**Maragana Girl**

by EC

**Chapter 11 � A partial reprieve for Eloisa**

Kim spent the middle of March confronting the emotional turmoil that resulted from Cindy's trip. Without realizing what was happening until it was too late, she had long since passed a point of no return. She couldn't go back to her old life.

Kim expected the first crisis from her decision to hit about 48 hours after she said goodbye to Cindy. Sure enough, two nights after her sister left Kim's parents called her, in hysterics over the result of Cindy's trip. Cindy's decision to support Kim's desire to stay in Upper Danubia only made their parents more irate. Both girls had completely lost their senses. Why wouldn't she want to come home, even with the tough transition that awaited her?

Kim's father was adamant. "Well, we're filing, no matter what you want. You're coming home and I'm going to knock some sense into you."

Kim asked her Spokesman to call her parents. He seemed to have a better ability to reason with them than she did. Dukov decided to talk to Mrs. Lee, since she seemed to have a greater understanding of how messed up Kim was. Dukov spent nearly two hours carefully explaining why Kim thought staying in Upper Danubia was her only realistic option. He played on her drug use, knowing that her mother had been appalled when she found out what her daughter had been doing in Europe with Tiffany and Susan. At last Kim's mother agreed that if she wished to stay in Upper Danubia, perhaps it was best to not pursue the effort to overturn her sentence. If nothing else, it would keep her clean and off drugs for two years. With that both Kim's mother and Kim's sister worked to change her father's mind. In the end he decided to wait and not file anything for the time being.

Kim's decision ended up saving her parents a lot of money and heartbreak. Later that year her father's lawyer was arrested for fraud. It turned out he specialized in promising the parents of young American adults jailed overseas that he could get their convictions overturned. He collected vast amounts of money, but did not successfully pursue a single case. He finally was caught in Peru, relaxing at a beach resort when he was supposed to be in Lima working on securing the release of two Americans arrested for terrorism charges. The Peruvian government extradited him to the United States for trial. One result of the lawyer's arrest was that Kim's father never questioned her judgment again.

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There was no question Criminal # 98945 had made the right decision in requesting that her sentence not be challenged. Still, it was a horrible feeling to think that she had burned a bridge in her life. There truly was no going back. The finality of what had happened frightened her.

Images drifted through Kim's mind, the most vivid of which was that of an enormous set of steel doors, far larger than anything that could have existed in real life, slamming shut behind her. That huge set of steel doors, now bolted and rusted solid, stood between Kim and everything she had ever known in the US. The only reality she could ever know from this point on would be her life in Upper Danubia.

Kim knew she was being overly dramatic. Of course, at the end of her sentence, she would be free to do what she wanted, whether that be to stay in Europe or return to the United States. Still, the feeling that the person she had been just a year before was completely dead continued to fill her thoughts. As March progressed and the trees started to bud out, she wrote at length about her feelings. She wrote actual poetry, not just essays, about the deep philosophical issues that surrounded her situation and what she thought about her life.

Kim shared her thoughts during the reading sessions at the Socrates Club. As she stood in front of her fellow criminals, reciting her emotional journey in her accented Danubian, she wondered what her friends from high school would have thought if they could have seen her. Here she was, in an old building standing on an old stage, naked and with a collar on her neck, talking about her philosophical view of the issues affecting her life. A year ago she had been sitting in the smoking area behind her school, drinking with Tiffany and Susan out of soda bottles spiked with ever-clear. Most definitely the Kimberly Lee of today was not the Kimberly Lee who appeared in her senior high school annual picture from the year before.

Dima ended up writing several songs for the group based on some of Kim's thoughts. One of those songs, titled "The Wall that Divides My Soul", later became extremely popular throughout Europe, and ultimately a signature song for the entire group.

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Kim's life faced even more changes as April started and the Danubian springtime began in earnest. On April 1 Danube City's 2,200 criminals lined up in front of the Central Police Station to return their winter capes and boots. At the moment she turned over her clothing, Kim pulled off her criminal's number 98945 from the Velcro patch on the back of her cape and held it up to the clerk, who verified that Criminal # 98945 had returned the property lent to her by the government.

After the capes were turned in, the criminals bantered with each other and posed for group pictures in the main plaza. They joked and smiled as they held up their numbers for the cameras. For some reason the returning of the winter capes was a customary time criminals posed for group pictures, perhaps because it was a time of the year they all were gathered in one place. Kim posed over and over with Sergekt and his friends, all 28 of them, plus several girlfriends and boyfriends who had ended up as part of the group in the same way Kim had joined, by dating one of the members.

Kim had to resolve the dilemma about her work situation. She loved her job at the music store, but she also had promised Victor Dukov to return to his courier service as soon as the weather warmed up. Kim wanted to return to making deliveries for Victor, not just because of her promise, but also because she wanted to put her mountain bike to good use. It was Sergekt who came up with the best solution.

"Why not just keep both jobs? You can work each part time, for example, ride for Victor Dukov Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, and work the rest of the week at the store. That would get you out on your bike exercising and at the same time make everyone happy."

Kim approached both her bosses with the idea, making each of them understand she had a commitment to the other. In the end Kim went with Sergekt's suggestion. She delivered messages for Victor Dukov on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays. She worked at the music store on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Saturdays, the days Eloisa usually liked to have rehearsals or performances after work. Kim's work-week thus was split between working outdoors and indoors. Because each day she did something different, Kim never was bored with either job.

