suppose I must." She did not look pleased.

Linda thanked her and returned to her place in line. As Victoria exited the pool, she dove in and started swimming. It was an odd sensation, swimming naked like that. As far as she could remember, she had never done so.

When she was about halfway back on her first lap, she heard a whistle being blown. Looking to the side of the pool, she saw the teacher holding up her cell. She cut to the side, got out, and padded rapidly over to retrieve the offending instrument. It had stopped ringing by the time she got there. The display indicated that it was from her father, so she called him back. After exchanging greetings, he asked about the delay. She told him about the pool. He chuckled, then told her that the Ministry of Education was going to have to sign off on the transfer of ownership. With all the names in favour, he assured her that it should be little more than a formality. They ended the call.

Linda glanced briefly at the pool, shrugged, and headed for the changing room. Once there she rinsed off, dried and powdered herself, and hurried toward her room. About two thirds of the way there, she caught up with Victoria.

"So, what do we do now? Asked the naked girl." Linda said with a self-conscious smile.

"Go become not-naked girls, for starters. And speaking of food," she returned, in a similarly light tone, "after we are done dressing and making ourselves beautiful, we go down for breakfast."

"Good. Conquering the world is hungry work!" came out with a bit more emphasis than she had intended. But not as much emphasis as her stomach chose to add at that moment. By the time the noise abated, her blush was beyond her breasts and headed south.

Victoria gave her a look of offended propriety, but she couldn't hold it for more than a couple of seconds. She then dissolved into giggles. They reached the room, and hurriedly dressed. Linda grabbed a brush and attacked her hair.

Watching her, Victoria commented "That's why most of us plait our hair. It looks a bit juvenile, but it is a lot quicker to deal with."

"Now you tell me!"

"Well, you \*have\* been rather busy lately. I just did \*not\* have time to tell you every little thing!" She rolled her eyes.

"Some friend!"

Victoria suddenly dropped her smile. With a nervous look, she replied "Are we?"

"Are we what?"

"Friends. Are we friends?"

"I hope so. I really need some friends here. And I especially need a good friend who can help keep me sane. Are you that friend?"

Victoria paused, then a twinkle came to her eyes. She grabbed the hairbrush, gave Linda a gentle swat on the butt, and then started brushing out the centre of her hair. "You know, trying to keep this mop neat really \*is\* going to drive you buggy."

With that settled, they went down to breakfast. Unlike lunch and dinner, breakfast was an informal affair. The girls came in after their morning rituals, and went to the window to fetch their own food. Eggs could be prepared to order (in a limited fashion), but the rest was ready and available for self service. The girls filled their trays, and sat. Linda started to reach for her utensils, but Victoria stopped her. With a glance at the teachers monitoring the room, she bowed her head. Linda followed suit. That done, they ate.

**Chapter 12: Morning Assembly**

As they ate, Victoria explained that shortly after breakfast they would go to Morning Assembly. There would be morning announcements, those facing major punishments would be brought up on the platform and have their misdeeds described and the punishments administered (or started). She mentioned rumours that girls had even been executed there in the early days. Her face took on a haunted look as she briefly shuddered. Then she shook it off and continued. The Assembly would end with a brief prayer, and then they would go to class.

The Assembly would begin when the faculty arrived from their Morning Meeting. If that meeting ran long, the Assembly would start that much later. If the Assembly ran late, the class times would be adjusted accordingly. She had heard that at one time the class times would not be adjusted. Teachers of the first class would then punish less favoured students for tardiness, "as an example" to the rest. For some reason, that practice had ended.

Linda watched the teachers leave the room. She looked a question at her friend.

"The Morning Meeting must be important today. Usually, the ones stuck with breakfast duty just get the necessary information from the others." She shrugged.

Linda allowed herself a secret smile. They finished breakfast, deposited their dishes, and then headed toward the Assembly Hall. As they sat waiting, they quietly discussed the daily routine and the most common grounds for punishments.

At last, the teachers entered. There was a brief murmur among the students as they saw their faces. In the place of the usual professionally aloof expression, they were showing signs of emotion. Some showed barely controlled anger. Others, shock. Yet others, puzzlement. A couple even looked as though they were afraid.

The students quickly quieted, and the headmistress stepped to the podium. She looked slowly around the seated students and then, apparently satisfied, began.

"We will dispense with some of the usual formalities this morning. I have some very important information for you, and I will need your undivided attention. Is that understood?"

"Yes, Miss James," they chorused.

"Very well. Due to a number of unfortunate events, we will be making a number of temporary changes to our rules and procedures. Over the next several days, we will be receiving unannounced visits from a variety of officials. Many of these people will, almost certainly, be men. Because of this, all disciplinary measures involving nudity or corporal punishment are prohibited until further notice." A gasp and murmur ran through the girls. She stared them down. "Students! You will continue to be held to the same standards of behaviour as before. We retain a wide variety of measures to address violations. Now then, there will be a new signal to recognize. If there is time to do so, we will signal their arrival with three quick rings of the bell. But I must emphasize that it may not be possible to issue such a warning. Therefore, you must assume that there may be men in the building at any time, and behave accordingly." She paused a moment to let that sink in.

"Despite that, the morning swim and PE will be conducted as usual. On that subject, most of you are aware that our Miss Fitzgibbon has been injured, and is in hospital. Until we can find an interim replacement, her duties will be taken up by a rotation of other teachers. You will attend classes as before."

"If, during the course of such activities, you are informed that men are in the building, you will immediately, but in an orderly fashion, take appropriate steps. If you are in PE, you will go immediately to the changing room and dress as quickly as you can. Your teacher will then organize appropriate activities. In the unlikely event that you are at the pool for morning swim, you will proceed immediately to your dormitories. Those who were in the pool at the time, or had exited the pool but had not yet showered, will use the dormitory showers to rinse off the pool water as quickly as possible. Towels will be provided there. All others will immediately go to their rooms and dress as rapidly as possible. Once dressed, you will proceed to breakfast and Morning Assembly as usual. Does everybody understand?"

"Yes, Miss James."

"Linda Magnesson, step forward." She indicated the space beside her, on the platform.

Victoria gasped, turning pale. Around them, the other girls stiffened in shock. Linda stood, and calmly made her way to the front of the room.

"This school is facing a fundamental change. At the very least, there will be changes in the Board of Directors and the faculty and staff here. This girl ... this young woman will play a substantial role in those changes. It is no exaggeration to state that she holds the key to the continued existence of this school. Because of her extraordinary role in this matter, she will have certain tools and privileges which the rest of you do not enjoy. She has a cellular phone, which she will keep with her at all times. She will be allowed to use it for the purposes at hand at any time of the day or night, and may be receiving calls on it at odd times. Anyone who interferes with that item or her use thereof will face severe repercussions."

"She has a set of keys to this school, which she alone may use. She has access to every part of the school and the grounds. She has an office, near mine. She has the authority to summon anyone at this school to that office. If she does so, you will face no penalties for responding to the call and cooperating with her. If anyone \*does\* try to penalize you in any way for such cooperation, bring the matter to my attention and it \*will\* be resolved." She looked around the gathered students again, then glanced meaningfully at the teachers as well.

"If you feel that her requests are unreasonable or improper, bring the matter to my attention and it will be resolved. She may ask uncomfortable questions, but she is sworn to keep any information thus gained in the strictest confidence. In fact, she will not even share such information with me. I encourage you," she looked again at the faculty and staff, "all of you, to be completely open and frank with her, while in her office."

"She has undertaken to do this with as little disruption to the normal operations of the school as possible. She will attend classes, and will be expected to keep up with the normal classwork. She will also be expected to behave appropriately to whatever role she is in at that time."

She dismissively waved Linda back to her chair.

"I cannot emphasize too much the need for everyone's cooperation and best behaviour. I need not remind you what would happen to many of you if this school were to close. Not only yourselves. Your families could suffer from the resulting disruptions as well."

She gave the benediction, then dismissed them to their classes.

Several classmates crowded around Linda. They had all been certain that she was in a \*lot\* of trouble when she was called to the front. She joked that she was - did they have any idea how much work she had let herself in for? That broke the tension a bit. They fetched their books and headed for class.

**Chapter 13: Counterattack**

Not everyone was thrilled with the announcements at the assembly, or at the faculty meeting before the assembly. Before going to their classrooms, a group of dissident teachers stopped in the meeting room Linda had used to make her phone calls. They believed it was rarely monitored.

