**Maragana Girl**

by EC

**Chapter 25 � Tiffany's Three Demerits**

While Kim and her friends were occupied with the first week of their concert tour, Upper Danubia struggled through an ever-deepening political crisis. For the first time since the Second World War, the Duchy faced the prospect of political instability. The conservative government of the Party of the Duchy fell in the Parliament's first no-confidence vote since 1940. The Prime Minister immediately called elections assuming, correctly as it turned out, the deputies of the opposition Greater Danubian Progressive Party were not yet organized enough to win an election outright.

On July 29, the day after the successful concert of "Socrates' Mistresses" in Warsaw, the Duchy held the first out of a series of chaotic national elections. During the campaign the opposition deputies savagely attacked the government's disastrous handling of the previous year's fires in Rika Chorna province, which resonated among dispossessed voters in the entire eastern part of the country. However, the economic program the Greater Danubian Progressive Party put forward was frightening because of the commitments its leaders had made to foreign corporations. Included in the opposition's plans were the immediate abolition of many of the country's oldest institutions and social services, the removal of all legal protection for local businesses, and the immediate removal of most border security. The "Progressives" openly argued for closing Upper Danubia's public transportation system and encouraging the public to buy and import private automobiles. As for the farmland that would be destroyed by the proposed roads, the solution would be to import food from the European Community.

The proposal that most frightened much of the public about the opposition's program, however, was the idea to systematically log Upper Danubia's forests, in order to pay for road building and other large-scale development projects. Several international logging firms already had contracts pending to clear out the forests. All that was needed was a clear victory by the Greater Danubian Progressive Party.

As insane as the massive logging projects may have sounded to the western half of the country, to voters in the eastern half of Upper Danubia logging made perfect sense. Logging would remove the region's fire hazard once and for all, as well as finance the reconstruction of Rika Chorna and other fire-affected provinces. It was a financial quick fix that had its attractions, but any educated person realized the ultimate price would be far greater than any short-term gain for the east.

There was one final part of the opposition's program that struck real fear into the hearts of Danube City's 2,000 criminals: jails. The "Progressives" wanted to bring Upper Danubia's justice system in line with the rest of the world by rounding up all convicted criminals and putting them in jail. The incarceration program would begin with a concentration camp outside Danube City, which would stay in operation until a proper prison could be constructed. Once the prison was built, criminals would move in, be issued prison uniforms, have their collars removed, and spend the rest of their sentences in prison cells. Sure it would be costly and pull the criminals away from their families and jobs, but isn't that the way the rest of the world does it? Besides, a lucrative prison construction contract was waiting for a US corporation paying the campaign contributions of several opposition candidates.

Two nights before the election the Parliament's independent deputies invited Spokesman Vladim Dukov to address a campaign rally. He gave an angry speech to a large crowd, exhorting the public to reject the "insane" proposals of "capitalism in its most savage manifestation". He attacked globalization and the neo-conservative push to turn the world over to corporate interests. As she listened to him speak Kim realized, in spite of his kindness to her and his understanding of US citizens as individuals, Dukov did not like the United States as a society and rejected much of what its government stood for.

"We need to cultivate our land and we need to eat! We need to be safe! We need to walk down our streets in peace and breathe clean air! We do not need to become a nation of automobiles, international logging companies, pollution, and crime! We must not become a nation of people working 60 hours a week to buy imported products we don't need! And we must not sacrifice our identity on the altar of global commerce! I reject that false god, and I urge you to do the same!"

Dukov's speech killed the prospect of an outright victory by the "Progressives" and earned him some real political enemies in the Parliament. The popular vote split three ways, between the "Nobility", the "Progressives", and the unorganized group of dissidents from the two parties. Following the election, the Party of the Duchy formed an unstable coalition with the Duchy's independent deputies to set up a government. The new government would last a total of three weeks before the independents defected in a no-confidence vote and forced yet another election. The nation's Prime Minister later resigned in disgust, leaving Upper Danubia in political crisis with no real leadership.

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Kim returned to the hospital to visit Tiffany on the 29th, the same day of the first round of elections taking place around the country. She entered the hospital grounds right at 9:00, expecting to spend the entire allotted three hours with her client. Kim was not surprised to see Tiffany still in her room, but she was surprised to see that her physical appearance had only slightly improved. Tiffany's intern reminded Kim that her client not only had spent the entire week cleaning out the drugs from her body, but also undergoing treatment for venereal disease and amoebas.

"She's had a rough week, but I think once we discontinue the antibiotics she'll feel much better. She's definitely past any danger of seizures, so I think we'll collar her today after her medical evaluation. Tomorrow we'll fix her teeth, and on Tuesday she'll start the regular exercise regimen with the other patients."

"How's her attitude been?"

"Apprentice, about the attitude�that's not been so good. She earned three demerits on Thursday, which is something I want to discuss with you. Our program includes a system of merits and demerits, which is one of the ways we encourage our patients to cooperate and behave appropriately. We issue merits based on good behavior and cooperation. A demerit results from a refusal to cooperate, or in the case of your client, disrespect and dishonesty. We've had quite a bit of unpleasantness from Tiffany over the last week. Some of that is to be expected, due to her medical condition. However, last Thursday we directed her to spend some time on a treadmill to check her heart and blood circulation. We run a total of three sessions on the treadmill to check a patient's endurance. Tiffany co-operated the first round, but she became rebellious after that. She�I presume it's an American manner of insulting�circled her eyes around when we issued our instructions, and then, in English, she called the doctor a 'cock-sucking fag' and to 'go fuck himself'. We did not understand what the term 'cock-sucking fag' meant, so I tried to look it up. I never figured out what the first word meant. The best I could figure is that it has something to do with sucking on chickens. The second word has two meanings, and I presume she was not calling the doctor a pile of firewood."

Kim sighed. "No. In the US that means only one thing, and it's an insult. A pretty bad one."

"Very well Apprentice. Then that is one demerit. I confronted Tiffany about the gesture with her eyes and her vocabulary, and she flatly denied both. Perhaps the gesture with her eyes was a misinterpretation on my part, but what she said was quite clear, and I am not the only person in the room who heard it. Several other patients witnessed the incident. We issued her a second demerit for lying and a third for the fact the incident took place in front of other patients."

"So�what is a demerit? What does that actually mean?"

"A demerit involves a formal apology and five strokes of the switch."

"And she's got three? That's fifteen strokes?"

"That is correct. Fifteen strokes and three formal apologies. Had she earned any merits, a merit would have canceled demerit. Unfortunately Tiffany did nothing this past week to earn a merit. To be honest, her behavior outside the Thursday incident has not been very cooperative."

Kim shook her head. The intern continued.

"I've discussed this matter with the doctors involved, and perhaps we can�postpone the corporal punishment until next weekend and hope she can earn a merit or two. That wouldn't sit well with the other patients, but perhaps it would motivate your client."

"Very well, Intern. I'll talk to her, and see what's going on."

Kim then returned to Tiffany's room, to find the patient sitting up and a bit restless. She gave Tiffany a sharp look and pointed at the floor. Tiffany sadly got on her knees and touched her forehead to the ground.

"OK, Tiffany, let's remember our protocol�it's 'Good morning Apprentice Lee. I am pleased you have safely returned.'"

Once she repeated the formal greeting, Kim invited Tiffany for a walk across the hospital grounds, to begin conversing with her. At first Kim gave Tiffany an update on her own life and the concert in Warsaw, and then went into detail about what Tiffany's life would be like once her trial was over. Kim wanted to emphasize that Tiffany would indeed have real life after her rehab and trial.

Kim continued with some questions about Tiffany's current life, beginning with how she planned to maintain contact with her friends and relatives in the US.

"I don't know who I'll stay in touch with. The only person who really cares about me is Joe. I know I�I gotta write him and tell him I�guess I'm doing OK. I don't know. I'm so doped up with antibiotics that I really don't know how I'm supposed to be feeling."

Kim and Tiffany walked out to the edge of the forest park, which was a place Tiffany would come to know very well over the next several weeks during the rehab program's afternoon hikes. For a long time both women stared at the woods, while Kim tried to think how she could bring up the subject of Tiffany's behavior and the resulting demerits. Finally she asked:

"What about things here at the hospital? How do you feel you're doing?"

Tiffany was quiet for a moment. Kim knew her well enough to realize that she was struggling with whether or not to tell the truth or simply gloss over what happened. Finally Tiffany sighed.

"Kim�I mean Apprentice Lee, I don't know if you talked to the doctors yet�about something that happened Thursday. I kinda�said some things on Thursday�to the doctor�and�I think...I�m in some sort of trouble."

"Why? What made you talk to him like that?"

