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## Chapter 1

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**A**s the small plane whizzed across the sky, Karia watched the clouds from the tiny window next to her seat. She turned her gaze determinedly toward the entrance of a cave at the foot of a mountain, half-expecting the plane to spin into a nosedive. Miraculously, they missed both the cave and the mountain as the pilot veered to the left, taking his passengers to safety by landing on a nearby strip.

Barely able to see through the tears that burned in her luminous green eyes, Karia desperately looked around and breathed a sigh of relief when she realized they had not crashed and that the plane had stopped.

That she had agreed to fly was a miracle in itself, as she had never been intrigued by the deep blue skies. She much preferred driving, where she felt she at least had some control over her situation. And then, suddenly, on her eighteenth birthday, she was told no, ordered by the head of her odd little family to accept the fact that she would not only be going away to school, but she was to fly there. As she closed her eyes, Karia sat for a moment in an attempt to gather the courage needed to face the demons, as she

called them. She was less than thrilled about the decision of her parents to send her away to a private, unheard-of college rather than the large university that most of her friends were looking forward to attending.

"No party school for you, young lady. You need discipline in your life if you are ever to succeed," her father had bellowed when she had begged him to change his mind. "Avalon is the best choice."

As she opened her eyes, Karia gasped at the view. "The Lake of Diana!" she said excitedly, recognizing the spectacular body of water immediately. She had done extensive research about the area after accepting her fate as best she could.

A splendid, sparkling blue lake lay before her, with mists of green rising to the bright sunlit sky. She sent up a quick prayer of thanks to the skies for the safe landing and smiled at the girl across the aisle as they both stood to gather their baggage.

During her online viewing, she'd realized that the small village of Avalon was located deep in the mountains, with the beautiful lake nearby. It was a very scenic area, and the academy, apparently, was a strict private school, attended by the children of wealthy parents who wished their offspring to learn the meaning of having discipline in their lives while learning one of the arts. Karia's chosen courses centered on writing—there were also classes in dancing, painting, sculpting, voice and various others to choose from. Supposedly, this disciplinary atmosphere was to ensure that, when they graduated and entered the world, they would be amply prepared and would have the tenacity and strength to do well. Karia wasn't sure about this at all. Why her parents wouldn't consent to allowing their only daughter to go to the university with all of her high school friends was beyond the realm of her apprehension. Why did she need discipline? Her

parents had indulged her all these years; why stop now? And what was discipline anyway? What was so different about the small academy in the tiny village of Avalon? Well, she was soon to find out, and she'd best be getting off the plane, she decided, as the other passengers had nearly all disembarked already.

She grabbed her bags and got in line behind the girl who had smiled shyly at her. Why did she feel like she was walking to the gallows?

"Are you scared?" the other girl asked when she turned her head and looked at Karia.

"A little. You?"

"Terrified. My folks said I need this."

"Hmm, so did mine."

"I think we should stick together then. I'm Colleen, by the way."

"I agree, Colleen. It's nice to meet you. I'm Karia."

"Less chattering and more walking," the flight attendant said sharply as they brought up the end of the line. "I'd like to call it a day before midnight, ladies."

When they got off the plane, Colleen whispered, "How rude."

"I think this plane belongs to the school. If that woman is anything to go by, I think we are in heap big trouble, Kimosabee."

Colleen giggled.

Once out of the plane, she could see that a great mountain faced them at the northern edge. At the base of the mountain, stood an impressive gray building that resembled a castle, with several towers.

That creepy building couldn't be the school, could it? As they were led toward it, it soon became apparent that it was.

Once inside the main building, a wiry little man wearing wire-rimmed spectacles hurried them along. "No dawdling. Dean Swisher will speak to all of you, and then you will be shown to your rooms. Hurry along now."

The group consisted of about twenty new students, ten boys and ten girls. Colleen and Karia took their place with the others and waited for the esteemed dean to begin his speech. At least, her father had said the man was very well-known and respected when he'd first told her about the school he'd enrolled her in without seeking her opinion.

As she proudly raised her chin, quite possibly in defiance, Karia looked around and saw the school's logo on a large sign in the main lobby. "Avalon Academy of the Arts."