"The headmistress has gone soft. Or they got to her, somehow. This is intolerable."

"I agree. We just need to get that little brat under our heel. Then we could put a stop to all this nonsense quickly enough. FitzGibbon was too soft and got careless."

"Then we are agreed? We 'forget' the new rules and show the girl what real discipline is. After we have tamed her, we bring James back to her senses and get back to the way things \*should\* be done here."

After brief murmurs of agreement, the women left the room and scattered to their classrooms.

On the way to her first class, Linda felt the buzz of the cell. She answered it, and learned of the meeting. She acknowledged the warning, then hurried to class.

Her first two classes went largely without incident. She was quickly assigned a seat and given her books, and then class went on. She noted that neither teacher was among those the girls had rated as the worst or the best. They just seemed like teachers. They did not tolerate any misbehaviour, but they were not abusive.

The third class was another matter. It started before class, when another teacher stopped her in the hall and berated her for trivial and in some cases imaginary improprieties with her clothes and grooming. She recognized the setup, and merely accepted the criticism. As expected, the confrontation made her late for class. When she arrived, the teacher berated her for her tardiness. When she respectfully replied that another teacher had delayed her to discuss wardrobe issues, the teacher replied that it was her own fault for having been so careless and improper in her dress and grooming. She declared that Linda had earned 10 demerits, and would lose one grade for the day for having delayed the class. From her subject and behaviour, Linda recognized her as one of the ones from the "worst" list. She also recognized that the teacher was trying to get her off balance, and to set up a situation in which she would have an excuse to take more severe actions. Linda kept her responses proper, and did her best to show no emotional response.

If the teacher had been able to perceive Linda's emotions, she probably would have misinterpreted it as the cockiness typical of an "unbroken" girl. She did not begin to understand just how much power Linda had in this situation. Before the day was over, that teacher would herself be broken, or dismissed with prejudice and turned over to the police, or both. Linda also knew that, in the long term, threats of demerits and grade reductions were meaningless.

She was pointed wordlessly to a desk, and took her seat. She was not issued a book. The teacher started going over the previous day's homework. On the third question, she told Linda to stand and give the answer. Linda stood, and then politely reminded the teacher that she had not arrived at the school at the time of the previous day's class, and had been given neither the book nor the assignment. The teacher berated her loudly for daring to come to class unprepared, and the class flinched. It was clear from their reaction that they expected this to end badly. She went on to declare that it was Linda's responsibility to obtain and complete assignments for days she had not bothered to show up for class. She then demanded that Linda step to the front of the class.

Linda was a bit worried. While she was quite confident that she could successfully protect herself from the older woman, she was concerned that a video of her competently using her self defence skills in that situation might weaken the case against Miss FitzGibbon. As she moved to the front of the room, the cell buzzed. She pulled it out, and read the text message it displayed. Help would soon be on the way. She saw movement out of the corner of her eyes, and barely dodged the baton aimed at the hand holding the cell. She jumped back a step, and pocketed the cell. She went into a deceptively clumsy looking defensive posture, and waited. The teacher came after her, shouting about how dare she use that cell in her class, especially when the teacher was talking to her. She demanded that Linda turn over the cell immediately. She politely refused. The teacher then instructed her to finish her trip to the front of the class, adding that she would otherwise be dragged to the front and dealt with all the more harshly. Linda quietly reminded her that such attacks had been prohibited, and went on to say that she would defend herself if necessary.

The teacher roared "How \*dare\* you threaten me?" and swung her baton at Linda's head. She ducked the blow and stepped away, avoiding any special moves. The teacher moved to grab her arm and raised the baton for another attempted strike.

"STOP!" They turned toward the door, where Miss James stood. "I will see you, \*both\* of you, in the hallway. Now!" She looked at the rest of the class. "You will quietly read the next chapter until we return." Her tone allowed no question.

Once the door was closed, she turned on the teacher. "Just what did you think you were doing?"

"She was tardy, disrespectful, unprepared, and confrontational. She even threatened me. She played with that cell in class, and refused to hand it to me. She needs to learn who is the master here!" She stood tall and straight, her eyes dancing with a zealot's fire.

"Do you, for one minute, think that we were not monitoring her every move this morning? That we didn't see that staged confrontation in the hallway, or your attempts at provocation and humiliation?" The teacher lost a bit of her starch.

The headmistress continued "Do you have any concept of what you may have done?"

"Yes! If you had not interrupted me, I would have been well on the way toward saving the school and restoring the legacy of more than a century!"

"Wrong! You would have destroyed the school, and ended up in disgrace. In all likelihood, you would have found yourself in prison, as well. You still may."

"She is trying to destroy the school and all we stand for!"

"No, she is our only hope for \*saving\* the school. Did you pay no attention at all this morning? If she does nothing, this school will be closed in the midst of a very public scandal. We will all be disgraced, and you and several of the other teachers will face serious criminal charges. Our backers and friends will do nothing to stop it, or to help you. Most likely, you will spend the rest of your life in prison."

"She was attending classes today in order to ascertain whether there is anything about this school which makes it worth her considerable time and effort to save it. She can walk away at any time and leave us to our fate. And just to make it clear, if she \*does\* manage to rescue the school, she will effectively own it. She will have the authority to have any of us summarily dismissed for cause, and to change any and all of our policies and procedures."

She turned to Linda. "She is the exception, not the rule here. What can we do to convince you to continue your evaluation?"

"She did not work alone, so an example must be made. I will offer her two choices." She turned to the teacher. "You have only two choices. You can accompany us to Miss James' office, where the police will be summoned. When they arrive, you will be taken away to face serious assault charges. All resources of the school, and all of the influence of its backers, will operate to make sure you receive the most severe penalties possible. In case you are thinking of threatening to reveal secrets of the school or the backers, think of how they would respond to such threats. If you survived at all, you most certainly would be unable to speak or even write those secrets. If they are annoyed enough, you would quietly disappear and spend the rest of your days painfully serving the pleasure of a few of the more vicious among them."

The teacher was visibly shaken. "What is my other choice?"

"You will be subjected to the most severe punishment you have repeatedly given your students. You will be forcefully stripped of your clothes, bent over your desk with your bottom facing the class, and caned. You will start with 20 strokes. If you cry out or move, more strokes will be added. You will then stand and display your markings to the students of this class and the next. You will maintain proper posture and silence at all times. If your posture slips, or you make any noise, or your eyes tear, you will receive additional strokes. Your colleagues will be brought in to witness your punishment, and told the reasons for it. You will remain unclothed for the rest of the day. After that, you will be on probation. If you abuse any student here, or even threaten such abuse, you will be prosecuted as I described. Is that clear?"

"Y...yes." The colour had drained completely from her face. "Headmistress, you would allow this?"

"I think she is being remarkably lenient, by offering you the second choice. What she said about the backers is quite true."

"I will make it easier for you. If you accept the second choice, you will later be offered the choice of resigning. There will be conditions, however. You will understand that you have no chance of recommendations. The school will acknowledge that you once worked here, and that you resigned, but no more than that. And most importantly, that you do not attempt to use any information to which you may be privy to the detriment of the school, its backers, its supporters, or its students, past, present, or future. You would no longer be a teacher, and would not seek any position involving authority over children or young adults. The benefit would be that you would no longer have the threat of imminent prosecution, death, dismemberment, or torture hanging over your head. If you are particularly well behaved, one of our friends might be convinced to offer you a menial position in one of their many business concerns."

"That is remarkably generous of you." Miss James turned to the teacher. "What is your choice?"

"You really leave me no choice. I will take the second."

"Very well." Miss James returned to the classroom. She selected some students to act as runners in order to summon certain teachers. She also sent for some of the other students and Matron.

When they arrived, Linda noticed a particularly large senior student. She was easily the tallest person there and well muscled. Linda noticed that she walked with a slight limp. Introductions were made, and Linda learned that the limp was a after effect of a particularly severe series of canings more than a year before. The faculty were all well aware of that fact. With Linda's consent, that girl was to administer the punishment. When the teacher heard Linda agree, she regarded them with an expression of stark fear. She was all too aware of the fact that she had been the one to give that girl the limp.