"I don't know. You know how I am with my mouth. And I didn't feel good and I was in a pissy mood, and they�do you know what happened?"

"I heard the intern's version of the story, so I know that much. What I need is to hear your side. Did they do anything wrong, anything to make you upset?"

"Not really, they just kept insisting on that treadmill test. But I starting to feel kinda sick and I mouthed off, and totally shocked everyone in the room. I think the other patients were more shocked than the doctors. It's like�I don't know�like the other patients are madder at me than the staff. They tried to be friendly at the beginning, but they haven't talked to me since Thursday�and that's got me a bit scared."

"Yeah, I guess it would. Tiffany, you just don't do that in this country, insulting someone and then lying about it. The Danubians get pissed about lying, because they're real big on this whole concept of 'honor'. Part of that thing with the 'honor' is you don't lie, and another part of it is you take responsibility for what you do. The other patients are avoiding you because you dishonored yourself. You know, if you just would have 'fessed-up and apologized�"

"I know I should've, but I�just can't. I've never apologized for anything."

"Well, this afternoon you're gonna have to. You owe the doctors three apologies, and you're gonna have to say it like you mean it. Nobody's gonna talk to you until you apologize."

"Yeah, I know. But the intern said something else�that they�re gonna punish me.

"Maybe. What's happened is you got what they call 'demerits', three of 'em; first for the insult, and then for lying about what you said, and the third for doing it in front of the other patients. Do you know what a demerit is?"

Tiffany shook her head.

"An apology is part of a demerit. The other part is five strokes of the switch. You got three demerits."

Tiffany gasped. "You mean�they're gonna whip me?"

"Well, that's what I'm not sure about. The intern said that maybe they could put it off 'till next Sunday, to see if you can get make up for it this week. The way their system works is if you get a 'merit' for good behavior, that'll cancel a demerit. If you could get three merits, that would cancel your punishment."

Tiffany's next question surprised Kim.

"Apprentice Lee�do they�ever do that for other patients�I mean�postpone a whipping to see if they can make up for it the next week?"

"No. In fact, the intern said it wouldn't sit well with the other patients, 'cause it's not the normal way they do things. But I guess they're willing to make an exception for you, 'cause you're a foreigner and maybe they think you don't understand the system or you didn't know what you were doing."

Tiffany struggled with the information and the possibility of a reprieve. For a long time she was quiet. Then Kim noticed a change in her expression. The change was slight, but it was noticeable.

"On Thursday�I knew what I was doing. I just thought, because they didn't speak English, I could get away with it." Tiffany swallowed and continued, "I just�I'm�I really don't want to do anything that's gonna piss off the other patients, any more than they are already. I mean, Kim�I mean�Apprentice Lee�I gotta live with everyone here until the end of August, and I�just�can't have them�not speak to me�'cause I got special treatment."

"So�what exactly are you trying to tell me?"

"I don't�I just think�I think the best thing would be for me to just get it over with. I�if I got punished, like normal�do you think the other patients would speak to me again?"

Kim thought for a moment, trying to draw upon her knowledge of Danubian society to answer Tiffany's question.

"I don't know about the hospital. I can tell you that with a group of ordinary criminals, if you turned down a special favor and asked to be treated like everyone else, it would get the others to respect you again. Anyhow, the way a switching works in this country is you deal with it, it hurts like hell for a while, and then it's over. Like, with our sentences�me and my friends from the band�once our collars came off, with the Danubian government it's as though our convictions never happened. I've got one friend who just entered the police academy, and well, here I am, as a legal Apprentice. I don't see why it would be any different with you. You screw up, you get your butt whipped for it, and then you're done."

"I really don't want to worry about this next week. I just want to forget about it."

"Well, you're not going to just forget about it. The welts will hurt for several days."

"I mean, the others�"

"I think it would fix your problem, if you're worried about getting along with the other patients."

Tiffany drew a deep breath. Her voice quivered slightly with her next statement.

"Then�I guess I'll just take the demerits and get it over with."

"You mean the switching?"

Kim's client nervously nodded.

"Yeah."

"It'll be 15 strokes."

"I know. I'll just deal with it."

Tiffany began twisting her hands and fidgeting. Before she and Kim returned to the hospital, she had one final question for her custodian.

"Kim...I mean Apprentice Lee, could you stay with me when I get punished, you know, to make sure I don't get hurt, like in court?"

"Sure. If you've got the guts to go through with this, then the least I can do is stay with you."

As they made their way back across the hospital grounds to the main building, Kim knew that, in her own way, Tiffany was about to make an important step in her personal transformation away from being a drug addict. For the first time in her life she had decided to directly face the consequences of something she had done wrong. She had turned down special treatment in order to regain the respect of her fellow patients. Tiffany's acceptance of her situation contained the seed of understanding the Danubian concept of "honor".

Kim approached the intern with her very forlorn client trailing behind her. Kim motioned with her fingertips for Tiffany to kneel. She then saluted the intern and addressed him in Danubian.

"Intern, I have discussed the situation concerning the three demerits with my client, Tiffany Walker. Tiffany understands she dishonored herself last Thursday and is willing to accept the consequences of her behavior. I do not believe a postponement of her demerits is necessary."

"Very well Apprentice. I think that's for the best. I was more concerned about how the other patients would view this, much more than the staff. It's been a bit difficult for all of us, given that Tiffany Walker is from a different country, and we're really not sure how we should behave around her. If she can accept her role as a patient and abide by our rules, I think that will make all of our lives much easier."

"Intern, I do have one request to make. As her Spokeswoman, I would like to be present during her punishment."

"I don't see why that would be a problem. If you come back here about 5:00, the head doctor will issue you a hospital pass."

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Kim decided to spend the early part of the afternoon at a nearby beach along the river. She pulled off her dress and for a while walked naked, with her clothes over her arm and her shoes in her hand, along the water's edge. After a few minutes she had the good fortune to run into her fellow-vocalist Valia and her family. Kim spent several pleasant hours just relaxing, for the first time in well over a month, as she swam and played cards with Valia, Valia�s boyfriend, and Valia�s younger brother.

Kim returned to the hospital in a relaxed and very upbeat mood. As promised, she was issued a special after-hours visitor's pass and made her way to the substance abuse department of the sprawling complex. She found the program's 40 patients sitting in a large classroom filling out questionnaires. Two doctors and five interns were standing in a group at the instructor's podium; looking over test results and organizing case files.

Tiffany and a middle-aged man wearing an alcoholic's collar were kneeling at the front of the room, facing the wall. The Danubian words "pog�nit j�ttit" were written in black magic marker on each of their backs, which, translated literally, meant "improper behavior". Kim realized the magic marker was indelible and would take several days to wash off. The humiliation of being marked was part of the demerit.

As soon as he noticed Kim was present, the intern called two security guards on a pager. The guards, a man and a woman, entered the room, as the head doctor loudly whistled. The patients quickly stood at attention, with the exception of the two demerits. The male guard was carrying a police switch.

The female guard approached the kneeling man and told him to stand up. Once he did so she took his arm and led him to the head doctor. He knelt and touched his forehead to the floor. Then he knelt upright and spoke: "Doctor, I committed a transgression that I need to apologize for. I pretended to be sick last Monday to avoid working in the garden. I lied about my physical condition, and wish to express remorse for my dishonesty. I request that I be appropriately punished for dishonoring myself."

"Very well, patient Dima. Once you are chastised, I will accept your apology."

Tiffany was next. The male guard looked at Kim, who instructed her client to stand up in English. The guard then took Tiffany's arm and led her to the head doctor. Tiffany knelt and looked nervously at Kim. Kim noticed the other patients were watching very intently, curious to see if she actually was going to apologize.

"OK. What you need to do is look at the doctor and say 'Doctor, I committed a transgression that I need to apologize for.' I'll translate."

Once Tiffany spoke and Kim translated, the Apprentice continued. "Now, say the following: 'I insulted you because I did not want to exercise last Thursday. What I said was in English, but I greatly dishonored you.�

When Tiffany repeated Kim�s words and Kim translated the statement to Danubian, she continued: �My second offense was to tell a lie because I wanted to deceive you. I did this in front of other patients, not thinking about your honor or anyone else's. I want to say I'm sorry for my behavior. I ask that I be appropriately punished for dishonoring myself."

As best she could, Tiffany stumbled over the long statement in English while her mentor translated. As soon as the other patients heard the translation, their expressions changed somewhat. They were very pleased that Tiffany was willing to accept the consequences of her scandalous behavior. She now could re-join the group once her punishment was over. The head doctor answered in Danubian:

"Very well, patient Tiffany. Once you are chastised, I will accept your apology and this incident will fade from our memories."