She didn't have time to wonder about the logo for long, though, because a tall, gray-haired man entered the lobby and took his place in front of the group of twenty apprehensive young people.

"Good afternoon. I am Dean Swisher, and I want to welcome each and every one of you to the Avalon Academy of the Arts. As I'm sure you know, we only accept twenty new students each fall, and those twenty are chosen very carefully. If your parents applied for you, then you must consider yourselves to be very lucky indeed. Our graduates are among the most successful young artists in the world. Authors, painters, sculptors, dancers, actors, some of whom I'm sure you have heard of. We are unique in that, as well as the arts, we teach discipline. You'll soon learn what that means. Now, as I call your name, you are to line up and wait for your dormitory leader to escort you to your new home for the next four years. After you are settled, you may go down to the lake for a brief swim if you wish, but dinner is served at precisely six o'clock

sharp. I might add that tardiness is not acceptable at Avalon Academy."

Colleen and Karia exchanged a look and waited for their names to be called. They each crossed their fingers that they would be lucky enough to be placed in the same room but held out very little hope that it would be the case.

"Ginger Longenborg." The two girls watched as a short, chubby girl walked to the side and stood in line.

"Thomas Steele," a young man of about twenty called out. A red-haired boy of eighteen made his way to stand in the boys' line.

On and on, the two leaders took turns calling out the ten names they each were responsible before. When she and Colleen were the last two names called, they wasted no time in moving to the end of the line.

"My name is Cinda, and I'm the dorm leader for the girls' dormitory. I'm a senior, and I will be in charge of your dorm this year. If you have any questions or problems, you come to me. Now, I'll take each of you to your rooms. There are two beds per room, so you will each have a roommate. We have five freshman rooms, and they are on the fourth floor. Follow me, please. The elevator is this way."

"So far so good, but why is everybody here so serious?" Colleen asked. "These people need to seriously loosen up."

Karia stifled a giggle as she picked up her two suitcases and followed the other girls.

Luck must have been on her side that day, because, when Cinda led her to her room at the end of the hallway on the fourth floor, she learned that Colleen was to be her roommate.

"Remember, you are free until dinnertime. Dinner is served in the main dining room at six sharp, and I would advise you not

to be late. You won't like the consequences, I can assure you," Cinda said as she opened the door and handed both of them a key. "If you need anything, I'll be in my room on the first floor, room 101."

Once they were alone and the door was securely locked, both girls breathed a huge sigh of relief.

"You won't like the consequences? What the hell are they going to do to us, spank us like little kids?" Colleen asked as she plopped down on the bed nearest the door. "This okay with you, if I bunk here? You can have the bed by the window."

"Sure, whatever. This place is creeping me out already, and we have barely been here an hour."

"You are not alone, sister. I say we unpack and head down to that lake."

"Good plan. It looks like we have two dressers and two small closets. Good thing I only brought two suitcases."

"Yeah, I about fell over when my mom helped me pack and said I had to limit my wardrobe. I'm surprised we don't have to wear some sort of ugly-ass uniform."

"I'm not used to this. That's for sure," Karia said as she picked up her bigger suitcase and threw it on the bed. She unzipped it and began to take out her clothes. She had followed the instructions her mother had shown her and packed only what was on the list. She had been shocked to learn that most of her wardrobe would not be coming with her.

Jeans, leggings, skirts, sweaters and blouses came out of the suitcase. They were plain and not at all what she was accustomed to wearing. The smaller of her bags contained her underwear, pajamas and toiletry items. She had one pair of boots because they were in the mountains and it would snow once the winter months arrived. A sensible pair of Mary Janes and a pair of

sneakers were the only pairs of shoes she had brought, other than a pair of flip-flops for the lake.

When she began to hang her clothes in the tiny closet, she looked over and noticed that Colleen's wardrobe was much the same. Well, at least she wouldn't feel quite so *common* with everyone else wearing the same things.

Once they were finished and had both shoved their empty suitcases under their beds, Colleen looked around the room. "Not too bad, I guess. The tiny kitchenette is nice. We each have a desk and chair, and the beds look pretty comfy." She sat down on hers and bounced up and down.