Kim moved about quickly throughout Danube City on her mountain bike as she delivered Victor Dukov's messages. She went everywhere within the collar zone, now that her ability to speak Danubian allowed her to make deliveries and ask questions as easily as any other member of Victor Dukov's staff. She became a familiar sight in Danube City, the naked Maragana Girl on her fancy bicycle, yes, the same one who was singing with Eloisa and her group of ex-students.

Kim now spoke to Victor Dukov in Danubian instead of English. Over the winter she had become fluent in speaking Danubian and now spoke the country's language better than Victor spoke English. That was not entirely a good thing for Kim. She no longer could hide behind claiming that she did not understand something when her boss got unpleasant with her. Victor was his usual self, in spite of the fact Kim was doing him a favor by coming back to work for him. However, Kim understood Victor actually liked her a lot and that his unpleasantness was simply a part of his personality he couldn't change.

Kim enjoyed riding, a task made much easier now that she had a proper bicycle. She loved the feel of the cool spring breeze and the warm sun on her body. She loved the sight of the pleasant streets and parks of Danube City as she whizzed down the tree-lined avenues. She loved her mobility, and the fact that every so often she could drop in at Sergekt's caf� and say hello to him at work. On the days she delivered messages, Kim rode herself to exhaustion, knowing that the following day she would be at the music store and could rest her body. By the end of the spring, Kim was in great shape, with her muscles toned and her body evenly tanned from the hours spent outdoors on her bike.

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April ended with the group becoming depressed again. Four months had passed since their last switching. They were due to be switched again on April 25, more than two years since their original crime. Once again they faced the prospect of being marched in chains to their old school and humiliated in front of the current students.

On April 24, the day before the switching, Eloisa showed up to work with her pubic hair shaved off, as did the other three members of the group of ex-students who were working at the music store. Of course the main purpose of shaving was to prevent the humiliation of being shaved by the police, but there was more to shaving than just that.

Over her time in Upper Danubia Kim had learned that it was customary for a criminal who faced being switched to shave the day before the punishment, instead of the day of the punishment itself. It was an unwritten part of the entire punishment ritual that a criminal announce to the world that he or she faced punishment by appearing in public shaved the day before. There was no formal requirement that criminals make such an announcement, nor even that they shave at all. However, the criminals of Danube City had their own subculture with its own traditions and protocol, which included proper behavior for those facing the switch. Part of that proper behavior was to be shaved 24 hours before the punishment itself.

Kim planned to spend the evening with Sergekt. They would go to the Socrates Club and rent an "intimacy room", since tonight probably would be the last night for several days that Sergekt would want to have sex with her. She already had told Dukov she would not be home until very late.

In the early afternoon Kim was surprised to see Vladik Dukov enter the music store. He was in his police uniform, which meant that his behavior around her had to be different than it normally would be at home. In spite of living under the same roof, when Officer Vladik Dukov was in uniform, Criminal # 98945 had to treat him like she would treat any other public official. As Vladik approached the information counter, Kim dropped to her hands and knees. She touched her head to the floor, feeling very strange having to do this to a person with whom she lived. However, to have not greeted Vladik in the formal manner would have caused a scandal in the store and have been a direct challenge to his authority.

As Kim prostrated herself at his feet, Vladik asked to speak to the store manager. Eloisa knelt, received the order, and got up to find the manager. Once he showed up, Vladik explained he needed to speak with Criminal # 98945 and that she needed to be excused from work for an hour or two. Kim left the store in the custody of the young police officer.

Kim nervously accompanied Vladik, not having a clue about what the police officer wanted from her nor why the conversation could not wait until the evening when they both would be back home.

A police officer and a criminal could not talk normally on the street, so Vladik took Kim to his father's office at the Central Police Station. Only when they entered the reception area could Vladik converse in a more normal manner towards his father's client.

"Kimberly, I apologize for having to pull you out of the store like that, but I need to talk to you and then you have get back to work as soon as you can."

"OK, so what's up?"

"Well, you know that your music friends are all getting punished tomorrow, at their old school?"

"Yes, Vladik, I'm well aware of that."

"Well, it turns out that I have to stand in for one of the arresting officers. He got into a motorcycle accident a couple of days ago and won't be out of the hospital for several weeks. So, I end up with the 'honor' of punishing some of your friends."

"You?�you mean�you're going to punish Sergekt?"

"No, not him. I can't punish him because he's eaten at my father's table. That's strictly forbidden, you know, to avoid conflicts of interest and trouble within our household. Someone else will get him. But I'm in charge of punishing a couple of the women. Right now your singing partner Eloisa is on my list. I have to switch her, and that's what I need to talk to you about."

"What's there to talk about Vladik? She doesn't deserve any of this. It's not her fault she got molested and I don't see why�" Vladik held up his hand.

"Kimberly stop�just stop. I'm not here to argue the merits of her case. My partner and I were ordered to participate in this punishment and that's the end of it. Whether or not she deserves what's happening to her is a decision that's beyond my authority. She and the others will be punished tomorrow, and I will be responsible for some of the punishments. Nothing can change that. What concerns me is that your friends are punished fairly and appropriately. I intend to respect their dignity as best I can and will ensure the blows they receive fall within the guidelines set by the Corporal Punishment Code."

Kim looked at Vladik with a bitter expression, not understanding what he was driving at. "So why are you telling me this? Do you think it'll clear your conscience?"

Vladik sighed. "I don't think you fully understand the situation. What my partner and I plan to do is stay just within the guidelines of the required punishment."