They moved to the front of the room. Miss James briefly described the reasons for the punishment, and its nature. The teacher stood facing the audience as the student literally ripped the clothes from her body. The tattered remains were thrown to the side. She knew better than to move or speak during this process, but much of her mind was screaming for her to escape. She was told to assume the position on her desk. As she did so, the large student asked the class which among them had gotten the worst from her. A smallish, black haired girl was the consensus choice. She was then told to move to the other side of the desk. Her job was to observe the teacher, and inform the others if she struggled, moved, cried, or made any noise.

Even now, a part of her believed that they would never go through with it. Yes, they had stripped her and bent her over her own desk, but in the end they \*THWAK\*! The blow startled a cry from her.

"Five more."

She clamped her teeth against the protest rising in her throat, knowing it would only lead to yet more blows.

The student delivered the blows expertly, varying their timing, placement, and intensity for maximum response and effect. Just as she had seen - and felt - this same teacher do over the years. She had learned the ones that would elicit an involuntary response, and made good use of that knowledge. Until, at last, her arm tired.

After 42 strokes, the teacher was allowed to stand. She could barely do so, and maintaining the required posture was intensely painful. Once she was in place, Linda walked over and stood in front of her. She frankly regarded her nudity, and then looked the teacher in the eye. While her face was flatly emotionless, her eyes filled the teacher with terror. She had never seen such a combination of control, contempt, and cruelty in anyone's eyes before, and she hoped she never would have again. She had been a fool to go up against this demon child.

Without saying a word, Linda turned and walked out of the room. She had been practising that look since the rape in the alley, but this had been her first chance to use it. She liked the results. Miss James followed her to her next class, then left.

Behind her, other students and teachers had silently exited the room. It was time for the next class. The students from the teacher's next class flowed in, many looking curiously at their naked, striped teacher. Once they were in their seats, the large student briefly described what had happened, and set them to reading. She also warned them that other classes would be coming by to witness the results. She appointed the largest girl in the class to monitor the teacher, then stepped in front of her as Linda had. Her face was a mask of contempt. She shook her head, and walked out of the room. She was late to her next class, but the teacher knew why and didn't make an issue of it.

**Chapter 14: Aftermath**

The rest of the day was unnaturally quiet. Many of the students and teachers were in shock. Matron went about her duties in a wooden manner. Wherever Linda went, a path opened up in front of her. Students and teachers alike regarded her in different mixtures of admiration and fear. While a small part of her felt almost supernaturally powerful as a result, she knew that this reaction would have to be broken. Her plans required interacting with the students as a peer, not as some Olympian deity.

She barely noticed lunch. The rest of her classes were handled in a quiet, businesslike manner. PE was led by the same teacher she had for maths the previous class.

After their last class of the day, she invited Victoria to her office. As a precaution, she used Blue Boy to scan for new bugs. The room was apparently clean. She sat there, hugging the rabbit, as she gazed thoughtfully at her friend.

"This is not good. I wanted to get some of the teachers and staff in line, not stomp the whole school."

"For what it's worth, some of the girls have started humming 'Ding, dong, the Witch is Dead' in the halls. The teachers don't like it at all."

That gave Linda an idea. "Who do we have with a good hand for drawing? Or maybe cartooning?"

"What are you up to?"

"Just an idea to break the mood. But I need someone who can draw quickly and well."

"I can think of a few, but..."

"Bring them. I can interview anyone I want here, and right now, I want to interview them."

Victoria rose to her feet, coming to attention and snapping a salute. "Yes, Ma'am! Right away, Ma'am!"

"Quit that!" she paused, as Victoria grinned. "Oh, you! Just get going."

While she waited, she pulled up the school student records to see whether they contained any information about artistic skill. After a disappointing search, she started looking at the financial records. The school was bringing in a lot of money, but the spending records did not seem to add up, and there were income streams that seemingly came from nowhere. She made a note to look into it later.

By that time, the girls were arriving. With the exception of Victoria, they looked very nervous. Some even looked frightened. Victoria closed the door behind them, and Linda began.

"Oh, relax. You're not in trouble, and I haven't eaten anyone's soul in days." They didn't seem as reassured as she would have liked. "I have some projects in mind, but I am going to need some artistic help. I may even need more than one of you before this is all done. They shouldn't take much time. In fact, time is very important. And I can make sure you don't get in trouble for it. How many of you can draw cartoon style images quickly, but fairly well?" About half raised their hands. "Good. Now, how many can do drawings on the computer?" A smaller group, some from the first group, some not, raised their hands. "Alright. Those who can do both, stay. For the rest, thank you and I'll see you around school. Please don't tell anyone about this meeting or what you think might be happening." About 2/3 of the girls left.

"Ok. How many of you have seen "The Wizard of Oz" more than once, or read the books more than once?" All of the girls indicated they had. "Great! Some of you may have heard your friends quietly humming a song from the movie. Some of you may have been among those doing the humming. We're going to build on that. What I need is an image to secretly circulate. It is important that nobody knows it came from me, however. Do you all remember the scene where they see the Professor behind the curtain, operating the giant head?" More nods.

"We want something like that. We need a big, frightening image that can symbolize the image many people have of me after the recent events. Bigger than life. Scary beyond all reason. You know, that kind of thing. It should be in a school uniform, or something like it. Nearby, there should be a curtain on a rod, pulled aside. Behind the curtain, life size or even a bit smaller, is a naked, blushing, maybe cringing figure which can be recognized as me. It could be holding one of my stuffed animals," she indicated the Gainsboroughs, "or not. Mostly, she should be an ordinary, non frightening girl. And it should say something like 'pay no attention to the girl behind the curtain.'" She looked around the group.

"Some copies will need to be on paper. Some on the computers. They will need to be passed around in a way that the girls see them but the adults don't." She got out some paper. "I would like each of you to sketch something along those lines. Is there anyone here who does not want to do this?" Nobody moved or spoke up. "Then let's begin."

One girl, a blonde about a year older than Linda, spoke up. "Does it have to be one picture? Why not a small series? That way, if one part gets seen it won't seem that important to \*them\*."

Linda thought a moment. "Good idea. I don't want this to take too long, though. Time is critical."

"All the more reason. With separate images, we can divide up the work much more easily. Some of us are better at some things than at others. We can benefit from that."

"I like the way you think. What is your name, anyway?"

"Saundra."

"I like the way you think, Saundra. Does anyone else have any questions? Comments? Ideas?"

"I have one." A petite brunette, this time.

"Yes?"

"Why? What is this for?"

"That's a fair question. Let me ask you one. Are you afraid of me now?"

"A little."

"As much as when you came here?"

"No. A lot less."

"When you first came in here, would you have been able to talk to me like this?"

"Probably not. I still don't quite understand."

"I need to be able to fit in and work with the girls here. The way things are now, they are too afraid of me. I need to change that."

"And something funny is a good way to change your image? I can see that."

"Anything else? Anyone? No? Ok, let's get those sketches."

They worked and brainstormed, sometimes argued, for about an hour. Finally, they had images they liked. They divided up the work and left, leaving Linda and Victoria in there alone.

"Do you think it'll work?"

"I don't know. I hope so. If nothing else, those girls at least see me as human again. I don't know about you, but I'm getting hungry. Isn't it about dinner time?"

"Pretty soon. I have to do a couple of things before then. Bye." And she was off.

Using the cell, Linda called home. She told her parents about the event in the classroom, and asked them for news. Things were moving quickly, but well, at their end. The governors were as anxious as she was to wrap things up as soon as possible. If not more so. They also advised her that her punishment of the teacher was probably excessive. She had limited her options, leaving herself little room to escalate if it should become necessary.

The call to her monitors also produced interesting news. They had played the recording of the headmistress' willingness to throw her to the wolves to Miss FitzGibbon. Lightly edited. She was shocked, and appeared ready to turn on the school and everyone connected with it. Especially if it would save her from prison and total disgrace. They had things on hold for now, but could not keep it that way much longer. If she ended up wanting to destroy the school, they had a lot more ammunition. And there were some people from the medical board who were eager to investigate Matron. She thanked them and ended the call.

With a sigh, she settled back into her chair. It seemed like she was walking an electrified tightrope, with sharks on one side and crocodiles on the other. Half of her apparent power was little more than bluff and momentum. One slip, and the whole thing could come crashing down. It was thrilling, but exhausting.