Kim's translation was "OK Tiffany, they'll drop this and forget about it after they whip your butt."

The guards led Tiffany and the alcoholic to the hospital grounds as the doctors and other patients filed behind. There was a pole located in the middle of a grassy area that had several metal loops welded to one side. Kim realized the pole was a whipping post.

The guards took out two sets of leather cuffs and attached them to the wrists of the culprits. Because he had only one demerit, the man would be punished first. However, what his punishment lacked in severity it more than made up with humiliation. Kim later learned he had entered the rehabilitation program voluntarily, because his wife threatened to divorce him if he did not stop drinking. He was an ordinary citizen with a good job and three children. Until recently he had led a respectable life, before his drinking got the better of him. Finally, on the verge of losing both his job and his marriage, he entered rehab. Now, here he was, a respected citizen with children, being cuffed naked to a whipping post for a stupid lie he had told earlier in the week. Kim noticed he did not really seem to be afraid, but it was obvious that he was horribly embarrassed.

The male guard handed the switch to his female partner and attached the patient's wrists to the pole. As was the custom in the National Police, the hospital rules stated that a person of the opposite sex should punish an errant patient in the rehab program. It was a humbling experience, especially for substance abusers who were married or had serious relationships.

The guard then told the man to spread his legs and arch his back. The patient sighed, but complied. The female guard positioned herself and tapped the man's bottom with her switch as he closed his eyes and waited for the first stroke.

The female guard struck hard, as hard as any police officer would have struck. Her victim gasped and turned slightly, but then tried to properly reposition himself for the second stroke. As soon as he was back into position, his bottom sticking out and his feet spread, the guard struck again. The patient gasped as sweat started collecting on his forehead. Once again the guard waited for her victim to reposition himself, and laid a third cruel stroke to the man's bottom.

Kim winced as the blows landed, but, having endured three full criminal switchings herself, she knew the patient's punishment was relatively mild. While it was true the strokes were every bit as hard as strokes issued by a police officer, there would be only five, which was something anyone could endure. Sure enough, the man made it through the fifth stroke without making any sound apart from his breathing. The guards released him and he rejoined the other patients. He tried to avoid rubbing the five red stripes across his bottom, but every so often he winced as his hands went over his backside. Still, he had made it through his punishment properly and gave Tiffany an example of how she needed to behave.

The guard glanced at Kim, who turned to her client. "Alright Tiffany, you're up." Tiffany shot a frightened glance at Kim as she got up off her knees. Kim gently squeezed her arm.

"OK. It's gonna hurt like hell, and it's supposed to. It'll feel like you're being cut open, but they won't do anything to hurt you for real. Now, one thing. Please�please try not to scream or cry if you can possibly help it. If you really want to get the respect of the other patients, you'll tough it out as best you can."

Tiffany nodded, but Kim could tell she already was on the verge of tears, even before the first blow was struck. Sadly she moved to the post and the two waiting guards. The female guard attached metal clips to the cuffs on her wrists and raised her arms to one of the higher metal loops. She clipped the cuffs to the loop and then tapped the insides of Tiffany's thighs with her fingertips to force them apart. She then put her fingertips on Tiffany's waist to move her backwards and have her bottom sticking out.

"You, American Tiffany. This how you stand, you listen me?"

Tiffany nodded, as a tear rolled down her cheek.

There were no preliminaries to the punishment. The female guard stepped back as her male co-worker positioned himself to whip Tiffany. He struck hard, hard enough to make all of the females in the group watching flinch in sympathy. Tiffany bit her lip and squeezed her eyes shut, but did not make any noise. Kim was relieved, because she had been afraid her client might not endure a switching very well. Tiffany bent her knees slightly and moved her body forward. Kim admonished her in English.

"Tiffany, get back in position. The quicker you get your butt out, the quicker this'll be over."

Tiffany gasped and nodded. She shifted herself back out. The moment her bottom was flexed back into position Tiffany felt another searing blow across her exposed backside. Her eyes were completely filled with tears and her lip was getting bruised from her teeth biting down from the pain, but Tiffany was determined to not cry out.

Patient Tiffany Walker struggled to get herself back into position. The pain from the strokes was a horrible experience, and yet, deep down inside, she was happy this was happening to her. This experience: being tied naked to a whipping post in a foreign country, being subjected and beaten by people who did not speak her language�somehow filled Tiffany with a sense of relief, as though her soul had been contaminated and now it was being cleansed. Tiffany now realized how much she would be forced to turn away from everything she had been just two weeks before. The pain tearing into her drove that message home. This was real. Her life had changed and there was no going back.

As the pain mounted in her bottom from the increasing collection of reddish welts, Tiffany's mind focused on a single purpose in life�don't scream�don't scream. For the first time in a while she was able to forget about the selfishness, impulsiveness, and self-pity, as well as the resulting guilt and self-hatred, that had filled her thoughts for several years. At the same time she felt relief from having finally done something wrong, confessing to it, apologizing, and accepting the consequences. Tiffany was learning what it was to live a life in which each of her actions had consequences that were immediate and direct results of the things she had done wrong. She found that reassuring: considering that in her previous life the consequences for her actions came days or weeks afterwards, and usually in convoluted ways that never made any sense.

The punishment was over only about ten minutes after it began. Tiffany almost blacked out after the final stroke and her face was totally wet from her tears, but she had managed to not cry, to the amazement of everyone watching. The guards undid Tiffany's cuffs and released her. She fell into Kim's arms. Her tears wet Kim's shoulder and the sleeve of her blouse, but she still managed to stay quiet, even as the pain in her welts mounted. Finally Kim whispered into her client's ear.

"You did good. Really good, Tiffany. I'm proud of you."

"Really? You think so?"

"Yeah. You're gonna be OK. You're gonna get past all this, and then you'll have a life that's worth living."

Tiffany finally took her place in formation with the other patients. Kim knew, from observing the others and from her knowledge of Danubian society, that Tiffany had redeemed herself among the doctors, and more importantly, her peers. She could look forward to participating as a fully accepted member of the group during the activities the following week.

The final part of Tiffany's incorporation into the hospital program came a few minutes later, when she was fitted with a red fiberglass medical collar. The collar was a clear indication she was progressing with her detox treatment, because the doctors only collared patients who were past the danger of seizures and ready to fully participate in the program's busy schedule. Tiffany would spend a good portion of the following day sitting in a dental chair, but once her teeth were taken care of, she would begin a regimen of rigorous exercising to finish cleaning and restoring her body.

That night, as Kim got ready to leave, Tiffany showed correct protocol. She knelt properly, and, in spite of the pain from her welts and bruises, she crisply placed her hands on the floor and touched her forehead to the ground.

"Goodbye, until we meet again, Apprentice Lee."

"Goodbye, Tiffany. I'll see you next Sunday."

**Chapter 26 � The trial of Tiffany Walker**

The following week Kim divided her time between the music store, rehearsal with Eloisa's band, and studying the cases and laws she needed to become familiar with to properly represent Tiffany during her trial at the end of August.

Dukov conducted some of Kim's research for her, finding relevant cases and book-marking them. He laid books and files on Kim's desk, along with a few old drug cases he and other Spokespersons had represented over their careers. Kim later would have to learn how to research and find the necessary information herself, but Dukov realized she simply had no time to find the information she needed for her research now. It was imperative that Kim know the legal limitations placed on her by the Danubian judicial system, and to have very clear in her own mind what she hoped to accomplish when Tiffany was sentenced. Kim's primary goal never wavered:

"She's here to get off drugs. That's what I want to accomplish with her sentence. I want to get her off drugs and see to it she never has the chance to get high again. I don't care how much she craves that crap, I want to make sure she can never get her hands on it. I'm sure that someday she can make peace with herself, but she's gotta be clean to do it."

Dukov thought about Kim's statement for a moment. Finally he responded: "Very well, Kimberly. I believe you will properly represent your friend in court, from what you have just stated. The goal of personal redemption is what we strive for in our judicial system. The thought of redemption should be on the mind of every Spokesperson as he contemplates each criminal who must pass through his office. If you understand that, and also understand how you can use our laws and resources to redeem Tiffany, then you will properly represent her at her trial."

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Kim only had three days to attend to her duties at the store and in Dukov's office before having to leave Danube City for the second foreign performance of Socrates' Mistresses that loomed at the end of the week. The band's second concert was in Berlin that Saturday. Kim's third week back in Europe would be taken up with video shoots and then there would be a concert the following weekend in Paris. Between all that Kim somehow had to schedule return trips to Upper Danubia each Sunday to spend her allotted three hours with Tiffany.