Vladik paused and then continued. "I will make a confession to you. The fact is, I do think what happened to your friends is unfair. A lot of us think the same about that case, in the police department, that is. But we can't say anything about it. To question a sentence is not our place, nor our authority. Now about my situation. I try to respect the people I punish. I punish with force, but I do not fondle the criminals like a lot of the officers do. I find that practice disgusting and there are some of us in the police department who are trying to put a stop to it. Another thing. The judge who will sign the punishment certificates for my group is an old professor of mine from the police academy. We know each other and he is of the same mindset I am, and that Father is; that we need to have some reforms in the system. Things are going to change, Kimberly, but that's not going to help your friends right now. What will help your friends, or at least the ones turned over to me, is that I plan to switch them to the absolute minimum of the legal standard. They'll get their 50 strokes, but my partner and I want to go easy on them."

"Well�I mean�I appreciate that Vladik, but what can I do to help?"

"Well, here's my idea. My partner and I will punish eight of your group. There are eight women, including your singing partner, right?"

"Yes. Eight."

"Alright, here's where you can help me help them. Your group usually has the women all go first. If they do it that way tomorrow, my partner and I will only punish two of the women and six guys. What I want is to have all the women sent to my room, basically to keep them away from a couple of the other officers who, I know for a fact, will mistreat them. They'll mistreat the guys as well, but it won't be as bad as the women. Now, here's what I want. I want you to very quietly approach the leaders of your group, and tell them to re-organize so that all the women come to me and my partner. The judge will go along with it, but it has to be done quietly or we will all get in trouble."

"But why just the women? Why can't you try to help the guys also?"

"Because my partner and I are only in charge of eight of the punishments. I can help eight out of your group. The reason why it's the women I'm worried about, is because�well, if you knew the other officers you'd understand. I don't believe that criminals should be our playthings, and they very much disagree with me."

"So, with those other officers, it'd be like what happened to me in January?"

"Worse. I know those other officers, and, let's just say there's two of them who I don't think have the right to be wearing badges."

"Alright, I'll talk to them, see if they'll go along with it. I don't know if they will because�"

"No! You will not talk to the whole group about this! Nor will you tell any of the women what I'm trying to do! I want you to go directly to your singing partner's boyfriend and have him make the arrangements with the group's Spokesman. You can tell Sergekt as well, he seems trustworthy. But that's it. I don't want this to get out. I'm taking a real risk here, not just for myself, but also the presiding judge."

"But why are you going through me? Couldn't you just tell Spokesman Havlakt?"

"That's illegal. I am not allowed to make any such arrangements with a Spokesman. That's for a very good reason, because it helps prevent corruption. Nor am I allowed to talk directly to any of the criminals involved in tomorrow's punishment. I'm going through you because you're a member of my household and I can legally talk to you, even though you're a criminal."

"OK, I'll talk to Dima about this, and I'm sure he'll do what he can to help out. I won't tell anyone else except Sergekt."

Vladik let out a nervous sigh. "Thanks. I have to take care of some paperwork and I'll be downstairs while you're gone. Once you get back, have Father's secretaries call me and I'll escort you back to work."

With that Kim rode her bicycle to Sergekt's cafe near the Temple of the Ancients. Kim was relieved to see Sergekt and Dima working there alone. Several of the guys from the group had jobs at the caf�, but the others were not working the mid-day shift. Sergekt was surprised to see Kim show up on her bicycle, knowing that she was supposed to be at the music store.

Kim quickly and quietly talked to Dima about Vladik's plans. She then explained that Officer Vladik Dukov was the son of Spokesman Vladim Dukov and she lived with him. Dima's face lit up with relief.

"So there really are human beings among all those cops! I was starting to wonder!"

Dima promised to re-organize the group to accommodate Vladik. He would talk to the group's Spokesman, who would make the arrangement. He would not say anything to any of the group's other members, including Sergekt. The group's de facto leader fully understood the need to keep everything as secret as possible. The women would go in wondering about the change, and come out wondering why their switching was not quite as severe as it had been during previous punishments. The guys would know nothing, at least not until the day was over.

With that both Kim and Dima returned to the Central Police Station. They parted as Dima disappeared into the doorway of Spokesman Havlakt's office. With that Kim slipped into Dukov's office and called Vladik to escort her back to work.

A half hour later Kim was back at the music store, kneeling in front of Officer Vladik Dukov as he dismissed her. Kim's feelings about Vladik had been neutral until just a couple of hours ago. He was Vladim Dukov's son, but he was also a cop. Because of his profession, Kim always felt very uncomfortable around him. And yet, working within the restrictions of his position, he was willing to take risks to try to ease the burden of a group of criminals he felt had been treated unfairly. That small act of rebellion on his part totally changed how Kim felt about him.

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That night Kim spent several somber hours alone with Sergekt in an "intimacy room" at the Socrates Club. She asked him to lie on his stomach as she sadly caressed his bottom. Sergekt had an attractive bottom, smooth and fairly hairless for a guy. She pressed her palms to Sergekt's skin, fill with regret knowing by this time the next day this same bottom would be covered with cruel welts and blood blisters. She gently kissed and massaged Sergekt's bottom-cheeks, the final night before they would be so cruelly marked up.

Kim was fascinated with the clean-shaven area around Sergekt's penis. It felt smooth and looked so vulnerable stripped of the surrounding hair. Kim felt an overwhelming desire to kiss and run her fingertips over the clean skin. She licked the base of his penis until he was hard, then gently ran her tongue around the tip, tasting his pre-cum. She straddled him and impaled herself on him, enjoying the unique feel of Sergekt's hairless lower body against her crotch. She grabbed his arms and pinned them to his sides, relishing the feel of his momentary helplessness. She climaxed with loud moans, in one the best orgasms she ever had enjoyed. It felt so incredibly good.