"It *is* a dorm room after all. Why don't you go on into the bathroom and get changed? I'll change into my swimsuit out here."

"Our lovely one-piece swimsuits," Colleen said with a laugh as she took hers out of one of her dresser drawers.

Karia rolled her eyes and began to strip off the one dress she'd been allowed to bring with her. It certainly wasn't her usual style; it was more of a sailor dress, similar to one she might have worn when she was five.

Soon, both girls were ready to walk down to the lake. When they arrived, they saw that some of the other newcomers were also there. They introduced themselves and set down their towels, slipped off their flip-flops, and prepared to get into the sparkling, inviting water for a relaxing swim after the tension of the day.

She entered the water a bit too fast, diving in and almost losing her balance when the force of water met with her speed. Karia steadfastly held on and, with eyes shut from the rush of water, blindly dove down to the bottom of the lake. As the water seemed to go on forever, her lungs began to ache with desperate need for air.

Never doubting her final success, Karia stayed her course. She had, after all, been the most talented young student throughout the UK in her younger years, winning every swim tournament she had ever entered. Of course, that wouldn't help her much in her studies here. She was sure there was no swim team.

The growing pressure in her lungs pushed such thoughts out of her mind. Within seconds of suffocation, Karia emerged from the water gasping.

When she looked up, she was greeted with the sight of a clear blue sky.

"Are you all right?" one of the boys asked.

"Sure," she said with a shrug.

The group splashed and played in the water after that for quite some time before someone asked the time.

"Let me look," Colleen said as she looked at the waterproof watch on her wrist. "Damn! We have to go if we're going to be ready for dinner in time."

The new students hurried out of the lake at her words, none of them wishing to be late on their first night.

With heart pounding, she flew up the hill with Colleen by her side. Doubts were soon clouding her thoughts. What if we're late? What if they laugh at us and turn us away from the dining room? What if they say we can't have dinner? She was starving by now, having eaten very little breakfast and no lunch, due to nerves. The swim had made her even hungrier.

"Come on; we have to hurry," she said to Colleen as they entered the dorm and ran for the elevator. She hoped no one had seen them because she seriously doubted that running was allowed, either.

Resolutely stifling her doubts, Karia stepped into the elevator

and hit the button for the fourth floor. "Come on, come on," she said impatiently as she waited for it to stop so they could get off.

Karia looked both ways before stepping out into the hallway. When she saw no one else around, she took off in a sprint for their room, Colleen close behind.

Karia had never gotten cleaned up and dressed so quickly in her life. She put her sailor dress and Mary Janes back on and asked Colleen if she was ready.

Dressed in a similar style dress, only in a different color, Colleen nodded. "God, I hate this getup."

"Me, too, girlfriend; me, too. Just go with the flow; it's all we can do for now."

"When I realized that no amount of crying or begging was going to change my folks' mind, I did just that. I decided to go along with the nonsense until I could figure out a way to get out of this place," Colleen told her in a low voice as they boarded the elevator once more.

Karia gave her a sideways glance and then agreed, "Exactly."

They made it to the dining room with one minute to spare. Cinda was at the door, and she gave them a look that told them they had better be glad they had made it.

"Find a seat, girls, quickly," a woman said from behind them. Karia watched as she moved ahead of them and decided that she must be one of the instructors.

They spotted some of the group from the lake and hurriedly walked to their table to join them.

"That was too close for comfort," one of the boys said. "From what I hear from our dorm leader, we don't want to ever be late."

They all nodded and turned as the dean began to speak.

"Good evening, students. For our incoming frosh, you will see that the food is set up on the north wall, cafeteria style. You'll

wait your turn, as we go by table number. Once you have your food, return to your seats. You may talk quietly at your table. No yelling, no cell phones and no food fights. That should go without saying, but you never know when a troublemaker is in the crowd. Enjoy your dinner, and I hope you all have a pleasant year."

Sounds of glass breaking and something crashing to the floor followed. When Karia looked up, she saw one of the servers had dropped a tray of water glasses. She felt sorry for the girl and hoped she wouldn't get into trouble. Two other workers quickly helped her, and soon it was all cleared away and a new tray brought out.