But worse than that, it was lonely. She missed her friends. Victoria was the closest thing to a friend she had here, and she was becoming more of an assistant. She hugged Blue Boy tighter. She didn't even dare tell her the real reason for the pictures. She desperately wanted to make some friends among the students there. And as long as she was the Giant Killer, that would be all but impossible.

She glanced at the time. It was nearly time to go eat. She rose from her chair, deposited Blue Boy next to Pinkie, and composed herself to leave.

**Chapter 15: Dinner**

She made her way toward the refectory. As she passed the common room, Victoria stepped out and joined her, grinning. She looked a question at her, but just got a mumbled "art homework" by way of explanation. When they reached their table, she noted that she still had an ordinary chair. She took that as a good sign.

When the teachers filed in, she noticed that one was still naked and was looking a bit the worse for wear. She was not unhappy about that, but she was annoyed at the memory of her parents' comment. Admittedly, her "choices" had lacked subtlety.

The faculty sat, followed by the girls. As a different set of girls served the meals, the headmistress rose to make announcements. The room quieted abruptly, with only the serving girls moving.

"This morning, at Assembly, we announced certain temporary changes to our procedures. These changes were made necessary by the likelihood that officials, some of them undoubtedly men, will be making unannounced visits to inspect the school over the next few days. The consequences of such inspectors witnessing any improprieties could be very damaging for the school and for all of you. Sadly, one of our teachers took it on herself to ignore those instructions." She turned and looked at the teacher. "Stand up. It is rare for one of our teachers to suffer the disciplinary measures that we usually reserve for our more wayward students. That we have done so now is an indication of the seriousness of the situation. I cannot emphasize the matter enough. We will try to warn you when such inspectors arrive, but we may not be able to. Until this matter is concluded, we must all act as though they are in the building at all times. Do you all understand?"

"Yes, Headmistress." The girls chorused.

She gestured for the teacher to sit, then continued with more mundane announcements. She led them in the benediction, then sat. They began to eat. Linda noticed that the girls at one of the tables were sitting in shocked silence.

Catching Victoria's eye, she gestured a question.

"Oh, them? Some of the teachers have their own sycophants. They are, or were, hers. She had gotten most of them special assignments, so they probably didn't see what happened. If they heard about it, they likely didn't believe it. They were sure she was next in line for Headmistress, and wanted to be in with the power. All that kissing up gone to waste." She pulled a face. "They're not best pleased, I can tell you that."

"Trouble?"

"Probably not. Their way runs more to rude comments and social snubs. They probably won't go out of their way to help you, though."

"I can live with that."

"If they knew where things were headed, they would probably try to hook up with you. Want me to tell them?"

"No thank you. \*That\* kind of help I don't need."

They turned their attention to their food, which Linda decided was on a par with that of her old school. Hardly restraunt quality, but not the stuff of Dickens. They kept the rest of their conversation light and inconsequential.

As they bussed their dishes, Victoria asked her to come to the common room, to see something. She was trying to be mysterious, but the twinkle in her eyes ruined the effect.

**Chapter 16 – Début**

As they approached the common room, she knew something was very different. Girls who had stared in fear (and sometimes awe) earlier in the day were barely hiding giggles as they passed. Others looked puzzled, sometimes whispering to the gigglers. Linda had a pretty good idea what was going on.

As usual, their approach quieted the room. Once it was clear that no adults were coming, the sounds of enjoyment returned. She noticed that the girls were passing around books by Baum, and a variety of others. She went around behind one of the apparently reading girls, and found what she had expected. The cartoons were nestled unobtrusively in the books.

Victoria winked and led her to the computer in the corner. She showed her what certain biographical references brought up. Now that she got a better look, the third panel was more recognizable, and more embarrassing, than she had expected. Even Blue Boy was fairly detailed. He was also positioned in a way that covered nothing.

Linda gave a brief half smile, then gestured to Victoria to follow her. They quickly made their way to her office, where they could talk.

"That last panel was more than I expected," she began. She had to wait a moment, as her friend let out a long suppressed laugh.

"I thought they captured that blush rather well."

"Along with altogether too much else. Oh, well. Done is done. And they seem to be doing what I wanted. Now comes the hard part. After another day or so, all of the known copies will need to be deeply hidden or destroyed. We don't want them falling into the wrong hands. The same with the on-line versions. Thank the girls, and feel free to describe my reactions."

"Has anyone told you that you get bossy when you are behind that desk? Even when you're saying something good?"

Linda stuck her tongue out at her. "Don't you have some homework you need to get done?"

Victoria saluted and left, giggling as she closed the door.

Linda waited a moment, to make sure she was gone. Then she got up to take care of another matter.

Linda took the short way, up the front stairs, and found her way to the utility closet. It took her a few tries to find the right key, but once she did, she found her way into the monitor room with no further difficulty. The woman at the monitors turned to face her.

"Since you can't find me, and I'm obviously not here, I'm probably in my office. Wouldn't you say?"

"That sounds reasonable to me. What can I do for you, oh hallucination of mine? And where can I get more of whatever brought this on?"

"Since we are not having this conversation, you can muse freely about things I would have no way of knowing."

"Such as?"

"Such as the streaming video feeds. How many are there, and how do they start?"

"We can have up to four simultaneous streams. One is broadcast at specific times, the other three are on demand."

"Encrypted?"

"Industrial strength. Keys are rotated frequently."

"Are any live, or all from disk?"

"We can run one live feed, but we usually use that for conferencing only."

"Are there \*any\* of those streams that wouldn't get us fried if they went public?"

"A few actual educational productions from class projects, and the archived Board Meetings. Well, the official parts of them, anyway. And the school introduction."

"Well, I suppose it's better than nothing. Who does the camera work for the class projects and the like?"

"Most of the time, I do. For some of the meetings, I just put a couple of fixed cameras on tripods in the room, and then mix it from here."

"Alright. In a few minutes, I should still be in my office. I will need you to meet me there and record a short video. Once you have it, you will need to reprogram the computers to play that video in the place of all the others. If the current stream would be encrypted, then this should be as well. This will need to continue until this is all settled, and the new policies are in place. For the near future, every bit coming out of this place will be subject to intense attention, and not just by people friendly to me or the School. Can you do that?"

"As long as your video doesn't run too long."

"It won't."

"Ok. One more thing. Are the priest holes still active?"

"Most of them still exist, but they haven't been used by visitors in years. Too much chance of being seen or otherwise discovered inside or outside the school. Our valued friends prefer the relative safety of the streams. Sometimes Miss James uses them when she is doing teacher evaluations and the like, but that is about it."

"Thanks. See you in a few."

Within an hour, the change had been completed. Every request or access of a Sands stream would see the same thing: A closeup of Linda. She would introduce herself, and tell the viewers that the School is undergoing some changes. Until those changes were complete, all of their entertaining and educational streams would not be available. She thanked them for their patience, and ended the video.

**Chapter 17 - Trouble Outside**

Shortly after completing her video, her cell rang. It was her watchers, and the news wasn't good. Tensions were starting to run high, and people were threatening to quit. She agreed to meet them all in the woods, as soon as she could get there.

"No rest for the wicked, I guess." With a shrug, she locked her office and went to Miss James' door. She knocked, and waited.

"Come in."

Poking her head in through the door, she warned the headmistress that she would be outside the building for the next couple of hours, meeting with some of her people. If she was needed, she could be reached on the cell.

Miss James acknowledged the statement, but did not look pleased.

Truth be known, Linda was not pleased, either. She had seen how a number of people had handled similar conflicts, but never in this kind of situation. She went out the front door, and walked toward the roadway. She pulled out the cell and called their number.

"I'm outside, walking down the road. Any cars coming?" She listened to the response. "Good. Have someone meet me and guide me in. It would probably be a good idea to have someone watch behind me. I don't think they would be stupid enough to try following me, but I could be wrong. Already? Whose idea was that? Great! Call me if a car comes or something. Thanks. Bye." She put the cell in her pocket and continued walking.

After the oppressive atmosphere of the school, the walk down the road seemed almost like the parks back home. Especially with the prospect of seeing her friends again. With everything that had happened, it seemed like weeks since that long, uncomfortable car ride. Had it really only been a day and a half?