Once they were finished making love Sergekt wanted to set the room in order and join the others downstairs, but Kim stopped him. She needed to talk. She told Sergekt about Vladik's tentative plans to try to give the group's eight women a partial reprieve from their punishments. She then briefly went over her conversation with Dima and his trip to the Central Police Station. Sergekt was a bit surprised.

"No wonder he came back in such a good mood! He was totally happy, but he wouldn't tell me why. He said that I was just imagining things."

"Well, you know, it's just going to be the women that are getting any leniency. You guys are going to get it just as bad as last time, or worse. From what Vladik told me, there's a couple of real bad apples among those cops that you'll be facing tomorrow. That's the reason he wanted to separate out the women."

"Well, he did something for us, or at least for the ones who needed it the most. We" (Sergekt used the Danubian masculine term to refer to just the men) "can handle most of what the punishing officers do to us, but we always worry about the girls. Every time we go through this it's the same thing. We're always stressed about what they're going to do to the girls. At least this time we don't have to worry about that. It will put everyone's mind at ease."

"Sergekt, no one's mind is going to be put at ease. You will keep your mouth shut about this. Don't tell anyone. Vladik and his partner are putting their careers at risk by trying to keep the women away from those other cops."

"Of course. I'd forgotten about that. I won't say anything."

Kim and Sergekt remained in bed for a while, quietly staring at the ceiling. Kim's thoughts returned to Vladik and his stern but fair outlook as a cop. She wondered what motivated him to go to the police academy in the first place. He was smart and educated, a cut above the majority of his co-workers in the police force. She wanted to get Sergekt's opinion of her Spokesman's son.

"What do you think of Vladik? I mean, you've eaten dinner with us, and talked to him a bit, so what do you think of him?"

"I don't really know. I come over and what I see is a cop. It's weird for me to sit with him. It's weird because, at your Spokesman's table I can talk to him just like I could with anyone else, but the moment I step outside, I have to kiss his shoes. That makes me feel very uneasy, and I can't really separate him from his uniform."

Sergekt continued. "You know, we've been criminals for two years. We still have another year to go. The whole thing has changed me: the restrictions, the beatings, the collar, being referred to as Criminal # 92876 instead of my name�it's made me different. I'm not like I was two years ago. I'm a criminal, and I can't believe I'll ever see myself any differently. And until just now that's how I saw Vladik; as a cop, as a blue uniform with a switch. I couldn't really see him as a human being, and I still can't picture that he sees me as anything other then a criminal. So�this plan of his is a bit of a shock to me, finding out that he actually cares about the girls. I never could have imagined that any cop would care anything about any of us."

Kim and Sergekt got up, figuring it was time to clean the room and go downstairs. They showered and replaced the bed sheets. As Sergekt tossed the used sheets into the overflowing hamper at the end the upstairs hallway Kim remembered something else that Vladik had mentioned that gave her hope.

"Vladik told me something that was interesting. He said there's a whole bunch of people in the justice system: cops, Spokespersons, even at least one judge, who want to make some changes and stop the sexual crap when we get punished. He thinks the laws about that will change at some point. Of course it'll be too late to do us any good, but still�"

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The following day Kim was scheduled to ride as a courier for Victor Dukov. He simply contracted her out to Spokesman Havlakt for the day. She had to ride back and forth with numerous legal documents to Sergekt's school, two different police stations, and the Central Courthouse. She was busy riding the entire day, so she only caught very brief glimpses of her friends as they were moved into and later out of the school.

As the criminals knelt in front of the small police station near the school, Kim noticed the eight women were chained together. The guys were separated into three groups: two groups of eight and one of four. Vladik, his partner, and another cop stood over the women, waiting to march them to the school.

Kim did not see the punishment itself, but heard the rest of the story that afternoon from Eloisa. Spokesman Havlakt ordered the women to kneel as a group instead of the usual arrangement of two women with six guys. The women were surprised to be chained together, and unsettled that their punishments would not be taken care of at the beginning, as had been the arrangement for previous switchings.

The women had never seen Vladik and his partner, so they did not know what to expect. Vladik seemed to have a rather stern appearance that frightened them. However, he did not yell at them nor beat their shoulders, as was happening to the guys.

The criminals marched down the street in chains for the sixth time in their lives. It was a humiliating experience, and it was meant to be humiliating. Once inside the school there was more humiliation coming. In Upper Danubia it was customary that, if at all possible, a student punished at a school should be switched in front of an audience of the opposite sex. The police took the male criminals into the school auditorium, which was full of female students. Vladik and his partner took the women to the school gymnasium, where all the male students were sitting.

Because Spokesman Havlakt was in the auditorium with the male criminals, a second Spokesman was present to turn over custody of the criminals to the police officers assigned to punish them. That Spokesman was Vladim Dukov. Eloisa recognized him, and suddenly realized that the cop standing near the punishment table looked a lot like the Spokesman, only much younger.

The boys were sitting eagerly. They looked forward to watching the switching of the eight young women. However, they also were anxiously waiting to see the women humiliated, as they had been during the punishment prior to Christmas. The fondling was the part they really enjoyed, but today they would be disappointed.

The third cop escorting the group ordered the women to stand in a line as he took off the criminals' handcuffs and leg chains. He then unhooked the chains that linked their collars together and ordered them to kneel. They knelt forward, touching their heads to the floor. Because they were facing away from their audience, the women's vaginas and bottom-holes were in full view to hundreds of eager eyes as they knelt. As much as they tried to ignore their exposure, the feel of the air from the gymnasium's ventilator blowing against their most private areas made the women all too aware of how much on display they truly were. They could hear the boys quietly making comments to each other and comparing their bodies.