"That woke me up," one of the boys teased.

Dinner that night consisted of pot roast, mashed potatoes, gravy, carrots and green beans. There was cake for dessert. The food wasn't bad, she decided, but she would certainly miss having the option to eat anywhere other than the school dining room for the entire school year. This had to be the weirdest school in the world. How had her parents ever found it?

After dinner, she and Colleen were both feeling the effects of the long day and decided to have an early night. They said good-night to their new friends and went to their room to unwind a bit before falling asleep.

They talked for a while, each one admitting her fears for the next day, when they would meet their instructors and get their class schedules. Finally, Colleen turned out the light, and in no time at all, both girls were fast asleep in their matching twin dorm beds.

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The next morning, they got up when the alarm blared, neither

wanting to be late. They took turns in the bathroom and headed down to breakfast, making the seven o'clock meal with time to spare.

Colleen was dressed in a navy blue skirt and light blue blouse, and Karia had chosen a black skirt with a light gray sweater. She'd made a face when she'd looked in the mirror earlier.

"May as well get used to it," Colleen had said as she picked up her bag and made ready to leave the room. "We can't change anything yet."

Resigned to the fact that she was, for the time being, stuck in this odd place, Karia had agreed, and they were now headed to meet with the staff.

Karia was to meet with Professor Evelyn first. She couldn't help but stare in wonder at the lady waiting by the entrance to her office. Sweeping golden hair framed the professor's bright blue eyes, and she wore a black dress with a purple jacket draped over her shoulders. Her eyes were kind, with the honored wrinkles of great wisdom, and her aged beauty was still breathtaking. An aura of incredible but calm power emanated from her.

"Welcome, my dear Miss Daly." The professor's voice seemed to sing rather than speak as she held her hand out to Karia.

"Thank you, Professor." As she had been taught by her parents, Karia took her hand and shook it firmly.

"Stand up, Karia." Professor Evelyn smiled at her warmly. The smile then faded into stern disapproval, and a note of censure crept into her voice. "You were expected ten minutes ago."

Karia had to bite back a defensive retort that wanted to spring from her lips, but she replied instead, "I am truly sorry. I had to... I was... I got lost—" She searched desperately for some

quick, intelligent reply, but none came to her mind, so she went with the truth.

Professor Evelyn interrupted, "I know; I have seen it happen many times before with our new students. You have much to learn, so you will not be punished this time for your tardiness. Follow me."

As she left Karia sputtering in surprise, the professor turned on her heels and led the way down the massive hallway. With her green eyes flashing indignantly, Karia smothered her pride and followed Professor Evelyn into a great foyer.

"You have an interview with Headmaster Knightson, then, if you are accepted into the classes you wish to take, you will see the Dean of Discipline, Master Armstrong, to set up your class schedule and acquaint you with our rules here."

Karia worriedly responded, "I thought I had already been accepted for the writing courses. I wish to earn a Journalism degree."

"You have been accepted into the Avalon Academy. Headmaster Knightson will determine which courses you are best suited for. Almost all with the family background such as yours may attend the academy." The professor's censoring look returned as she glanced back at Karia. "You must, however, pass the requirements for your chosen courses before being admitted to them."

Karia had spent many hours under her father's patient and caring tutelage, training and studying for entrance into the academy. Being a journalist himself, he had been her best teacher, or so she had thought. What if this headmaster guy didn't let her take those courses? What, then?

"We shall see. If you have truly reached an understanding of the requirements of your chosen profession, then your testing will

soon be over. If not, well, you will choose another future to strive for." The professor turned and gestured to a golden archway on her right. "Follow this hallway to Headmaster Knightson's office. You will see a waiting area. There, you may wait for him to see you."

Karia bowed her head appropriately. "Thank you, Professor."

She felt a gentle hand pulling her chin up. Karia gazed into the professor's strong blue eyes. "My dear, you were meant for great things, or you would not be here on this mountain with us today. You will move on to the greatness you were meant for. Choose your path wisely."