The early evening was pleasantly warm, and the slowly fading light was more than enough for her to see her way. She had no idea how far into the woods they were, so she decided to just enjoy the walk. As she walked, she watched and listened for movement among the trees. Other than the light breeze rustling the leaves, she didn't hear much.

She wasn't sure how far she had walked when she saw a figure in the road, some distance ahead. As she got closer, she recognized the silhouette and waved happily. She picked up her pace a bit, and when she got close enough to do so without shouting she called out "Mark! Oh, I've missed you guys!" They came together in a brief, friendly hug, then set off into the woods.

"Is everyone there?"

"Almost. Constable Mary had to work, Roberta had a 'family obligation', and Steve is still doing the computer thing."

"He never was one for surrounding himself with nature." She grinned.

"Too right. Still, he's having fun doing his part."

"I'll bet. Getting him that computer was one of the better things we've done."

"Too right." He paused a moment. "Ok, why aren't you asking?"

"Because I want to hear it in general when I get there, and then each person's side from them. I don't want anybody to think you were campaigning."

"Makes sense, I guess. Watch the root, there. We're pretty close anyway."

She could make out quiet murmurings and see muted lights about 20 meters ahead. As she drew closer, she could smell faint traces of Indian take out. "Do you know if they left me any vindaloo?"

"There was some left when I headed for the road." With a smile, he raised his voice a little. "Of course, someone could have scarfed the rest while I was gone."

"You were the one who had thirds, you little rat!" Came a friendly response from Janice, the ambulancewoman, as they stepped into the small clearing which served as their "field headquarters". "Hey, Linda. How's that scratch doing?"

"What scratch?" Asked Mark.

"None of your business. It still stings sometimes. Especially when I dry myself off."

Amused at Mark's sudden discomfort, Janice responded. "I'll give you some ointment. Keep the tube with you, and reapply it each time. The \*last\* thing you want is that getting infected."

"Thanks. Now for the important stuff. What food did you save me?" Everyone laughed, and produced the cartons and a spoon. Looking over the wreckage, she sniffed one carton in particular. With a smile, she dipped the spoon in and took a taste. "Oooh, yes. The good stuff," she said, through pleasantly burning lips. Cradling her treasure, she looked around. "Are we ready to begin?"

"We are now." John, another of her council estate friends, stepped into the clearing. "Nobody followed you."

"Thanks, everyone. Actually, let me say that again. While most of you have your own reasons for what we are doing, you have let me play the central role in the whole thing and you have been here for me the whole time. It can't have been easy for you. Or comfortable," she added, looking for somewhere to sit. Mark showed her a folding chair. "So I really do want to thank each and every one of you. Now," she sat, smoothing her uniform skirt under her, and settled into the chair. "I understand there are some conflicts starting to come up. I should have expected that. I didn't, but I should have. Do any of you think you can give a brief summary of the problems, one that everyone can agree with?" Janice and Mark both indicated an affirmative.

"Alright. Here is what I propose. I will listen to the summary, and then make sure you all agree it is at least superficially correct. Then I will speak with each of you either separately or grouped by position, and try to sort this out. Is that acceptable to everyone?" They all agreed.

She gestured for Janice to begin. "We have been following what you have been doing, by listening to the bugs and phone taps, talking anonymously with your parents, and watching other indications. Some of us are unhappy with being left out of the loop when you use that damned bunny or your dad's briefcase to kill the bug you're wearing. Some of us are not entirely happy with the direction you are taking this, either. As you said, we each have our own reasons for doing this. Some don't think your way will fill our needs. And some are here out of personal loyalty to you," she glanced at a few of the boys, "and think we should all shut up and just let you do what you think is best. Finally, some of the younger people do not like the way the adults here treat them, and vice versa."

Linda looked around. "Does that about sum it up?" There was general agreement, although a few looked like they wanted to add something.

"Ok, here's what we'll do. I have one thing to address with all of you, then I will speak to you individually or in little groups. When I do, I want three promises from you. First, is that the rest of you will avoid listening in when it's not your turn. Second, when I do talk to you, I just want to deal with your issues rather than make some attempt at a universal solution. Finally, if we agree that I cannot meet your needs, you will be free to leave with no hard feelings. But if you do leave, you will take no action to undermine the rest of us. Can you all agree to these things?" She looked at each person, and got an affirmative.

"Alright. First, I need to talk about the blackouts. As much as we might wish otherwise, this is not a nice, clean little game. And some of you are not completely free to act as you might choose. I have said, or listened to, things which you really don't want to hear. There are some kinds of things which, if Mary or Janice heard them, would have to be reported. I am not saying that any of the unheard conversations included anything like that. But then again, I am not saying they didn't. There are other things which would simply be too upsetting for some of you. I can only ask you to trust me on this. Believe me, you will all sleep better for it." She looked around.

"For the same reasons, you do not want to hear my conversations with the others here. Think about the kind of reaction you would get if a boy accidentally overheard a frank discussion between some girls about recent, unpleasant period problems." John turned a bit pale, as the rest chuckled. "Can you all agree to do as I ask in this part of it?"

Again, she looked around until each agreed. "Alright. I will speak with Mark first, for two reasons. First, I wouldn't let him talk about it on the way in here. Second, I have what is probably an unrelated question to ask him. While we are talking, the rest of you get together and decide who will see me in groups and who will be one on one. OK?" They agreed.

She gathered Mark, the chair, and the leftovers, and moved to a corner of the clearing.

"Alright, Mark. Who is she and what is the problem between you?"

"How did you know?"

"How long have I been around you guys? How many times have I seen what you looked like after you had your heart set on some girl, only to have her reject you?"

"Not \*that\* many times!"

She just looked him in the eye silently. "Alright! Alright! Far too many times. It's that school mate of yours, Stephanie."

She winced in sympathy. "Uh, Mark? You remember what it was like after what we saw in the alley? Especially for the guys like you, the ones who knew her? Before that, you had been the randiest rooster in the crowd. How long did it take before you could chat up the girls again?"

"Until the bastard got nicked, and I had some talks with those counsellors from Janice's group. Even now, I'm not the same."

"Thank God! You were an embarrassing little git before. When you did start seeking female companionship again, you seemed more mature and caring. Sensitive, even. And you were a lot more successful at getting on their good side, weren't you?"

"Well, yes. But what has that got to do with this?"

"To all intents and purposes, some of those so-called teachers in there did the same thing to her sister that he did to her. Only they didn't just rape her body. They had her at their mercy for weeks, and abused and humiliated her at will. And when she collapsed, there was nothing any of us could do. She went from being a lot like I was before the alley, alive, full of energy, a bit wild and full of herself, to little more than a vegetable. Steph loved her intensely, even when she disapproved of her actions. She still loves her. She was always a bit of a prude, but after what happened to her sister she had a hard time trusting anyone. Even though it was women who did it, a man sent her there."

"It took the robbery and arrest to start you healing. What we are doing here may do the same for her. Stick around, and she will remember the part you played in all this. When she is ready, she will remember you. Be nice. Be helpful. But give her the room she needs just now. Can you do that?"

"I guess."

"Good. You're one of the 'shut up and follow' crowd Janice mentioned, aren't you?"

"Yeah, I guess I am."

"It would be helpful if you could back off that a bit. Some of them are here for revenge, just like we were. They fantasize about closing down the school and torturing some of those teachers for a very long time, barely keeping them alive. I can get them a lot of what they really want, but it will fall short of those fantasies. In the end, what I'm trying to give them is even better. But they don't see that yet. Give them time and room, and especially understanding. You \*have\* been there. We didn't get everything we fantasized, either. But what we did get was pretty good. Use that memory to help you know what to say and do with them. Ok?"

"Ok."

"Anything we haven't covered?"

"Not really."

"Alright, then. Send in the next victims! Oh, one more thing. This is very important. Send me something to drink. All this talking is going to dry me out. No alcohol. I need what little is left of my mind tonight."

He agreed, and walked back to the group. Soon, a group of three girls with Stephanie in the lead approached. They handed her a cold can of orange soda, and waited as she took a drink from it. Then they got down to business. She convinced them that her approach would get them what they really wanted: destruction of the "old" school and punishment of the really bad teachers. She promised to get them a DVD of the punishment, which she could show to her sister if she thought it would help. When she was confident that she had their support again, she asked for a word alone with Stephanie.

"Had Mark been bothering you?"

"Now that you ask, he has been getting on my nerves."