Kim openly worried about her fellow band-members during their upcoming trip to Berlin, given that in Warsaw she almost felt like their chaperone. Kim's boss from the music store and the now-retired Spokesman Havlakt came to her rescue, volunteering to go with the band during the trip to Germany and France. Their help would allow Kim to study her case files during the week and return to Danube City on Sundays to deal with Tiffany.

Kim took a suitcase of Danubian law books with her to Berlin. While the other members of her band toured the German capitol with their two chaperones, Kim spent hours alone in her hotel room with Dukov's books and photocopies of his case files. When Kim was not reading or taking notes she was with the other members of the band rehearsing or being filmed for footage to be used in several upcoming videos. Kim only slept about five hours per night during her time in Berlin and Paris. Of those two famous cities Kim saw absolutely nothing except the airports, her hotel room, the Berlin studio, and two concert halls.

As regrettable as it was she could not be with her friends as they explored the world outside Danube City, Kim had no choice. Tiffany would be released from the hospital at the end of August and immediately go on trial. Kim's actions in the courtroom would determine the course of her client's entire life and she had to be properly prepared. Kim ran up the band's hotel phone bill spending hours talking to her former Spokesman when she had questions or doubts about how to interpret what she was reading. Kim had only three more weeks to attain a third year level of proficiency in understanding the cases and laws concerning drug use and perjury that would be relevant to Tiffany's case. Her only consolation was that because she had to push herself so hard during the weeks leading up to Tiffany's trial, she expected her classes in the fall to be somewhat easier now she was familiar with real cases and laws.

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Kim visited Tiffany for the third time the Sunday following the concert in Germany. She flew to Danube City first thing in the morning to be at the hospital by 9:00 and would go to the airport immediately after noon to return to Berlin. Officer Vladik Dukov and his partner borrowed a police van to take Kim from the airport to the hospital and back again, justifying the use of the van to transport the Apprentice because she was performing the duties of her profession. When the two cops dropped her off, Kim realized they had an ulterior motive for borrowing the van. As she got out of the vehicle she noticed a picnic basket sitting in the back, partially covered with a blanket.

As she entered the substance abuse rehabilitation program area of the hospital complex, Kim had a pleasant surprise. Tiffany was not in her room. Instead she was sitting outside on a bench, struggling to communicate with a young man and woman. The woman was wearing a red heroin collar like Tiffany, but the young man was wearing a yellow collar. Kim later learned the color yellow was for ecstasy users and he had become hooked on the drug while studying abroad in Belgium.

As Kim approached Tiffany, she dropped to their knees and crisply greeted her in the proper manner. The other two stood up to greet Kim instead of kneeling. Tiffany seemed surprised as she turned her head slightly and noticed her companions still on their feet.

When she was alone with her client, Kim realized she would have to explain the complicated situation of her status as a provisional Apprentice. As far as Tiffany was concerned, Kim was legally her Spokeswoman and had to be treated as such. However, Kim did not have her Spokesperson's certificate, so she was not yet a public official. Therefore any other criminal, prisoner, or patient not directly assigned to her had no obligation to use protocol when greeting her. As far as the others were concerned, legally Kim was nothing but a college student.

When she knelt upright, Kim noticed that Tiffany's appearance had improved tremendously. Her skin color looked good and she seemed to have gained some weight. The scars on her arms had faded and were only visible if one actually was looking for them. However, the other changes were nothing in comparison with the change in her eyes and her expression. Tiffany's eyes no longer had a vacant, exhausted look. They were not sunken nor with dark circles under them. Tiffany looked�healthy.

Kim also realized Tiffany was in an upbeat mood. She quickly found out why when her client summarized her week. The second week in rehab had been a difficult one, but it seemed each day Tiffany was making real progress.

"Kim�I mean Apprentice Lee�I got a merit! They actually gave me a merit yesterday, 'cause I've improved so much with the exercising!"

"In just a week?"

"Yeah! In just a week! I went out on Tuesday and got sick during the workout�but I kept trying. Everyday I got a bit better, and yesterday I was able to keep up! I mean I did the whole routine! The hike, everything! And I didn't get sick!"

"That's so cool! I'm really happy for you!"

Tiffany's merit, because she did not need to use it to cancel a demerit, resulted in her receiving a small reward. During the dinner Saturday night Tiffany was allowed to eat dessert. She had the choice between a piece of cake and two cookies. She took the cookies so she could give one to her roommate. Having dessert was a big deal in the program, since ordinarily dessert was not on the menu. The patients ate extremely bland food designed to clean out their bodies: whole wheat bread, raw fruits and vegetables, buckwheat porridge, and an occasional piece of meat. Dessert was held out to those who had earned merits.

Kim was pleased that Tiffany had shared her merit with her roommate. That small gesture indicated that Kim's client was thinking about others and making the effort to become an accepted member of the detox program's patients. Kim noticed a very real difference between how the program's other patients were treating her now, and how they had treated her the week before. The language barrier still stood between Tiffany and her fellow-patients, but the Danubians seemed to be determined to make Tiffany part of their group.

Kim reflected how much Tiffany already had changed. In high school she had been the leader of her clique. She mercilessly bossed her friends around, using her charisma and the threat of her disapproval to keep everyone in line. The Tiffany who was emerging now was much more reserved, content and eager to be accepted and follow instead of lead. What she had been before was completely destroyed by her drug use. Now, with the drugs out of her body and her brain recovering from the chemical assault it had endured over the last two years, Tiffany had to rebuild her mind and her personality every bit as much as she needed to rebuild her body. Her goals would have to be modest ones at first, because she was rebuilding herself from nothing. Tiffany's excitement over the merit reflected her new ability to appreciate the smaller things in life.

Tiffany still was in the very initial phase of breaking free from her past. She still faced many very hard challenges. For example, she had a bad craving on Thursday, but was smart enough to tell her intern about it. He walked with her for several hours until she was able to work that awful feeling out of her body. The year before the exact same thing had happened when she was in rehab in the US, but with different results. As the craving became unbearable Tiffany escaped and immediately scored some drugs to get high. This time, with a red collar around her neck and the prospect of a switching looming over her if she tried to escape, Tiffany was forced to stay and work through her craving instead of leaving to satisfy it.

That week Tiffany felt well enough to start a rather long letter to her brother, a project that took up all of her scant spare time. She shared what she had written so far with Kim. Kim was surprised to read the detail with which Tiffany had described the Danubian rehab program. She left nothing out, not even the fact she was denied the right to wear any clothing, nor the details of the punishment she received the week before. She emphasized she was not really sorry to have been punished, since it was in response to something she had done that clearly was wrong. Once the punishment ended and her welts healed, everyone acted as though the entire incident had never happened.

Tiffany also wrote Joe about how grateful she was for everything he had tried to do for her over the past two years. All of Joe's efforts to help Tiffany had failed but, as best he could, he kept trying. Finally his efforts did pay off when he succeeded in getting help for his sister by finding Kim. Without Joe, Tiffany would not have talked to Kim. Without talking to Kim, Tiffany would still be dancing at Dirty Grampy's, strung out on meth and making trips across the street with her unsavory clients to get money for Ray.

Finally, as she talked to her client, Kim realized her speech had improved in her conversation. Tiffany's grammar was better, she was using somewhat less slang and not swearing constantly. Her sentences were longer and her train of thought more coherent. She was more straightforward with her statements and clearly not embarrassed at all about the steps she was taking to rebuild her life. In the letter Tiffany planned to include a Polaroid picture of herself taken with her roommate and two other patients, to give Joe a better idea of what her life really was like.

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The remaining weeks of August passed in a flash. Kim would have liked to enjoy the rest of the summer doing things outdoors. She remembered with regret Sergekt's hope the previous year they could go hiking in the foothills near the Rika Chorna Reservoir, but it was obvious there was not a chance there would be any time for hiking that year. She really saw very little of Sergekt, because she was with her law books while he was constantly practicing and experimenting with Dima and the band's other musicians. Both of them were extremely busy, so fortunately there was no time for either to be upset about not being able to spend time with the other.

Eloisa, on the other hand, fully enjoyed her month traveling around western Europe. She and the three other female members of the band took time off from their practicing to explore with Spokesman Havlakt. Eloisa's mind, recently freed from many of its inner torments, was hungry for experiences and information that did not relate to her life in Danube City. Under the very legitimate justification they needed to rest their voices for the concerts, the band's four Danubian women simply relaxed and went sight-seeing during the day while Kim studied and the men practiced with their instruments.