After giving Karia her blessing, the professor turned, leaving the young girl standing speechless and pondering the gravity of the professor's prophecy. From a very early age, her father had constantly drilled into her the necessity of weighing the consequences of every action and the great responsibility that came with great power. She had never wanted to be anything but a journalist like her beloved dad. And now, she had just been told that dream may never come true and that her future lay in the hands of some headmaster at a weird school in the mountains. What craziness was this?

As she closed her eyes, Karia could almost hear her father's low, smooth-sounding voice. "No action or inaction is ever inconsequential. A simple smile at a stranger can be so powerful that the course of the future is drastically altered. A small smile today may prevent a great war in a thousand years' time. A journalist's job is to report the facts; he or she alone might be able to stop a war with the right facts. Think about that, my darling daughter."

She opened her eyes to blink back the tears threatening to spill over. *It's true*, she thought. *My actions today will reflect on the rest*

*of my life, what it will be. I must pass whatever test Mr. Knightson gives to me.*

Karia squared her shoulders and lifted her chin. She wanted nothing more in her life than to see pride in her father's eyes when she graduated with her Journalism degree. He had always been so proud of her and had probably spoiled her a bit too much while she was growing up. She had to trust that he had known what he was doing when he chose this school for her.

As she took a deep breath, Karia began making her way down the grand hallway before her. The walls on her right were lined with full-size portraits of all the great headmasters ever to lead the ancient academy, and to her left, the walls were hung with all the specially honored professors who had taught there. There were also photos of various alumni.

As the hallway stretched on and on, Karia remembered the story she had heard about the magic in this Hallway of Honor. Apparently, over time, so many graduates, professors and headmasters had earned a portrait of honor that the hallway became too short. There was no more room for any more portraits, so the hallway had been made longer to accommodate the ever-growing wall of portraits. By now, it had taken her five minutes to nearly reach the end.

Just before she reached the golden doorway that was elegantly labeled, "Headmaster," Karia was taken by surprise and shock to see her father's portrait hanging prominently on her left. He had graduated from this place? Why hadn't she realized that before now?

She felt a hand come to rest on her shoulder, and as she looked up, Karia saw a man whom she knew must be Headmaster Knightson. He was an awe-inspiring six feet tall, wearing a silver-gray suit and had silver hair and beard to match. From

amidst an old and wrinkled face twinkled two blue, kind eyes. In his right hand, he held a gnarled wooden walking staff, a little taller than his six feet. Headmaster Knightson was every bit the picture of the powerful man he was famed to be.

The man placed his hand firmly on the small of her back, guiding her toward the doorway. "Come into my office."

Karia passed by a group of students seated on large pillows lying about the floor when she entered his office. As soon as he closed the door, Headmaster Knightson turned toward her.

Karia shrank back fearfully and instinctively. His eyes were now shining with powerful anger, and she understood why he was respected, both at the academy and the outside world she had just come from.

"You are ten minutes late!" Headmaster Knightson's thundering voice set the whole room vibrating.

As he pointed the tip of his staff toward her, he growled, "Bend over the table."

"B-but I got lost, and Professor Evelyn said I wouldn't be punished for my tardiness today—"

"Correction," the headmaster said as his eyebrows raised. "You were not punished by Professor Evelyn. She does not speak for me. Now, are you going to stand there and argue with me, or are you going to take your punishment so we can get on with your interview?"

Karia had no time to comply before he turned her and bent her over in the appropriate position over the dark oak table edged with gold. Before her body could even instinctively struggle, a powerful hand held her arms and head against the table. With her hair plastered to her face, Karia could see nothing in the room, which increased her fear to panic.

*I know he would never kill me. I know he wouldn't kill me. My father*

*would never send me to my death*, Karia's thoughts chanted over and over in her mind, trying to control her panic. She was completely powerless against this powerful man, and her father was not here to protect her.

The man roared, "And still," the back of her skirt was raised to the middle of her back, exposing her panty-clad bottom, "you have no remorse for your actions." Her dangling legs were roughly spread out and pinned to the table's legs.