Vladik's partner picked up her switch and stepped in front of the kneeling criminals.

"Criminal # 92870, rise and present yourself at the table."

Eloisa stood up, walked to the punishment table, and resumed her kneeling position at Vladik's feet. As was customary, the Spokesman and the cop saluted each other to signal the change of custody. As was customary, Eloisa kissed Vladik's shoes. He tapped her shoulder with his switch and Eloisa sadly stretched herself out on the punishment table. Vladik's partner secured her wrists and ankles with leather straps.

Vladik touched Eloisa's bottom with the switch. He gave her a stroke that was painful, but not vicious. He re-positioned the switch, and struck again. Vladik continued to strike methodically, laying on one stroke after another. The punishment hurt, but was much less severe than what Eloisa had experienced previously. She closed her eyes, trying to cope with the pain. Tears rolled down her cheeks, but she was able to resist the urge to cry.

Vladik continued switching Eloisa, sharply but not full-force. He tapped her bottom before each stroke, then twisted back and struck her. He punished only her bottom. The welts were not serious enough to risk breaking Eloisa's skin, not even when the punishment was close to the end. As a result of the lighter strokes on her bottom there was no need to punish Eloisa's back or thighs.

The lead singer's switching was over in less than 20 minutes. The last time she had been switched, the cop took nearly an hour. She was in considerable pain, but was not feeling the agony she felt back in December. Vladik's partner unbuckled the straps and Eloisa stood up. Vladik then presented her to the judge, who signed her punishment certificate. Criminal # 92870 was hugely relieved. It was over. She knelt, kissed Vladik's shoes, thanked him for punishing her, and with a tap of his switch on her shoulder, was released. Vladik saluted his father and that was the end of Eloisa's switching.

Eloisa felt enormously grateful to Officer Vladik Dukov. He had punished her to the absolute minimum of the legal standard. She realized that some sort of secret arrangement must have been made on her behalf, which also would explain why all the women were together today and separated from their classmates.

Eloisa knelt quietly while the second criminal, one of her back-up singers, was called to the table and switched. The second woman's switching also was to the minimum legal standard and was finished within 20 minutes. No mistake about it, some sort of arrangement had been made. There was no humiliation, no teasing, no fondling. The young harsh-looking officer was showing leniency to the group. Eloisa looked at Vladik Dukov, then at Spokesman Dukov, then back to the officer. She realized the cop must be the Spokesman's son, the same cop with whom Kimberly Lee was living. That explained a lot, but not everything, in Eloisa's mind.

Once the fourth criminal in the gymnasium had been punished and released, the first four women from Vladik's group walked past their audience of somewhat disappointed boys and left the school in Spokesman Havlakt's hired van. They briefly returned to his office, but none of them needed to get on a recovery table. Already the pain from their switchings was subsiding. They quickly drank some tea and then left to check on the guys. They knew the guys had not been so lucky.

**Chapter 12 � The Punishment in the School Auditorium**

Officer Vladik Dukov had been concerned about the other police officers for good reason. Several of them had a reputation for being perverted and two of them already had been reprimanded for abusing criminals. Vladik was appalled when he found out they would be part of the punishment team, which was what prompted him to take charge of the women.

Along with the deviant cops, several of the medical students from the Central Police Station were present in the school auditorium. As the male criminals looked over at the group of medical students standing with the cops, they knew they were in for a rough time. There was no legal need for the medical students to be present; they were there to have fun. Magda, the female student who had tormented the two burglars in Kim's presence, was included the group. She stood next to a cop she was dating, holding a box of medical gloves in her hand.

The 20 male criminals were forced to stand at the edge of the stage, facing away from their audience. Their punishment began when they were forced to kneel. When they put their heads to the floor, they were fully exposed to hundreds of jeering teenaged girls whose ages ranged from 15 to 18. A couple of female cops walked behind them, kicking apart the knees of the guys who were not spread widely enough. The harsh stage-lights shined brightly on the testicles and bottom-holes of the 20 young men.

The sight of 20 very exposed bottoms lined up on the stage was something the cops and medical students found extremely amusing. The cops, both male and female, kicked and slapped the kneeling criminals, to the point Spokesman Havlakt objected several times to their treatment. However the presiding judge in the auditorium was not the one same one who was in the gym. The criminals in the auditorium and their Spokesman received very little support or sympathy from the judge.

The female students were encouraged to taunt and whistle at the criminals. Many of the older girls remembered Eloisa's case and were sympathetic to the 20 guys on stage. They sat in the back of the auditorium and stayed quiet. However, the younger ones were elated at the spectacle unfolding in front of them. The teachers in the room were divided. Some of them secretly sympathized with the criminals, others felt they deserved everything coming to them because they had attacked one of their co-workers. It was an ugly case that continued to hurt the people involved and one that sharply split the school.

Four medical students put on medical gloves and shoved their fingers up the exposed bottoms of four of the ex-students. They massaged their prostate glands and forced furious erections from their victims. The cops then grabbed their arms and forced them stand up and face the audience. Four erect penises faced the mob of jeering teenagers. The cops, male and female, ran their hands up and down the criminal's bodies and teased them, to the delight of the girls in the front rows. The criminals' humiliation was complete, or so they thought.

Spokesman Havlakt was beside himself with disgust. There was no way he could get this to stop. The presiding judge would not support him, leaving him only the option of filing an official complaint once he got back to his office. However the complaint would do nothing to stop what was going on at the moment.