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The group's other chaperone, the owner of Danube City's music store, watched Kim dig herself ever deeper into her future life as a Danubian Spokeswoman for the Criminal. He became increasingly annoyed about the fact the band had dumped its financial responsibilities on its American singer, and also angry at himself for allowing it to happen. What had happened to Kim was completely unfair. Dima and Sergekt were intelligent and sharp young men. There was no reason why they should hide behind that "Americans are so good with business" nonsense to shirk their responsibilities to the band's other musicians and songwriters. In Barcelona he sat down with Dima and Sergekt to give them an angry lecture about the need for them to take control of the finances of "Socrates Mistresses".

"What you two are doing to Kimberly Lee is completely unjustified, and you are dishonoring yourselves with your laziness," he snapped. "She has her own path in life and that path is not to keep your band's records straight! That is your job, not hers! Kimberly Lee now has her duties to Spokesman Dukov and to that drug addict Tiffany Walker. I do not want you to approach Kimberly Lee with your financial concerns any more. When you have problems, you will approach me about them. When you do, I will expect you to have at least made the effort to find out what questions you need to be asking. From this moment I will insist that you two take responsibility for this band, and I will hold you accountable for anything that goes wrong. You will learn what you need to know to negotiate your contracts and make payments, and you will assume some leadership!"

With that the lives of Dima and Sergekt suddenly became much more serious and focused. While the others went out sight-seeing, the band's two leaders nervously sat with the impatient businessman and learned the basics of the band's financial arrangements. As Kim sat reviewing her law materials during the final weeks of August, Dima and Sergekt spent all of their free time with the financial records of "Socrates' Mistresses". They were forced to learn what they should have learned the year before as they answered a barrage of challenges and questions posed by their impromptu business instructor.

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Kim returned to the rehab wing of National Hospital for the last time on the final Sunday of August. Tiffany's month in the program had rejuvenated her and restored her health. She had put on 5 kilograms and her muscles were toned from the constant exercising. It was obvious there was no need for the American to stay in the hospital past the beginning of September.

Carrying with her the court authorization to represent Tiffany, Kim presented herself at the arraignment committee on August 29. Dukov went with her, but only as an observer. Tiffany was Kim's case and it was Kim who had to address the committee to arrange a trial date. Kim put on her most formal dress and stood in front of the same three individuals who had arraigned her as a criminal slightly over two years before.

There was no warmth between Apprentice Lee and the three officials. The committee members had been humiliated during Kim's trial because of Dukov's defense and criticism of their actions regarding the release of her friends. On the other hand they also had a legitimate interest in questioning Kim's qualifications, given her provisional status and partially completed studies. When asked about her limited education Kim responded in accented Danubian:

"It is true that I am completely unqualified to appear in court for any case other than that of Prisoner 98946. It is true that I have not completed the second year exams, which is why I am only a provisional Apprentice instead of a certified Apprentice. However, it also is true the amount of research I have conducted on the case law related to the crimes committed by Prisoner 98946 is comparable to the research a Spokesperson in full standing ordinarily conducts under similar circumstances. What I lacked in education and general knowledge of the Danubian court system I compensated with guidance and tutelage from Spokesman Dukov."

Kim took a breath, swallowed, and continued:

"I am qualified to argue this particular case because of my unique knowledge of the personal situation of Prisoner 98946. I believe I understand her needs and that is why I volunteered to represent her. My intention is exclusively to serve her interests and make the necessary arrangements to protect her from her own chemical dependency. I have certain concerns regarding her sentencing and want to make sure this panel and the trial judge understand those concerns. If you ask me whether or not I am qualified to represent most prisoners, the answer would be that clearly I am not, due to my lack of experience. However, I do believe that I am the most qualified person available to defend the interests of Tiffany Walker."

Kim's heart was pounding as she finished. She couldn't believe she had said all that, in Danubian, with no pauses and no grammatical mistakes. When the committee members questioned Kim about the cases she felt were relevant, Kim's answers convinced them she was indeed familiar with the information she needed to confront the judge and prosecutor.

The committee had nothing more to add. If Kim could defend Tiffany as well as she had just defended herself, she would do fine in court.

The committee members quietly talked among themselves. The leader responded in Danubian:

"Very well, Apprentice Lee. This committee will take you at your word that you will properly represent Prisoner # 98946. Since we already are familiar with this case we will change our normal procedures for processing her. On September 1 you will bring her here under armed escort at 7:00 in the morning. We will confront her with her actions from two years ago. Immediately after we read her the charges, you and your police escort will take Prisoner 98946 across the Plaza to trial. Once she is punished the court will release her to your custody."

"Yes Chairman, and�thank you."

The committee chairman stood up and drew his fist across his chest. Kim and Dukov saluted the committee members and they saluted back.

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On August 30 Kim visited the hospital to break the news to Tiffany about her trial. Tiffany was scared, not only because of the trial and the punishment that awaited her, but also because she had become used to the sheltered life of the detox program. Tiffany had enjoyed the regimented routine and being able to keep her mind clear of everything except her minute-to-minute responsibilities.

That evening there was a small goodbye party for Tiffany and two male alcoholics who were well enough to leave the hospital. The hospital staff removed the patients' collars by unlocking them. Unlike judicial collars, which were much more permanent, medical collars simply unlocked and were designed to be re-used on other patients. The party was short, but very emotional for Tiffany and her roommate, who shortly would be separated. The two women would see each other in about a month, however, once the roommate was released. Kim was deeply satisfied knowing Tiffany had made her first friend in Upper Danubia.

The two middle-aged male patients got dressed and officially were released into the custody of their wives. Kim learned an interesting detail about Danubian law and how it treated substance abusers. An officially certified substance abuser, even if not accused of any crimes, no longer was a completely free citizen. Instead the patient had to be released into the custody of a family member, most often a spouse. The spouse was legally responsible for the substance abuser's public behavior, could tell him or her what to do, and could request arrest or detention if the offender refused to follow orders. After a year the detox program's staff reviewed each case to determine whether custody needed to continue or if it could be canceled. Kim figured very few men would want to be ordered around by an angry spouse for a year. Perhaps that was one factor that kept Upper Danubia's alcoholism rate so low. That night the two men, in a very subdued demeanor, left the hospital with their wives.

Tiffany was not released, because she had to go on trial the next day. Instead Vladik and his partner showed up to take Tiffany to the Central Police Station and lock her in a holding cell. The law was inflexible on that point; if Tiffany was not wearing a collar she had to be locked up. Kim felt bad for her, but the only thing she could do for her client was have Vladik give her some paper and a pen so she could spend the night writing letters. Tiffany was very scared, and with good reason. The next day would be both painful and traumatic. As best she could, Kim had warned her what to expect, which was not particularly reassuring.

At 6:00 the following morning Kim and Vladik showed up to take Tiffany to Spokesman Dukov's office. Tiffany ate the usual criminal's breakfast of tea, breakfast rolls, and fruit, before going to the bathroom and getting cleaned up. Kim ordered her to fill a sample tube with her urine for drug testing and to shave her pubic hair. While Tiffany finished getting cleaned up Vladik's partner took the urine sample to the police doctor. A medical student determined there was nothing in Tiffany's urine except a trace of marijuana, a drug that lingers in the body much longer than most other drugs. For the first time in several years, Tiffany was clean.

Tiffany dried herself off and came out just as Vladim Dukov showed up to accompany Kim to her first court appearance as an Apprentice. Kim ordered Tiffany to kneel in the outer office. Vladik then ordered her to stand up and handcuffed her. She gave Kim a very scared look.

"Alright, Tiffany, we're taking you down to your arraignment. I'm gonna warn you that committee is not going to be very nice to you, because they're a bit pissed about the perjury. Just be ready to answer their questions, and whatever you do, this time tell them the truth."

A few minutes later Tiffany was standing in front of the arraignment committee, in the prisoner's stance with her hands behind her head and her legs spread. She was trembling from fear and humiliation as the tears began flowing down her cheeks.

The English-speaking member of the panel addressed Tiffany in her usual dour manner.

"You are the American Tiffany Walker?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Has your Spokeswoman, Apprentice Kimberly Annette Lee, informed you about the charges pending against you?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"What are the charges you face, Tiffany Walker?"

"Marijuana possession, direct perjury, and indirect perjury, ma'am."

"That is correct. You are aware of the seriousness of these violations of our law?"

"Yes ma'am."

"And knowing the seriousness of what you did, you still chose, voluntarily, to return to our country and face these charges?"

"Yes, ma'am."

There was a brief discussion among the committee members, before the female panel member addressed Tiffany again.

"Tiffany Walker, on July 2, two years ago, you entered our country with two other American tourists, Kimberly Lee and Susan Taylor. Kimberly Lee had 432 grams of marijuana in her backpack, along with items associated with the preparation and use of that drug for the purposes of intoxication. Were you aware of the presence of the marijuana in Kimberly Lee's backpack?"