Karia was already sobbing uncontrollably. Not only did she feel tremendously shocked at learning that her father had earned his degree from this very place and hadn't told her that was why he was sending her to this godforsaken private school, but she was scared and felt very vulnerable. With her skirt raised, her back and bottom were left to the headmaster's view. With her legs spread wide open, she could feel the ends of her personal hair rustling from a sudden cold draft of air.

"Ugh, ow, ahh, I-I am s-sorry!" Karia was sure she had never screamed so loudly in her entire life. With all the energy she had put into the scream, it did absolutely nothing to relieve the horrendous pain that had erupted on her backside. It felt like he had used his large staff to beat her, but she could not see anything.

As she lay there panting, shocked out of her sobs, Karia heard the door open. She instantly recognized the singing quality of Professor Evelyn's voice.

"Mr. Knightson, King George and his son, Prince Henry, have come to the Great Hall. They need to see you immediately."

Although she could see nothing from under her hair, Karia had the sudden impression that the professor had just seen Karia in her

humiliating position. She felt a blush creep up her face and then down to her bottom. For some odd reason, it felt like the professor's gaze had rested on her private, but presently gaping, bottom hole.

Karia then sensed the breeze of an impatient sigh on her back, and she heard the headmaster order, "Stay there, Karia. We are not finished."

As if she could move. After some creaking floorboards told her he was walking toward the door, he said, "Lead the way, Professor."

The door was either left open a crack purposely or incidentally, and she could hear their conversation as they walked down the hallway.

"How many are you giving her?"

"Ten, one for each minute she..." the headmaster's voice trailed off as they walked out of hearing range, but Karia could figure out the rest.

Nine more! She would never survive! Her father had never punished her during her childhood or adolescence, and she had never felt anything so painful in her life as that one stroke the headmaster had just delivered to her backside.

"By the goddess, you must have done something deliciously naughty to warrant a caning like that!"

A cool hand lightly touched her blazing bottom, and she sobbed out a reply, "Ten minutes late."

"You're being punished for being ten minutes late on your first day?" The girl went on before Karia could answer, "My name is Rhiannon Tait. What is your name?" The girl's voice was chirpy and seemed not to hold Karia's mortifying position against her.

Karia could only groan her response. "Karia Daly."

"Daly!" Rhiannon gasped behind her. "Are you Gordon's daughter?"

"Well, I am trying to be."

"You must be so proud of your father!" Rhiannon gushed. "Imagine, being Gordon's daughter!"

Pride was not what Karia was experiencing, but guilt. Guilt for not knowing about her father's great deeds, his high standing with the academy. How could he send her here without telling her what to expect, that he was held in such high regard here and that she would be expected to live up to that? And why should she be the one feeling guilty about that? She had no way of knowing. But then again, had she ever asked or shown any interest?

"I'm in the School of Dance. My mother was a dancer, graduated from this very academy."

"Wow, but you knew that going in, didn't you? Imagine my surprise to see my father's portrait on the Hallway of Fame this very day."

Rhiannon sounded a bit shocked. "He didn't tell you? Wow. I have to go to class. I'll see you tonight? At the great feast to mark the beginning of the term?"

"Rhiannon, what are you doing in here?" It was the singing voice of Professor Evelyn, followed by the sound of what Karia guessed was a hasty retreat by Rhiannon as she tried to edge past the professor.

"Professor!" Rhiannon gasped. "I—"

"You haven't been talking to her while she's being punished, have you?"

Karia whimpered as another cool hand touched her bottom.

"No, Professor! I mean, just a little. I came in to get something I left behind. I am on my way to class."

"Rhiannon, run along and leave us, and shut the door behind you. We will speak later."

In her present position, Karia had no idea how to greet the professor. For some reason, the fact that the professor could see her, bent over the table with legs splayed shamefully open, renewed her sobs.

"Headmaster Knightson must attend to the king and the prince. I will be completing your punishment." Her voice sang gently, and Karia experienced a wave of relief. Surely, nothing could be as bad as the staff of Headmaster Knightson.

The professor must have sensed her thoughts, because she went on, "You may not know, but a punishment given by a professor carries great weight."