At last the first four criminals were ordered to kneel at the switching tables. As they knelt and kissed the shoes of the cops tormenting them, it was almost a relief to no longer have to stand in front of all those girls with their penises bobbing up and down. The cops secured them to the four switching tables. Magda, the medical student, placed her hand on the bottom of the criminal stretched out on the first of the four tables on stage. She addressed the audience.

�How many of you think criminal # 1 will cry first?�

A portion of the girls cheered.

�Very well�how many of you think criminal # 2 will cry first?�

Another portion of the girls cheered. She asked the question two more times for the other two criminals and got cheers from two other groups of girls.

Sergekt remained kneeling with his forehead touching the wooden stage floor and his bottom spread and high in the air. He was totally horrified. He knew that he would be humiliated and punished in the second batch of criminals with three others. He was so nervous he was sweating and shaking slightly.

Still, Sergekt was immensely grateful that at least Eloisa and her companions were not facing this awful treatment, nor did they have to witness it. He now understood why Vladik Dukov had been so determined to get control over the women in the group. What was happening to the guys was bad enough, but at least they did not have to watch these indignities heaped upon their female friends. From what Kim had told him, Sergekt understood that Vladik planned to punish the women and get them out of the school as quickly as possible. He fervently hoped they already had left.

The switchings began, four at the same time. The four cops struck as hard as they legally could, each trying to get his or her criminal to cry first. The four criminals, following the protocol of their subculture, resisted as best they could. They wouldn't have wanted to admit it, but they were competing against each other to see who could hold out the longest.

The four punishing officers struck the criminals simultaneously, but each trying a different tactic to get his or her victim to be the first to cry. They tried striking fast, striking slowly, punishing across the entire bottom, punishing one bottom-cheek at a time. The first criminal screamed at the 21st stroke, the last one at the 42nd stroke. All of them were crying towards the end of their punishments.

Spokesman Havlakt nervously went from table to table, waiting to do the one thing he was authorized to do. One by one he redirected the punishments against the criminals' backs or thighs to prevent permanent injury to their bottoms. When the punishments ended the Spokesman was sweating from stress and anger. However, he had to maintain his self-control. One group had been punished, there still were four other groups to go.

The police un-strapped the four criminals. The four young men were very badly marked up; their bottoms, upper backs, and upper thighs covered with dark welts. They staggered off and sank to the floor to kiss the shoes of their tormenters. One by one they were presented to the presiding judge, who signed each of their punishment certificates. To conclude their punishments, they had to thank the officers for the mistreatment they had just endured. With that they exited the stage towards the waiting van, to spend a long and painful afternoon on recovery tables.

Sergekt felt a hand caress his bottom. The hand slid between his legs and squeezed his testicles, so hard that he felt some discomfort. He felt his penis being massaged, and then the hand returned to fondling his testicles. He did not dare move his head or try to see the face of the cop who was tormenting him. Then he noticed part of a white smock out of the corner of his eye. His tormenter was not a cop, but one of the medical students. He felt a rough finger slide up his bottom. The finger briefly searched inside him and found what it was looking for, his prostate gland. He gasped and tears ran down the bridge of his nose as the finger circled around his gland and worked up a furious erection. The medical student began massaging his penis with her free hand and continued working his prostate from behind. She abruptly pulled her finger out of his bottom and ordered him to stand up. Sergekt did so, and was forced to face the audience. The medical student stood behind him, running her hands up his chest and pinching him. She whispered in his ear:

�You know, you filthy little beast, that you look like you could use some relief. You're all worked up and no one to fuck. Now isn't that sad?�

Sergekt was mortified at the thought the medical student might force an orgasm out of him on stage, but she knew better than to go that far. As it was the punishment crew stood very close to passing the legal line of mistreatment of the criminals in front of their under-age audience. Forcing Sergekt to have an orgasm on stage would definitely cross the line and result in a legal reprimand.

The girls sitting in the back and the teachers who had sided with the criminals were furious at what was going on. The school already was very bitterly divided over the merits of the sentences. The division would become even sharper after the punishment of today.

Sergekt and the other three criminals in his group finally were led to the punishment tables and kissed the shoes of the officers who would switch them. They bent over the tables and were strapped down. In spite of the fear of what was coming, he was relieved to no longer be standing up facing the auditorium with his erect penis on full display. However, the humiliation portion of his punishment was far from over. Several cops, male and female, as well as some medical students, caressed his bottom and continued to massage his penis, as he lay stretched out on the punishment table. It was the ultimate humiliation for Sergekt, to be touched by other guys.

Finally the cops in charge of actually wielding the switches took position. Sergekt was so mortified by what had just happened that he no longer was really paying attention to anything going on around him. Still, the criminal protocol of resisting his punishment as long as possible was burned into Sergekt's mind, and he was prepared to attempt not to scream or cry as long as possible.

Once again Magda posed the question to the screaming girls, which criminal would be the first to cry. The girls screamed the loudest when Magda touched Sergekt, making it even more important that he resist, just to prove them wrong.

The cop took her time delivering the first stroke. She made several false starts, trying to catch him off-guard and perhaps get him to scream at the very first stroke. Finally she struck, a hard vicious blow that burned into Sergekt�s backside and made him gasp as he tried to stay quiet. The cop patiently waited for a while and then struck again, with a stroke that approached, but unfortunately did not pass, the maximum legal standard. Sergekt clenched his fists and pressed his forehead to the table. Sweat trickled down his body. Very slowly the cop struck him again and again, waiting a very long time between each stroke. She would break him simply by dragging out the punishment. The pain was mounting and becoming intolerable, but the punishment was only beginning.