"Yes, ma'am. I knew the marijuana was in there."

"How did you know that?"

"I put it there before we left Amsterdam, 'cause I didn't have any room in my own backpack."

"You now acknowledge having placed 432 grams of marijuana in Kimberly Lee's backpack? With your own hands?"

"Yes, ma'am, I put it there myself."

"But, two years ago, in this very room, you denied having any knowledge of the contents of Kimberly Lee's backpack."

"Yes, ma'am. What I said two years ago wasn't true. I knew."

"Who purchased the marijuana in Amsterdam?"

"I bought it from a guy...you know a friend...like a boyfriend or something, who gave me a good price for it. That's part of the reason I got so much. And I was going to take it to Prague and...trade some of it for heroin. That's what I wanted to do with it."

"So your plan was to exchange a portion of the marijuana for another drug."

"Yes ma'am, that's what I was gonna do."

"What was Kimberly Lee's participation in this transaction you were planning?"

"She just was smoking, that's it. And Susan was just smoking. I was the one who had the contacts in Prague."

"That is not what you told this committee two years ago."

Suddenly Tiffany began shaking with fear.

"No ma'am. Two years ago...I...I....w...wasn't....t...telling...the truth."

The committee gave the prisoner a moment to calm down and continued.

"Let us change the subject. You mentioned Susan Taylor was smoking your marijuana as well. So she was aware of the marijuana's presence in Kimberly Lee's backpack?"

"Yes ma'am, she knew."

"And why, do you suppose, she denied any knowledge of the marijuana when we questioned her?"

"Because I...when we were in the holding cell...I told her to play dumb, you know, so we wouldn't get charged."

"And you did this knowing Kimberly Lee would be charged with possession of the full amount of marijuana in her possession?"

"Yes ma'am, I knew she was fu...uh, that she was gonna get charged."

"And you now claim that it was your idea that you and Susan Taylor would deny knowing what Kimberly Lee had in her possession, even though, in fact, both of you did know?"

"That's right, it was my idea. I was the one who told Susan what to say."

"Very well, Tiffany Walker, you will understand that you have admitted to marijuana possession, you have admitted to lying to this committee, and you have admitted to telling Susan Taylor to lie to this committee."

"Yes, ma'am."

The woman then stood up and tightened her lips. Her eyes bore right into Tiffany as she continued.

"I do not find what you did to us, however, nearly as abhorrent as what you did to Kimberly Lee. Apparently you had no reservations about destroying her life in order to spare yourself. Is that not so?"

"I...I didn't...I...was more worried about myself, that's true, ma'am...that's..." Suddenly Tiffany sobbed.

"You will control yourself!"

With every bit of her strength Tiffany forced herself to stop crying, while the committee members again talked quietly among themselves. Finally the woman spoke again.

"I want you to understand how vile a person I would find you, but there is one detail that prevents me from making such a conclusion. You did volunteer to return to our country and submit yourself to the consequences of your crimes. You will understand that your trial will not determine your guilt or innocence, since you already have admitted to all three charges. You will understand there will be no leniency for you, because what you did came very close to destroying the life of a person who considered you her friend. But you have chosen to try to redeem yourself, and for that I am forced to withhold my judgment concerning your value as a human being."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Very well. This committee will recommend you face charges of marijuana possession, drug trafficking, direct perjury, and indirect perjury. Your trial will begin as soon as you depart from this hearing."

With that the director of the committee stood up and drew his fist across his chest.

Vladik immediately handcuffed Tiffany and led her into the hallway of the police corridor. As members of the public and staff from the National Police watched, Vladik led Tiffany out of the building and onto the sunlit Central Plaza while his partner, Kim and his father trailed behind. The trip across the plaza seemed to take forever, even though they were in the main courthouse only minutes after leaving the Police Station. As always the Plaza was full of morning commuters, many pausing to stare at the attractive tall young foreigner being led across the plaza in handcuffs.

Kim was quiet during the trip across the plaza, extremely worried about the added charge of drug trafficking. She had expected the other three charges, but drug trafficking carried an additional 20 years plus a switching every 60 days. The extra time did not worry Kim, but the prospect of the extra switchings did bother her. Kim was convinced that switching Tiffany more than once a year would do her much more harm than good. Somehow she had to convince the court not to impose the extra switchings.

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The Spokesman and his Apprentice, along with two police officers and one very forlorn-looking naked young woman, entered the old ornate courtroom. The courtroom was crowded, as it had been for Kim's trial two years before. The audience this time was different, and included Sergekt, Eloisa, Dima, ex-Spokesman Havlakt, and Tuko, who now was wearing a police cadet's uniform. Also present were Anyia, a couple of her friends from high school, and Dukov's wife Maritza.

Kim and Tiffany took their positions at the back of the chamber for the beginning of the trial. Kim's words to Tiffany echoed what Dukov had said to her two years before.

"Tiffany, when the judge comes in everyone will stand and salute him, except you. You must kneel forward and put your forehead to the carpet. You will stay that way until the judge orders you to step forward. You will climb the platform and assume the prisoner's stance. That means you must stand with your legs spread and your hands behind your head. No matter who else is talking, you must remain in that position, facing the judge. I will translate anything you need to know or any answers you need to provide the court."

The judge entered the chamber. The entire room shouted "Doc-doc Danube!" and everyone saluted, including Kim. As instructed her client knelt forward and placed her hands on the worn carpet, her forehead touching the ground. Like Kim before her, Tiffany felt the cool air of the courtroom blowing against her exposed vagina and bottom. The tears rolled down the bridge of her nose and onto the carpet.

The prosecutor read the charges, which included the new accusation of marijuana trafficking. Kim quickly scribbled a note to pass to Dukov asking him if Tiffany could be charged with trafficking if she did not intend to sell the marijuana in Upper Danubia. A court courier took the note and handed it to Dukov. Kim noticed Dukov writing a rather lengthy response.

The Prosecutor then asked Kim in Danubian: "Apprentice, is your client properly aware of the charges she is facing and that you are her representative in this court?"

"Yes your honor. I informed Prisoner 98946 of the charges before she departed the United States to come here and face trial. I have since provided her with the additional information to fully understand what she faces as a convicted criminal in the Duchy."

"Are you properly prepared to represent her?"

"I am properly prepared to represent her regarding the charges of marijuana possession, direct perjury and indirect perjury. I will request assistance from my mentor, Spokesman Vladim Dukov, concerning the charge of drug trafficking, which under the Spokesperson's Apprentice Code Item 7, article 2, I have the right to do."

"Very well, Apprentice. It is better to request assistance when needed than to poorly represent your client. Please tell your client to present herself to the court."

Kim tapped Tiffany's shoulder and pointed at the platform. Tiffany walked to it and climbed the steps, finding herself standing about a meter and a half above the ground. Reluctantly she spread her legs and put her hands behind her head. Four spotlights shined on her from different directions.

Tiffany was totally terrified. Over the last two years she had suffered nightmares about going on trial, and now here she was, going on trial for real. And yet through her haze of terror and humiliation, Tiffany realized that here, on the prisoner's stand in the Danubian courtroom, was where she needed to be. This was her destiny, to surrender herself to the harsh punishment of Upper Danubia, and at last her life had come in line with her destiny.

Tiffany knew had she confessed the truth and been on the prisoner's stand two years before, two ugly things in her life would have been prevented. First, the traumatic adventures from the most recent two years of her life never would have happened. There would have been no hepatitis in Prague, no unpleasant homecoming, no drug addiction, no Raymond, no dancing at Dirty Grampy's, no sex with paying customers. Joe probably would not have started drinking so much, and her mother would still be speaking to her. Kim would still be her friend instead of her Apprentice, or Spokeswoman, or whatever the fuck she was. More importantly, had Tiffany come here to the courtroom instead of going to Prague, Susan would still be alive. Kim's harsh words in Frankfurt echoed in her mind: "One last hit! Just one last hit! One last hit before we leave Prague! Isn't that what you said to Susan? One last hit? And for her it was, wasn't it?"

There was only one thing that could be saved now, and that was Tiffany's own life. Standing here guaranteed only one thing, that she would stay alive long enough to see her 30th birthday. It was a gift from Kimberly Lee, but a gift that would come with a very heavy price. If only Tiffany had come here two years ago. If only�

Tears stated flowing down the prisoner's cheeks. She was not crying from fear of what was going to happen, but out of regret for the two years of hell she had gone through because of her "escape". Kim was the lucky one. She was the one who stayed. She was the one who had a life worth living.