"Thought so. I've had a word with him, and he should be better company after this. He knows more than you think about what you are going through. He went through something all too similar not too long ago. It wasn't directly to do with this school, but there are connections. If you need to talk, or even to vent, he can be a sympathetic ear. So can Janet, but she doesn't fancy you the way he does."

"He fancies me?" She rolled her eyes. "Why doesn't that surprise me?"

"Yes, he fancies you. But he also knows that you are not ready for that now, and might not be for some time. So he will back off, but he will be ready to help if he can. Try not to take \*too\* much advantage of him, even if he is just a boy." She rolled her eyes, and they giggled.

She went through the group, and got them working together again. If things worked out, they all would get the important parts of what they really wanted. By halfway through the group, the night air had chilled enough that she was glad she had brought her hoodie. While the warmup shirt was an awkward fit over the uniform, the warmth was worth it. By the time she was done, she was more than ready to go back to her room. Most of the others had left already, to their homes or their planned activities.

Mark walked her back to the road, and made sure she was on her way before heading back to camp. He would make sure the camp was cleared and the equipment was working (especially the repeaters, which let them monitor the bugs and taps from a more comfortable location), then he would also leave. Two others would keep a physical watch on the road and the house that night, with others taking shifts before morning.

She had gone a little way down the road when the cell rang. It was Miss James, reminding her of the hour and the falling temperature, and asking whether she would be in soon. She said she was on her way in, and that she was using part of her old outfit to keep warm. Just as she ended the call, it rang again. This time, it was her father. He was doing a random check, to make sure she still had the cell. He assured her that things were moving rapidly, and that the turnover might even happen sooner than expected. They ended the call just as she broke free of the trees and headed toward the door.

She closed the door behind her and turned to unexpectedly find Miss James standing in front of her. They acknowledged each other, and then the headmistress moved around her and locked the door. She looked at the hoodie, and shook her head.

"Better not let anybody see you in that. It would be a serious violation of the rules, you know."

Linda nodded, and shed the offending garment. She wished the headmistress a good night, which got her a brief nod, then set off for her room.

**Chapter 18: Sleep**

When she approached the common room, she heard a few quiet voices and what sounded like giggles coming from there. Just as she reached the doorway, there was a shuffling of paper. Looking in, she saw Victoria and some of the other girls looking a bit too innocent. She looked a question at Victoria, who tried to keep a straight face for a few seconds, but gave up and smiled. The others started quietly humming "We're off to see the Wizard", while she held up copies of the cartoons. Linda gave her a tired smile, then gestured toward the dorms. The two of them made their way to the room, with the chorus a short distance behind. When asked where she had been, she tried to exude an air of mystery as she said she had been in a meeting.

When she went to take her shower, she almost turned back. Once she was well away from her door, the hallway was quickly lined with grinning, humming girls. She glanced back, and found the way blocked by some of the girls. Even as tired as she was, she blushed fiercely at the experience of walking naked down that living corridor, with every eye on her. Somehow, the cartoon didn't seem as good an idea any more. Victoria, on the other hand, seemed undisturbed. When they reached the showers, they had them to themselves. The others who wanted to had showered earlier.

When they returned to their room, cleaned, powdered, and refreshed, they did not have an audience. Linda was profoundly grateful. She was also happy to note that nothing of hers seemed to have been disturbed in their absence. She quickly put things away, and crawled in bed. It seemed to Victoria that she was asleep before she even finished doing that.

**Chapter 19: Inspectors**

Morning came far too soon, with Victoria shaking her awake.

"You've got to cut back those nights of debauchery. At least on school nights." she snickered. "You slept right through the bell."

"I'm up. I'm up." she replied, blatantly fibbing.

"Don't make me get the ice water!" the redhead threatened.

Mumbling imprecations under her breath, she got up, made her bed, and laid out her clothes. Joining the others, she staggered out the door and into line. As they made their way toward the pool, she heard quiet humming from parts of the line. It stopped every time they approached one of the watching teachers, then continued once the performers thought they were far enough away. While the teachers looked disapproving as they scanned the lines and tried to catch the hummers, several of them looked distinctly uncomfortable or even a bit afraid as they spotted her.

The long lines of naked girls moved as slowly as they had the morning before. Linda wondered uncomfortably whether the monitor was watching her. Or even worse, recording her. Even though the video streams were no longer going out, the thought of being watched while she was naked made her uncomfortable. It was one thing when everyone was pretending to pay no attention. But deliberate watching... that was just wrong.

Other than the uncomfortable thoughts, the morning ritual started pretty much as it had the day before. Nobody made any move toward her things while she rinsed off in the shower. Some people looked at her a bit strangely when she went to get in line. As she approached Victoria, she realized that she was carrying her towel much the same way as the cartoon had her holding Blue Boy. She shifted her hold uncomfortably.

As before, she excused herself to hand her things to a nearby teacher. As she approached, the cell rang. She saw that it was her watchers, and quickly answered it. After her initial greeting, she didn't say anything until she ended the short call. She turned to the teacher.

"Get everyone out. Now! There is a ministry car on the way with two men in it." She turned and looked at the place where she knew one of the cameras was. She held up the cell as though talking on it and continued, a bit more loudly. "Emergency! Have Miss James call me at once! A car is on its way in!"

The teacher blew her whistle three times. "Everybody out! Men are coming! You girls!" she pointed to the group still waiting for the pool. "Upstairs and get dressed! Now! The rest of you, get to the dorm showers, and rinse off and dress as quickly as you can! Go, go, go!" She caught the attention of one of the other teachers, and motioned her toward the changing room. The other nodded, and rushed off in that direction.

As Linda joined the rush to the door, the cell rang again. It was the headmistress. Linda told her that a Ministry car containing two men and a woman was coming in through the woods. She went on to assure her that none of them were affiliated with her group, and that all of the girls were on their way to the dorms. She also suggested some mops be sent to take care of the trail the wet girls were leaving enroute to the dorms. She ended the call, and concentrated on not getting trampled. As she turned the last corner, she heard the three bell signal.

Unlike the orderly lines of the morning march to the pool or the trickle of bodies as the girls individually returned from that swim, this was a moving crowd. Feeling parts of her body rub up against the naked bodies of the other girls made her much more aware of her own lack of clothes. It also reminded her of the bra incident, embarrassing her even more.

She thought to stop by the shower room and grab a handful of powder, but by the time she got there it was too crowded. She got to her room, dressed, grabbed her brush and comb, and made for her office. She tried brushing her hair on the run, but quickly gave up.

Once she reached her office, she quickly neatened her hair as she stood just inside her open door. She heard The three approach, walking with the headmistress. In front of the latter's office, the woman directed the men to go inspect the pool area while she spoke with the headmistress. Linda closed her door, grabbed the cell, and called the watchers. She had them patch the bug in the headmistress' office through to her. As they did so, they relayed the name of the woman, and what they had already heard. As she waited for the feed, she went through school records. She found the one for that woman, an expelled student of the school, just as she started hearing the relayed conversation.

The woman was bitter, and saw the current situation as a way to get back at the people who had abused her so badly when she was there. She named the teacher Linda had punished as one of those at the top of her list. Hearing that, Linda used the desk telephone to call the monitor room. She told the monitor to make her a dvd of the punishment, and to rush it down to her.

In the meantime, the former student was demanding various records and the headmistress assured her they would be provided. Then she demanded that she be allowed to interview Linda. The headmistress allowed as how she had the right to make that demand, and reached for her phone. Linda couldn't tell who she called, but she asked whoever it was about Linda's own location. She ended the call and told the woman that she was most likely on her way to her office. She then went on to explain that Linda was given the office in order to be able to meet with the expected people without unnecessarily disrupting the school. She then picked up her phone, and called Linda's office number.

Linda answered the call, as she cut the connection on the cell. She acknowledged the request of her presence, saying she would be right there. She set the cell to vibrate and slipped it in her pocket. She stepped out of her office and over to the door of the headmistress' office. She knocked and, greeted with an invitation, stepped in.

The woman was a few inched taller than Linda. She was dressed in the severe style of Ministry agents, no matter what Ministry they are from. Her dark blonde hair was styled in the short, neat style favoured by female bureaucrats and the like. Other than that, she had changed little in the five years since the picture in her file had been taken.