The female cop and a couple of medical students periodically ran their fingers over Sergekt's welts. They pressed hard on them, knowing that sharply increased the mounting pain from the raised reddish lines crisscrossing the criminal's bottom. The waiting was an important part of what made the punishment almost unbearable; the pain continued to mount and yet the punishment was no closer to ending. In spite of what he had told Kim in January, that nothing lasts forever, Sergekt now felt that attitude was a lie. The fact this was the sixth time he had endured a punishment didn't matter. What mattered was that he had only taken 10 strokes so far. There were 40 to go. It seemed this would indeed go on forever.

Spokesman Havlakt nervously walked from table to table, trying to prevent any serious injury to any of his clients and looking for anything that would allow him to cut short a switching. The one thing that would end a punishment immediately would be blood. Danubian law prohibited the further punishment of a criminal whose skin had been broken. In fact, if a cop broke a criminal's skin during a punishment, the officer risked losing the switch as part of his or her uniform and with it the right to punish criminals in the future. The officers were well aware of that limit and were very careful not to whip to the point of drawing blood. The Spokesman could see nothing that would legally justify stopping any of the punishments.

Sergekt made it to the 37th stroke without crying. He had defied the girls' prediction by being the third criminal out the four to start screaming. The final holdout cried out less than a minute after Sergekt broke. In this aspect at least, Sergekt maintained a shred of his dignity.

Sergekt's punishment ended in the usual manner, with six strokes re-directed against his thighs and another six on his upper back. He was in so much pain he nearly passed out, but with every bit of energy and self-control he had left, he struggled to get off the table and accompany the police officer to verify he had been properly punished. He knelt to thank the cop for punishing him and finally, an hour and a half after he first had been told to stand up from the stage, Criminal # 92876 was allowed to exit towards the waiting van.

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Kim was well aware of what was going on inside the school. She picked up a batch of punishment certificates and caught a brief glimpse of the punishment in the auditorium. There were only four criminals still kneeling on the stage and four others on the tables, in the middle of their switchings. Even at a distance Kim could tell they were being savagely treated. She was relieved to see that Sergekt was no longer there. However, Dima was present, still kneeling on the stage. He would be in the final group to be punished.

Kim was surprised at the sharply contrasting attitudes of the girls filling the auditorium. The students in the back were sitting in disgusted silence, while the younger ones in the front were acting like they were at a rock concert. Kim decided to discuss the school's division with Vladim Dukov, hoping that somehow he would find the information useful.

Some of the girls sitting in the back sadly looked over at Kim as she left with her hands full of folders. The students recognized Kim as the �Maragana Girl�, having seen her singing on stage with the criminals being punished today. Kim took a last look at the eight criminals remaining on the stage. Besides, Dima, there were two others who Kim considered close friends. However, there was nothing she could do for them by staying. Kim left the school and rode with her folders downtown.

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Kim returned to the school one last time in the mid-afternoon to pick up the final batch of punishment certificates. The students were back in their classes, pretending to pay attention to their teachers in spite of the spectacle they had just witnessed. The purpose of having the criminals punished in the school was to frighten the students into not getting into trouble themselves. That goal was easily achieved. There was not a student in the school who would have wanted to trade places with their ex-classmates.

Kim picked up her folders and quickly moved towards the main door, not wanting to be here any longer than necessary. However, she was stopped by one of the teachers, who signaled her to go with him to the school library. Once in the library the teacher quietly spoke to her in bad English.

�I want tell you. You�criminal�Advocat Vladim Dukov?�

�Yes sir. He's my Spokesman.�

�You know�many teacher�many student�we no like today. Very bad. Very bad. No good to criminal.�

Kim nodded. �Yes sir.�

�You good girl. Good singer. Now you help me. Take list to Advocat Vladim Dukov. You no show list�only Advocat Dukov.�

With that the teacher handed an envelope to Kim. It was fairly thick, but sealed. Kim looked at it, mystified. The teacher tapped it, nervously.

�You no show list.�

Kim understood. The envelope had to be hidden. She stuffed it among the other envelopes.

�Now, go-go.�

Kim quickly mounted her bike and sped to the Central Police Station. She should have gone to the Central Courthouse first, but she decided not to risk having someone there question the extra envelope she was carrying. She wanted to get rid of it as quickly as possible.

Kim entered her Spokesman's office, passing the two secretaries and two of Eloisa's female friends as they were rubbing lotion onto the welts of four punished male criminals. The contrast between the women and the guys shocked her. The two women still had switch-marks on their bottoms, but nothing too serious. The women moved about normally, none the worse for their experience with Vladik. The guys were covered with dark raised welts that looked awful. Kim realized that Officer Vladik Dukov really had spared the group's women.

She entered Dukov's office to find him there with four other Spokespersons, including Eloisa's. Dukov�s co-workers looked at her with surprised expressions. Kim quietly started to back out, but Dukov called her back. He addressed her in Danubian.

�Kimberly, I presume you have something urgent, to have come in here with such haste?�

Oops. Kim had forgotten her public duty as a criminal. In the presence of the other Spokespersons she had to greet Dukov in the formal manner, not just charge into the office. She immediately dropped to her knees and placed her head on the floor. She held out the teacher's envelope. Dukov took it, but did not give Kim permission to stand up. She felt very strange, given that she never had knelt for her Spokesman before.

Dukov opened the envelope and unfolded the sheets of paper it contained.