The three arraignment panel members spoke for the prosecutor, as well as Malka Chorno's former police partner. An assistant to the prosecutor re-introduced the statements of other witnesses from Kim's trial, but did not see the need to actually call them back to give live testimony. The judge asked Kim if she objected to excluding live testimony from the witnesses, to which she replied she had no objections.

About half-way through the prosecutor's portion of the trial, Tiffany's loud sniffs began filling the room, as she desperately tried to keep the snot from her crying from running down her face. Finally the judge couldn't stand that irritating sound anymore. He addressed a court attendant:

"Attendant Dublakt, please bring some tissues to Apprentice Lee. Apprentice Lee, as soon as you have the tissues in your hand I want you to call Prisoner 98946 off the stand and have her blow her nose. Then she will reassume her position and we will continue."

"Yes your Honor."

Once Tiffany's nose was taken care of, the intern in charge of her rehab discussed her current physical condition. He described how she had deteriorated since her arrest two years before and how much she recovered during her five weeks in the National Hospital program. He showed two mugshots of his patient, the one taken the day after her return to Danube City, and a more recent one to emphasize the change.

The judge commented: "I believe we have a living example in front of us who demonstrates why our drug laws are necessary."

Finally Officer Vladik Dukov testified concerning the details of Tiffany's arrest at the International Airport. His testimony did not really have anything to do with Tiffany's guilt or innocence, but he had to certify he was the arresting officer to allow the court to authorize him to switch Tiffany, should she be found guilty.

Tiffany still was crying when the prosecution phase of the trial ended. Kim ordered her off the prisoner's stand and handed her a glass of water. Kim's mind was on the note Vladim Dukov was about to pass to her, concerning how she was to confront the drug trafficking charge. However her first priority was to get Tiffany to calm down. As best she could Kim tried to comfort the prisoner, telling her that the trial and the switching would be the worst part of her experience in Upper Danubia. All she had to do was get through the next several hours. As Tiffany buried her face in her hands, Kim nervously opened Spokesman Dukov's note. He advised her to argue for dismissal of the drug trafficking charge, given that there was no indication Tiffany planned to sell or exchange marijuana in the territory of Upper Danubia. He cited two cases he had worked on before Kim's, in which he successfully had argued for dismissal of trafficking charges in possession cases. Kim realized that there was a third case she could cite, her own from two years ago.

"OK, Tiffany, here's the deal. I am going to be arguing your defense. I'm going to be honest and tell you there's a bit of a problem, and that is they want to add drug trafficking to your charges. I'm going to argue that doesn't apply to you because we weren't going to sell or exchange any of that pot in Danube City. I'm worried because its going to affect what actually happens to you during your sentence. Now you gotta get on the prisoner's platform on your knees and wait for the judge to come back in. When you hear 'Doc-doc Danube' kneel foreward and put your forehead on the platform. I'll tell you when they want you to stand up, and when you do it'll be legs spread and hands behind your head."

Tiffany climbed back up and knelt, occasionally wiping her tears or blowing her nose.

"Doc-doc Danube!"

Once Tiffany was back in position Kim began her defense. She spoke of her personal experiences and how she had come to terms with what had happened to her. She explained that in the end she had been the lucky one, to have stayed in Upper Danubia while one friend died and the other became a drug addict. She discussed how she understood the term "redemption" and how she felt the Danubian justice system could contribute to personal redemption. She went on to explain why Tiffany had been crying throughout the trial. It was not because she was scared, it was because she had lurched from one personal tragedy to another. Kim then described Tiffany's condition when she came across her in the US. She left nothing out, describing Tiffany's drug addiction, her boyfriend, her job at Dirty Grampy's and her supplemented income. Kim concluded:

"Just a couple of weeks before my sentence ended, Spokesman Dukov told me I would use my profession to save a life. I now understand that he was talking about the life of Tiffany Walker. I brought her back with a single promise and a single purpose. I asked her if she wanted to see her 30th birthday, in good health, and many more after that. She agreed, and came back with me."

Next Kim addressed the issue of the drug trafficking charge, citing Dukov's two cases and her own to request the trafficking charge be dismissed. Kim then continued to explain what she wanted for Tiffany's sentence:

"Prisoner 98946 is in this country because this is the one place where she cannot feed her addictions. Her master is her chemical dependency, and chemical dependency is a jealous master that doesn't give up easily. Tiffany Walker can lead a normal healthy life, but the shadow of her addictions will loom over her forever. I plan to stand between her and her former master, to see to it that no matter how bad her cravings become, never again will drugs assault the soul of my client. I am accepting a lifetime of responsibility, because I believe that is what the Ancients have called upon me to do. That is what this being a Spokeswoman is all about. It is about saving a life and redeeming a soul."

The court sat in absolute silence as Kim confidently laid out what she wanted for Tiffany's punishment. There was the 35 year sentence and yearly switchings that Kim had discussed with Sergekt, to be held each July 12 to force Tiffany to perform penance for her role in Susan's death. Later would come Tiffany's future purpose in life, to provide first-hand information about drugs to a society and a government that knew very little about the substances themselves or how they were made. Among other things Tiffany knew several recipes for making methamphetamine, knowledge of which would allow the Danubian government to restrict the importation and sales of the needed ingredients.

"The storm is coming. It's not here yet, but it's coming. You need to prepare to fight it, and you can only fight it with the correct information. I believe Tiffany's path in life will be to provide the information you need to change your laws and make methamphetamine production impossible in this country. Without those changes, you will have plenty of Tiffany Walkers among your own children."

Kim spoke with such confidence that everyone in the court, with the exception of Vladim Dukov, was left stunned. She knew exactly what needed to be done about Tiffany Walker.

Spokesman Dukov sat back, deeply satisfied, his task with Kimberly Lee finally fulfilled. Kim had entered the path he had foreseen during the previous year's Day of the Dead ceremony. He had foreseen she would be here in court, redeeming a person no one in their right mind would have thought could have been saved.

Finally Kim finished speaking. The chairman of the arraignment committee raised his hand and the judge gave him permission to speak.

"Your Honor, this committee would like to withdraw the charge of marijuana trafficking against Prisoner 98946. We also recommend you abide by the wishes of Apprentice Lee concerning the sentencing of the prisoner."

"Very well, Chairman. I think that places everyone in this courtroom in agreement about how we should address the case of Prisoner 98946. This court finds her guilty of the crimes of direct perjury, indirect perjury, and the possession of one third of 432 grams of marijuana. The suspicion of drug trafficking does not apply in this case, given there is no evidence she planned to negotiate any monetary exchanges with her marijuana in the territory of the Grand Duchy of Upper Danubia. The conditions of the American Tiffany Walker's sentence are as follows:"

"Item One: The American Tiffany Walker will wear the criminal's collar for thirty five years. Twenty of those years will be for her reprehensible act of deception and perjury against the Danubian government and more importantly, the violation of her friendship with Kimberly Lee. For her corrupting influence on the behavior of the American Susan Taylor, the American Tiffany Walker will wear the criminal's collar an additional ten years. Finally, for her part in the possession of 432 grams of marijuana, the American Tiffany Walker will wear the criminal's collar an additional five years. The collar will identify her as a criminal, monitor her movements, and alert the police should she try to leave this city. For the next ten years the American Tiffany Walker is prohibited from traveling more than 10 kilometers from this courthouse. After ten years this court will review the criminal's status and determine if she or the nation might benefit from her being allowed to travel outside the Danube City collar zone."

"Item Two: For the duration of her sentence the American Tiffany Walker is prohibited from covering any part of her body with any article of clothing. That prohibition will remain in effect for the full 35 years, regardless of any other changes to the conditions of her sentence. She has disgraced herself and our city with her actions, and the American Tiffany Walker's disgrace will be shown to the world as a result of this conviction."

"Item Three: The American Tiffany Walker will receive 35 vigorous punishments on the naked buttocks with a standard leather switch. One of the punishments will be given in this chamber immediately at the closing of this hearing, the others will be given on the date of July 12 in the Central Police Station each year for the duration of her sentence. The arresting officer or his assigned partner will administer all punishments."

"Item Four: Finally, Apprentice Kimberly Lee will be held accountable for any drug use or relapses by the American Tiffany Walker. Apprentice Lee has full discretion concerning medical evaluation and drug testing of the American Tiffany Walker. Should the American Tiffany Walker violate her responsibilities as a convicted criminal, Apprentice Lee will advise this court concerning what action we should take."

Kim looked up at her client.

"Tiffany, you are now convicted and sentenced. You gotta come down and kneel at the judge's table."

Once Tiffany was kneeling on the floor the judge issued another command. The collar technician walked up to her and put a measuring tape around her neck. He checked the pulse of her jugular vein and wrote down the measurement from the tape. He left and shortly returned with the collar-fitting device. Tiffany glanced at it in terror.