Miss James introduced her as being from the Ministry of Education, and told Linda that she was here in connection with the attack and the proposed shift in the Board of Governors. Linda shook hands with her, then invited her to her office.

Once there, she closed the door, offered her a seat and rounded the desk to seat herself. Her chairs were of a normal size, so the woman could sit in relative comfort. Once seated, she got right to the point.

"I suspect you have things to ask on the record, and things to discuss off the record. Why don't we get the official stuff first?"

A bit startled, the woman agreed. First, she asked Linda's name and why she was there. Linda gave her name, but described her situation as having caught the attention of the wrong people one too many times. The woman nodded knowingly, then asked about the incident in the changing room. Linda described her official version, including the part about flinching when the finger found the wrong place, sending someone for help, and being examined by the ambulancewoman. She didn't have to act to show embarrassment about some parts.

Acting a bit upset, she got up and took hold of Blue Boy. Cuddling him, she returned to her desk. Once she was seated, the woman looked at her and asked whether they could be frank. Linda agreed, but only on condition that the recording device be turned off. The last was said while looking directly at the woman's clutch. The woman sighed, then reached inside and seemed to be working a control.

"Very well. The first thing I will frankly say is that in about a minute, any active recording or transmitting devices in this room will be disabled and may be severely damaged. If you have a cell in there, I suggest you turn it completely off or take it out of the room. The device my father brought me is quite powerful." Suiting action to word, she disconnected her desk phone.

The woman took a cell from her jacket, turned it off, then returned it to her pocket. She then gestured her readiness.

Cuddling Blue Boy with one hand, she opened a desk drawer with the other. As she reached into the drawer, she used her other hand to activate the bunny's equipment. She closed the drawer, and put the seeming toy on the desk, near the clutch. After a moment, there were screeches, pops, and small puffs of smoke from the clutch and the woman's jacket. The woman jumped up, beat at her lapel for a moment and, finding the danger over, looked unhappily at her clutch.

"I did warn you. Now we can talk, Claire." The woman looked startled. When introducing them, the headmistress had not used her first name.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. "Just a minute," she responded, going to the door. It was the monitor, with the DVD she had requested. She thanked her, and sent her on her way. She returned to her desk, puting the unmarked case near the jammer.

"Now that we are really off the record, what do you want here?"

"I want to shut this place down, and punish the bitches who abused me."

Her bluntness startled Linda, but the vehemence was pretty much what she expected.

"If you \*had\* to choose between the two, between closing the school with no other punishments of the teachers and keeping the school open while punishing the teachers, which would you choose?"

"What do you mean?"

Linda loaded the DVD into her computer. "Let me show you what I mean." When she saw the teacher, the woman's eyes hardened. But as the scene unfolded, they widened with surprise, then settled into a sort of grim enjoyment.

"I arranged for that, and I can arrange appropriate punishments for the more abusive among the others. But only if I can keep the school open and complete my other plans. But if you interfere with that, if you force the school to close, the backers of the school will protect most of the teachers from anything worse than being unemployed. And what of the students? If you close the school, many of the current batch of girls would likely end up in Borstall or the like."

"If I succeed in gaining control of the school and keeping it open and free of public scandal, I can turn it into what it was supposed to be. Instead of broken sex toys and submissive sheep, it will be producing confident, productive women who are fit to assume the leadership roles their families might have expected of their precious sons. But I can't do that if you sabotage the process."

"Normally, the combined influence of the backers of this school would be such that neither of us could move against it. If you tried, you would find yourself blocked from above. If you made enough of a fuss, you might even disappear quietly. And I would have gotten nowhere with my plans. But a number of unusual events have come together to make my moves possible. But only if I do this now, and without outside interference."

After more discussion, Linda all but had her on her team. She had to promise a copy of that DVD and those of other punishments, to be delivered after the changes were completed. She would also warn Linda about any potential problems from within the Ministry.

By the time they were done talking, she realized that she would have to hurry if she was going to make it to breakfast. She put Blue Boy next to pinky, covertly deactivating the jammer at the same time. She locked her office and rushed to the Refectory. There was nobody in line, so she was able to get right to the food and serve herself. She took her tray and quickly found Victoria. She made a quick show of a breakfast prayer, then started eating.

As she ate, Victoria filled her in on the events of the morning. The inspectors had seemed rather disappointed to find the pool empty and the girls dressed. While they couldn't find an excuse to go to the dorms, they had looked around the building for anything else they could report. She didn't think they had found anything. Now they were there, at another table, sampling the breakfast.

As she was describing the last, she drew Linda's attention to the entrance of the woman. The men did not seem pleased with her. After a brief conversation, they seemed even less so.

**Chapter 20: Assembly and Classes**

After breakfast, the girls hurried to Morning Assembly. They quickly found their seats and exchanged brief greetings with their classmates. The room quieted abruptly as the faculty entered, accompanied by the Ministry people.

The Assembly started with the usual formalities. Once those were out of the way, Miss James started the morning announcements. "As you can see, we have visitors here today. These people are from the Ministry of Education. They will be looking at the operation of the school. If they question you, or make any reasonable request, I urge you to cooperate. If you feel that they are making an unreasonable request, bring the matter to my attention and it will be resolved. It is very important that they complete their work quickly and effectively."

She went on with more usual announcements, including the fact that a replacement for Miss FitzGibbon would not be hired until after certain issues were resolved. She finished the announcements, pronounced the benediction, and dismissed them to their classes.

Linda quickly approached her first teacher and warned her that she would be late to class, due to pressing business. The teacher acknowledged the warning, but was not pleased.

Linda quickly went to her office and took out the cell. She called her team, and let them know what was happening. She learned that her work the night before had done some good, and there was no more talk of walking out.

Next, she called her father. She told him about the Ministry people, including a heavily edited version of her meeting with the woman. He, in turn, told her that there would be a meeting of the Board of Governors in two days, and that the primary orders of business there would be acknowledgement of the new member of the board, election of the new chairman, and an address by that chairman. He advised her to write and practice that speech. There would be a less formal meeting before that one, where she would sign the relevant papers. She then told him that she would need her mother to pick her up after work for some serious shopping. Specifically, for an appropriately businesslike outfit for that meeting. He agreed to have her call Linda to make arrangements.

She closed up her office and hurried to class. She arrived just in time to hear the announcement of a surprise quiz. When she looked at it, she found that it covered things she had already studied at her old school. Unfortunately, it had been some time before. She struggled with parts of it, but was confident that she had done passably well. At one point, as she looked up to think about an answer, she saw one of the Ministry men go by, glancing into classrooms as he passed.

Class ended, and she made her way to her next class. She had the feeling she was being followed, and when she looked behind her she saw that same man. She shrugged and continued to class. The class itself proceeded in a businesslike manner. While she had to pay attention to keep up with the discussion, she did notice the man leaving after about 10 minutes.

On her way to the next class, some girls stopped her briefly to tell her about an incident in the classroom of her next class. Apparently, the teacher had started to fall into her old habit of berating a student. Worse, it had happened when one of the men was observing the class. Before any real harm had been done, one of her favourites had caught her attention and reminded her of the observer in an indirect manner. To her credit, she changed her approach fairly smoothly and ended up giving the girl demerits rather than the punishment she would have preferred to give.

By lunch time, the Ministry trio had left. Word was given that PE classes would be held as usual for the rest of the day.

Linda spent the rest of the day and most of the next buried in research, interviewing faculty and staff, and writing her speeches and recommendations. She had never worked so hard in her academic career. The one break she took was a shopping trip with her mother. Who better to advise her on a power suit?

**Chapter 21: Taking Control**

After all the events leading up to it, the actual turnover was a bit of an anticlimax. She arrived in her business suit, every inch the executive. Her father carefully explained some of the details to her. She would hold one third of the votes on the board for a period of ten years. After that, she would merely hold twice the votes of any other member. The rest would be distributed as she and the board decided at the time. The rest of the board could override her decisions, but as a practical matter it would take three quarters of them to do so. She would immediately chair the board. While there were charter provisions which allowed the board to remove members, her votes assured that they could not do so within those ten years (unless, of course, \*she\* voted in favour of the motion). If the rest of the board unanimously agreed that she was incapable of exercising her votes properly due to her youth, her votes would temporarily be divided equally between her and her parents for a period not to extend beyond her twenty first birthday. In return, she agreed not to undertake legal actions against the Board or the School as long as the Board lives up to the agreement, unless she is compelled by law or court order to do so. The rest was largely boilerplate and detail.