�Kimberly, please rise and finish your deliveries. Once your assignment has been completed, you are dismissed. You may wish to report to Eloisa. I believe she could use your assistance.�

�Yes, Spokesman Dukov.�

Kim bicycled across the main plaza to make her final delivery. Upon getting back she sought out Eloisa, and finally found her in Spokesman Havlakt's office. She was with Dima, standing next to his table. He was very badly marked up, not just from the 50 maximum-strength stokes of the switch he had received, but also from having been struck on the shoulders at the beginning of the punishment and having been slapped many times across the face. His face was swollen and his lip had been cut. He was asleep, or to put it more accurately, he had passed out.

Kim was not surprised that Dima had been treated so badly. What did surprise her was to see Eloisa holding his hand and caressing it. She looked up at Kim with tears streaming down her cheeks. She noticed Kim's surprised expression, given that she had never seen Eloisa touch anyone before.

�I�I need to be a bit stronger for him.� Eloisa stated sadly. �I'm going to make myself get over my fear of touching people. I need to�be�a real woman for him. I realized that when I saw him this afternoon. He's given up everything for me. The least I can do is hold his hand.�

Kim was so upset she felt sick. �What did they do to Sergekt?�

�He's better. He forced himself to get up to help the others come in at the end. Sergekt's tough. I don't know where he is now, though. I'd guess he's in one of the offices, or maybe helping people get home.�

�I want to find him.� Eloisa sadly nodded. Kim continued. �Will you be OK?�

�Kimberly, I have to be OK. I have no choice.�

Kim spent the next few minutes looking for Sergekt, but instead ran across her Spokesman. Dukov signaled Kim to go back into his office. The other Spokespersons were gone, ending the temporary need for Kim to treat him in the formal manner. He was very agitated.

�Kimberly, I wish to ask you something. Are you aware of the contents of the envelope you gave me today?�

�No, Spokesman Dukov.�

�Well, I will tell you. What you handed me was a petition, signed by 37 teachers, three administrators, and 138 students. The petition objected to the immoral treatment of your friends today. The teacher who worded the petition argues that to punish criminals in such a blatantly sexual manner will corrupt the morals of the school's young people. What they want is the punishments to stop, or at the very least to be moved elsewhere.�

Dukov sat back, stretched his arms backwards, and continued.

�There is something else I wish to tell you, which may or may not help you. All 20 Spokespersons in Danube City finally have agreed that our system of corporal punishment needs to be reformed. I will introduce legislation next week that would specifically prohibit police officers from touching a criminal with their hands during a punishment. We wish to outlaw any act designed to sexually satisfy a police officer. Also, we wish to outlaw allowing persons such as medical students to participate in corporal punishments.�

Kim said nothing, not really knowing how to react. Dukov put on a pair of surgical gloves and opened up an ancient-looking law book that was placed in a felt-lined wooden tray.

�Today's decision is a very grave step on our part, Kimberly. Our judicial system has kept our country at peace for ten centuries. We have had only two major reforms during that entire time. The first was in 1524. That was when our King, Vladik the Defender, created the position of Spokesman for the Criminal. The second was in 1780. That was when the Grand Duke abolished the use of whips and instead opted for switches. We have had no reforms since 1780.�

�So why now? What's made things different?�

�What has made things different is a recent breakdown of morality among the younger police officers. The sexual abuse of criminals is something that started only about 10 years ago. When I was sentenced, no police officer would have disrespected a criminal in the manner we are seeing today. Now the practice is becoming common. It will destroy our entire judicial system if we do not stop it. The problem we face is public opinion and the widespread belief that a police officer should have complete control over a criminal's corporal punishment, within the standards set in 1780. The standards of 1780 no longer properly protect criminals, so we must set new ones.�

�But, what's the problem? I mean, isn't obvious that it's wrong to like, rub us and�?�

�No, Kimberly. It is not so obvious. I can tell you there is very little sympathy for criminals in this country. We cannot debate this issue by arguing that criminals deserve leniency. We need to argue from the point of view that the changes are needed to protect public morality. That is why the petition from the school is so important. It supports my argument in terms acceptable to the people of this nation. What we saw at the school today was immoral acts being performed in front of young teenagers. Those girls were corrupted by what they witnessed. That gives me the image I can use to make my argument when I speak next week.�

�So, you're going to the Parliament next week?�

�Yes, Kimberly.�

�Aren't you scared?�

�Yes, Kimberly. I anticipate this with much anxiety. I am not a politician, and to challenge the statute of 1780 will disrupt the tranquility of my family's life. It will bitterly divide the Judges, the National Police Force, the schools, and the public. I will be blamed for disrupting the peace of our society. Only the Spokespersons are in complete agreement about the need for reform. My responsibility over the next several months will be to convince the rest of the nation. At the beginning that task will be very difficult.�

Kim left the office, briefly wondering about the wisdom of her decision to stay in Upper Danubia. What the hell was wrong with this country, that its people didn't recognize the obvious? Who wouldn't want to put a stop to what had happened in the school auditorium today?

And yet, change was indeed coming to the Duchy. There were good people in the police force, in the schools, and in the legal system, who would push for reform. Some would challenge the system because of their definition of public morality, others out of genuine sympathy for the nation's criminals. Perhaps it would be enough to update a law that was two centuries old. Kim held out hope the result would be a better Upper Danubia, one in which she would feel more comfortable spending her life.

With that Kim returned to Eloisa and her boyfriend. He was up and somewhat recovered. The three left the Central Police Station. Tomorrow was another day, one in which Kim and Eloisa would return to the music store, and Sergekt and Dima would be returning to their caf�. There would be a rehearsal tomorrow night and a concert to prepare for on Saturday.

Every four months the 28 members of Eloisa's group went through this. They still had over a year of wearing their collars and at least three more switchings left on their sentences.