"That's what they use to put the collar on you," explained Kim. "It won't hurt."

The technician slipped the imposing tong-device over Tiffany's head and closed it around her neck. He checked to make sure it would not pinch her skin, and then clamped it shut. There was a faint hiss and a dull click. When the man opened the device and moved it away, Criminal 98946 had a metal collar around her neck. Like Kim before her, Tiffany now was marked as a convicted criminal by a collar that was virtually indestructible. Like every other criminal, Tiffany's hands went involuntarily to her neck to feel the collar that now set her apart from the world of free citizens.

The court attendants were collapsing the prisoner's stand to reveal the switching table. Tiffany glanced at it not so much in fear, but rather in sad resignation. Kim had told her how to behave in court and what to expect the previous night, so there was no need to explain now. Kim would release custody of Tiffany to Vladik Dukov, he would punish her and present her to the judge, she would thank him, and she then return to the police station to spend a painful afternoon on the recovery table in Dukov's office.

Kim, with Tiffany kneeling at her side, saluted Officer Dukov and his partner. There was the tap of the switch on Tiffany's shoulder, the kissing of his shoes, and the order she lie over the table. To Kim's relief it seemed that Tiffany had stopped crying.

Kim felt enormously relieved once Tiffany was strapped down to the table. The switching would be the final act of passage from Tiffany's life as a drug addict in the US to being a Danbuian criminal. It would be "the wall that divides Tiffany's soul".

Once she was strapped down Vladik tried his hand at speaking English to Kim�s client.

"This whipping hurt your bottom because you need punish, but when you hurt, I want you show me courage and honor. I want you be brave criminal and no much cry. You understand?"

"Y...yes Officer."

With that Vladik tapped the switch to Tiffany's bottom, repositioned himself slightly, and struck hard at the base of her buttocks. A reddish line appeared and quickly began to darken as Tiffany winced and clenched her fists. At last, Tiffany finally was receiving the punishment she should have submitted to two summers ago.

Vladik tapped Tiffany's bottom again and struck another vicious blow. A second line of solid pain marked the American's exposed bottom, soon to be joined by a third, a fourth, a fifth. Vladik sympathized with Tiffany. He had no intention of showing her any mercy by reducing the severity of the punishment, but he wanted Tiffany to show him, the courtroom, and most importantly herself, that she could take a severe punishment with courage and dignity. It was another step in her path to personal redemption and to gaining respect among her future peers in the criminal community.

Tiffany gritted her teeth, but wanted to do her best to show that officer the "courage and honor" he was asking from her. She understood this was the way things had to be. She had done many terrible things in her life to serve her addictions. Now the moment had come for the world to hold her accountable for having ruined her life and the bright prospects she once had enjoyed, as well as the lives of her two best friends.

Vladik punished Tiffany in his usual methodical manner. He tapped the victim's bottom to let her know where the next stroke would land, drew back, and then delivered a fearful blow. He waited for Tiffany to fully appreciate the pain from the stroke. After about 40 seconds Vladik tapped his target and struck again. He slowly worked his way up towards the top of Tiffany's bottom leaving it covered with 15 welts. Starting with the 16th stroke he slowly worked his way back down, trying as best he could to aim at the unmarked skin between the reddish lines on Tiffany's tanned bottom. He wanted to leave her bottom a solid mass of evenly placed welts.

Sweat and tears poured down Tiffany's face as she gasped through her clenched teeth. This punishment was a real judicial punishment, far more severe than what she had faced at the hospital. And yet, Tiffany still felt somewhat relieved about the intensity of the pain tearing into her. As the pain intensified, it forced her mind off the guilt, cravings, and self-pity that had so much filled her thoughts over that past two years.

Vladik continued striking viciously at the American. Her knees were shaking and her body jerked each time the switch landed. Vladik carefully laid a series of hard strokes at the base of Tiffany's bottom cheeks and then continued down her thighs.

Kim watched the punishment intensely. She knew that it was her duty to make sure Vladik did not come close to breaking Tiffany's skin, but the truth was she had little experience watching switchings and decided to leave the punishment's severity up to Vladik. She knew Vladik was both an experienced and a careful disciplinarian, so she trusted his judgment better than she trusted her own.

Tiffany was shaking and groaning slightly from the pain, which by the 35th stroke was worse than anything she had experienced previously. Over the past two years she had been beaten up a couple of times, but intensity of the physical pain from those experiences came nowhere close to the agony she was experiencing now. Her bottom and upper thighs were a solid mass of red swollen welts, and there still was more to come.

Vladik's 36th stroke landed right across the middle of Tiffany's badly swollen bottom. The stroke hurt enough to break her resistance and she started crying. Still, she struggled not to scream. She began sobbing, the sobs growing louder at each stroke. The final blows left ugly purplish lines across Tiffany's reddish skin, as she cried louder and louder.

Finally the 50th stroke landed and Kim was able to raise her hand. Dukov previously had instructed her that it was extremely important to keep track of the number of strokes a client received, because it was the Spokesperson's job, not the cop's job, to make sure the punishment did not go beyond 50 strokes. Tiffany's body was jerking with sobs and her bottom was quite red, with a series of dark purple lines punctuating where Vladik had landed his final blows.

Kim and Vladik exchanged glances. Tiffany had held up extremely well, considering the severity of her punishment. Vladik and his partner unbuckled their victim, but for a few minutes she remained bent over the table with her face buried in her hands. Vladik had no intention of pulling her off himself, but gave Kim another glance, warning her she needed to get Tiffany to stand up on her own if she didn't want the officers to move her. Kim laid her hand on Tiffany's shoulder:

"Tiffany�Tiffany�come on, you're done. They still gotta present you to the judge, but then that's it, it'll be over. You did real good, but you gotta stand up."

Tiffany sobbed, nodded, and pushed herself to her feet. She was unsteady while standing, but Vladik and his partner grabbed her arms and walked her over to the judge. The judge signed the punishment certificate and they presented her to Apprentice Lee. Kim needed to remind Tiffany.

"OK, that's it. All you gotta do is thank Officer Dukov. Just kiss his shoes and say 'thank you for correcting my bad behavior.'"

Tiffany clumsily got on her knees and repeated the required sentence in English, which Kim translated for the court. Vladik again touched Tiffany on the shoulder with his switch and saluted Kim. Kim saluted back and with that Tiffany's first punishment ended.

The court gave Criminal 98946 its final instructions and the promise that Kim was required to find her work and a place to live within three days. Finally, Kim led the broken criminal to the photography room, where she posed for her post switching police photos. The final ordeal was another walk past the crowded Central Plaza to the police station, to return to Dukov's office and rest on a recovery table.

As they entered the Central Police Station, reporters lined the steps leading to the entrance. Kim responded:

"I will be back here in a few minutes to answer your questions, but I request you let me take care of my client first. Once I have her on a recovery table I will be out here to talk with you."

The reporters respectfully stepped aside to let Kim, Tiffany, and Spokesman Dukov pass by. Fifteen minutes later Tiffany was safely on a recovery table and Kim returned to the Police Station entrance to fulfill her promise to the Danubian press. In accented Danubian she discussed the case and how Tiffany came to be her client.

Towards the end of the impromptu press conference a reporter asked Kim about any feelings she had of personal betrayal. Kim responded:

"Whatever happened two years ago I must now address from a professional point of view, not a personal one. As I stated in court, the path of my life included rescuing Tiffany Walker from her chemical addictions. I will continue to help her battle her addictions for many years to come, which is why I requested such a long sentence. To understand my feelings about the 'betrayal' issue, you must understand she is not the same person from two years ago, and neither am I. What matters now is that Tiffany Walker and I will have a professional relationship and I will serve as her mentor."

Kim went back upstairs to see Tiffany asleep on her recovery table. She cringed slightly at the sight of the dark marks punctuating Tiffany's red bottom, but by now Kim was quite used to the sight of a punished criminal. Still, it was very hard on her to see her friend from high school reduced to a naked criminal with a whipped bottom asleep on a Danubian recovery table.

Spokesman Vladim Dukov stood next to his Apprentice, as she sadly looked at her former friend.

"Right now I feel terrible about having to do this to her. It hurts me to see her like this, to have to make her kneel when she talks to me, not to be able to call her 'Tiff' anymore�"

"Kimberly, you've done the best you can for her. She now must rebuild her life, and what you see on this table is not an end, but a beginning. Will your new relationship ever be that between two equals? No, but you will serve each other, and someday you will be close friends again. You will be there for her, you will guide her, and she will need you. Tiffany will build her life here in our country, and I believe, in her own way, she will find the path to happiness."