Karia did not know, and she felt her momentary relief fade back into fear.

"Yes, Professor," Karia practically whispered in fear, wishing both that the punishment would not start any time soon, and that it would start immediately so she could get it over with.

The professor's voice was gentle and soothing. "When you are ready, you may ask me to begin."

Could the professor hear every thought in her head? She must know how much worse it was to ask for the punishment, particularly such a harsh punishment. Her legs were cramping from their stretched position, and her face and arms were tired from holding herself in place. But the pain, could she stand it?

Resigned, Karia put up a brave front. "Professor, please begin."

*Crack!* Karia jolted and immediately cried out. The pain of this stroke was just as intense as the headmaster's, but Karia could tell that this was no staff, but a long slat of wood, a paddle, striking down the middle of her bottom.

"I have heard, Karia, what you have done, that you tried to get out of your punishment with excuses. I want to hear you tell me the story." The professor's voice was calm, without any trace of effort expended at Karia's backside's expense. "I want to know about your spoiled childhood and how you've never been punished before, for anything."

Karia tried to get her sobs under control so she could speak, but she could barely think from the pain in her bottom. The professor waited patiently, and after a long while, Karia began to tell the story.

"I am the only child of Gordon and Rosemarie Daly. I'm sure you know of my father. It seems he is an alumnus of this very school, although I didn't know that until today. While I was waiting for the headmaster, I saw my father's portrait on the wall outside the office with the others."

"Hmm, he didn't tell you? Very interesting."

"Anyway, h-he is a very prominent and well-known journalist now. He has taught me from a very young age. All I've ever wanted to be is a writer. I have won many writing contests. If I have to change my career choice, I don't know what I'll do. Please, can you ask the headmaster to admit me to the journalism classes?"

As Karia continued with her story, she felt the professor's hand come to rest on the back of her neck.

*Crack!* Karia was painfully pulled back to the present as another stroke seared into her backside, landing in exactly the same place as the last stroke.

"Ahh, ohh!" Karia gasped for breath and grotesquely bounced her buttocks in the air, looking for relief from the pain. "By the goddess, please, oww!"

Professor Evelyn waited for her screams to die down before

she spoke. "And were you a spoiled child?"

"Y-yes, I suppose I was. But I was their only child. I want to follow in my father's chosen profession. I didn't understand why he insisted I attend this school, but now I know. I can't disappoint him. I-I am sorry I was late. I tried to tell the headmaster why I was late, but he didn't want to hear it."

*Crack!* Karia screamed with pain as this stroke scorched her left cheek. With overwhelming humiliation, she felt, almost in slow motion, the paddle snapping down on her cheek, pulling her cheek open and biting into her private crevice.

Before she could finish screaming, another *crack* burned into her right cheek. Again, she felt, with great mortification, the paddle reaching into her crevice to almost bite her bottom hole.

"Professor, please," Karia sobbed, begging. "Please show mercy. I am sorry; I truly am. Please don't paddle me anymore."

The professor did not answer, and Karia, unable to see her, was fraught with fear of the next stroke. At every second, she felt terrified it was coming, but she didn't know when or where it would strike next on her throbbing bottom. As a result, Karia was unconsciously wiggling her cheeks in fear.

Again, the professor waited for her sobs to lessen and placed a warm hand on the back of her neck. "Now, tell me again why you wish to become a journalist. You will learn, my dear, that in life there are no excuses."

*Crack! Crack!* Two strokes landed precisely where the last two had landed, pulling her cheeks apart and blistering her tiny bottom hole. Karia was overwhelmed with shame, but she was not sure which was the greater pain: the humiliation of her present position or the actual paddling.

This time, it took much longer for Karia's sobs to die down.

As she started to calm down, she realized the professor was rubbing her back, infusing Karia with strength and warmth.

"Professor, I wish to become a journalist because it is in my blood. It is all I aspire to do. I love to write, to investigate and research a story, to put words to paper."

Professor Evelyn hushed her, "Quiet, child. You deserve the best life has to offer. Everyone does. And you, my dear, have just passed the requirements for admission into your chosen courses. Congratulations. Now, to the corner until the headmaster returns."