The document had already been signed by the other members. She noted that one name was conspicuously absent. He had been voted out in an earlier, emergency meeting. She signed in the indicated place. She noticed with amusement that the ceremonial gold-plated pen was engraved with the single word "Change". Her father then signed, due to her legal minority.

That done, there was a sigh of relief from those assembled. It was done. She was presented with the pen, which she slipped into her clutch.

The Board, including its newest member, then took their places to start the meeting. The cameras were activated, and the meeting was called to order. As the first order of business, the outgoing chairman formally introduced the newest member of the board. He then announced that he was stepping down from the chair, and called for nominations for his replacement. For the sake of form, one of the other members nominated Linda. After an unanswered call for other nominees, she was elected by acclimation. She accepted, then moved to the head of the table.

In her brief speech, she promised to work to keep the best parts of the old while making the school more sustainable. She alluded to continuing a long tradition of producing educational and entertaining productions for their discriminating audience, as well as producing graduates who were better suited to the world of the Twenty-First Century. And she promised changes in staffing and procedures which would seriously decrease their liabilities. She spoke in carefully formal generalities, as suitable for an official meeting of that sort.

She then ran the meeting according to the agenda, taking care of routine matters, and requesting (and receiving) a special budget for one-time changes in operations. She was also authorized as a committee of one to determine what changes were necessary, subject to later review by the board. Once the business was done, she accepted a motion to adjourn. The motion carried, and she declared the meeting over.

The cameras were turned off, and conferencing links were established with the board members who could not attend. This was the real meeting - entirely off the record. She outlined her new mission for the school, turning from producing sex toys and servants to producing the leaders those families need. She was going to change some outdated and potentially dangerous policies, such as the shared towels. In the long term, she was also looking at making some changes in the uniforms. As to their their rather ... specialized ... videos, she definitely had some ideas.

**Chapter 22: Meeting**

Miss James, and most of the faculty and staff, was aware of what had happened at the Board meeting. And before it. They also knew that it was traditional for a new chairman of the Board to address the faculty and staff the day after being elected to that post. Therefore, there was a special meeting scheduled for the purpose. Later, there would be an Assembly so that the students could be informed of the new leadership.

When Linda entered the room for the meeting, she did so in her power suit. There were some raised eyebrows over that, and some frank expressions of disapproval. She moved to the head of the table and stood beside Miss James, waiting for her formal introduction.

"Ladies, may I have your attention please? It is my duty and honour to introduce the new Chairman of the Board of Governors, the first female to hold that post in the history of this school, Miss Linda Magnesson." She then led the ritual applause.

"I will now turn this meeting over to her."

"Thank you, Miss James. Ladies. First, we must be clear on one point. I am addressing you today as the chairman, not as a student of this school. That fact is reflected in my mode of dress. Your reactions to seeing me dressed this way, while understandable, are inappropriate. Over the next few months, we will be having more such meetings. This mode of dress will serve as a reminder of the function I am serving."

"There will be many changes over the next few months. The primary change will be to the mission of this facility. This will no longer be a place where girls are sent to be broken and humiliated. Instead, it will be our duty to teach these girls respect and strength. They will learn to respect themselves, first and foremost. Beyond that, they will learn to respect their families and their society. We will be creating generations of leaders, instead of cringing servants."

"There will be many changes to the procedures and even the staffing of this school. Those of you who are unsuited to the new mission of the school will find your roles changed. I will say more about that in a moment."

"I came here to investigate this school, and I did. I was shocked and disappointed at what I found. Not about the sadism and sexual humiliation - I was warned about them." Her audience looked at each other with concern and some confusion. "I was most disappointed at how lazy and complacent you have become. For a school that prides itself at turning out students, those who survive, with high academic skill and achievement, you have shown a stunning lack of creativity and flexibility. I might expect that of the sadists, but even the best of you are in a rut. Someone acts out, you strip her and humiliate her. Someone seems undermotivated, strip her and humiliate her. Someone doesn't learn the day's lesson, strip her and humiliate her. Things get worse, or she stands up for herself, strip her, humiliate her, and beat her. The most creative ones are the sadists, and they are only creative in finding new excuses for their abuses. And even they are in a rut."

"Thousands of teachers maintain discipline, even rigid, effective discipline of otherwise unruly students, without the least hint of nudity or violence. They vary their measures to suit the individual student. Even in a Borstall they do so, and that with the kinds of girls you routinely turn away. If you are going to stay here, you are going to have to be able to do the same. I can tell you here and now, nudity and physical violence will no longer be accepted as disciplinary measures here. At least, not when applied to the students. And other forms of humiliation are largely incompatible with the new mission of the school. If you are so hidebound that you cannot teach under these conditions, then you have no business teaching here."

"I will be proposing a few tools for your use. The \*real\* educators among you will come up with many more. And will undoubtedly continue to do so for the rest of their tenure here. We will expect nothing less."

"I have made several references to the fact that some of you may not wish to continue in your positions here, and that some may not be allowed to continue. That is not as simple a matter as it may seem. To put it bluntly, most of you know too much to be allowed to leave freely and easily. It could become \*very\* unhealthy to make yourself seem a threat to the powerful and well connected people among the parents of our students, and among my fellow Governors. Therefore, over the next few weeks Miss James and I will be meeting with each of you to discuss your options regarding continuing employment or severance. I need not remind you that any one of you could be charged with many counts of sexually abusing these girls, under our current laws. And I should not have to describe the probable consequences if you should threaten, or even hint at, using what you know about these people to the detriment of any of our students, their parents, or the backers of this school. If you do as we say, most of you have a good chance of getting through this with your careers, and your very skins, intact."

"There will be a number of changes to the way we do things here. For liability reasons, we are doing away with the shared towels. This will increase the work of the shower monitors and the laundry. There will also be some changes to the uniforms. Some of you will have some input into that process. There will also be significant changes to the ancillary products which have traditionally come from this institution. Those will be discussed under more appropriate circumstances." She indicated the conspicuous camera and microphone which were capturing her address for the traditional recording.

"The next few weeks will almost certainly be difficult for many of you. But it is not acceptable or appropriate for you to take that difficulty out on our charges. Keep your heads, and you are more likely to do so over the long run. We will be counting on your best efforts throughout this transition."

"Thank you for your attention. I will be keeping regular hours in my office, during which you can bring your issues and concerns for discussion. And, of course, Miss James will retain her responsibilities and will continue to be available to you. Again, thank you."

With that, she sat down. She nodded at the woman from the monitor room, who then shut down the camera and microphone and packed them away. As she was doing that, Linda was sipping her water and going over what she was going to say next.

"Alright, ladies. The public part of the meeting is over. Now it is dirty little secret time. You are all aware that videos of many disciplinary sessions and other events have routinely found their way into the hands of some of our supporters. Men, and some women, with some fairly specific tastes in entertainment. I have temporarily put a stop to this for a number of reasons, but they will resume in modified form. Certain events will be carefully staged for the cameras, and used for that purpose. There will be some changes even then. And after recent events, we have an opportunity to reach a new, powerful audience. Many of our alumni, and the siblings and other relatives of some of our failures, would pay dearly for videos of certain of you receiving what you have so enthusiastically given out. A select few have seen the recording of the disciplinary action of a few days ago, and it was very well received. Unlike that one, and the past events involving our students, these new recordings will be carefully staged in a way which, while painful, will preclude the likelihood of significant injury. For some of you, participation in these videos will not be entirely voluntary."

"The staged, old-style disciplinary actions involving students will be limited to those who are of age, and who freely agree to participate. Specifics about those events will be addressed at another time. I will welcome suggestions for such scenes, and for other kinds of video products."

She went on to discuss other changes and issues, partly for the people there, and partly for the audience hidden in the woods and beyond. She would have a meeting with them later that day, under more comfortable circumstances than their earlier meeting.

Before that, she would address the students at the Special Assembly. She would draw a firm distinction between Linda the student, and Miss Magnesson, Chairman of the Board of Governors. Unlike the staff meeting, most of what she would tell the students was good news from their point of view.

All told, it had been an interesting and educational exercise of power. Her only question now was what to conquer next. "Today, Sands. Tomorrow, the world" was not really specific enough for her tastes.