Tria

By

Carolyn Faulkner

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Chapter One

She heard the sharp snip of the lock being cut as she knelt before him on his bed – one of the few times she was even allowed near it – then the thin brown leather band was removed and thrown away. It was the first time she'd felt nothing around her neck since she was eleven and got her first flow. Whereas, when she'd first been fitted with it all those years ago, she'd pulled and tugged at it, and sworn that it had itched and she was allergic to it. She felt somehow bereft without it now, but it was the morning of her twenty-fifth birthday, and she was to be a part of the public auction that would be conducted in the square at ten. There were to be no reminders left on her of the one who had owned her until she was of an age to be bought.

Once the jomfru torque had been removed, she then presented herself to the hood – the only woman in the house who held any rank of a sort that was recognized by the male of the house. The females had their own ranks amongst themselves, but the principal ignored them, as was his right. The hood removed the robe-like covering that covered her completely, even to the tips of her toes, the style of which she'd been wearing since that same day fourteen years ago.

Abril was bathed en masse by all the women in the house – all five of them, as it was a small household – and every speck of her body hair was removed except that on her head, which had been allowed to grow since birth. By law, no woman could cut her hair except for reasons of disease, although it was unheard of to bring such a menial disobedience to the attention of the Greycoats. They weren't there to help a man control his women. Laws were there for men and things of their realm, certainly not for women, except in matters of property disputes.

Such trivial matters were dealt with by the principal, within the walls of his own house, where his own rule was law. He would never let such a pitiful transgression against his authority be brought to light in a court of law, regardless. That was what Downstairs was for.

She was made to lie back on the hood's bed – they had no decent bier for such ceremonies as this, there weren't enough of them to warrant it as far as the principal was concerned – with her legs held up and spread by two of the women, while a third assisted the hood and the fourth sat by her head, stroking her hair soothingly. Abril took little comfort,

however. Nothing in her life had prepared her for the way she was being opened and exposed, but she knew better than to resist.

The fact that these women had helped raise her didn't make this any easier for her to endure. And she had been brought up the right way; the way that was endorsed by the government – with extreme modesty measures, with no male contact ever, except with the principal and then only in the most chaste of ways even when it involved discipline. He was never to touch her, otherwise. That was the realm of whoever bought her.

There she was, lying forcibly naked and spread, when she'd never once in her life not been covered by some sort of clothing. Even just changing from one robe to another was done by bringing the new robe up from the feet to the neck, then taking the old robe off over the head. Her whole body was blushing hot, she could feel it. And then, the hood leaned forward and fit something into the leather and steel girdle that had been welded onto her so long ago, removing it in one motion and discarding it as casually as the principal had her toque.

But she didn't stop there. Every inch of Abril's most intimate self was washed, very carefully and with disgraceful intimacy, with a soft cloth dipped in Blenheim-scented water. She was barely allowed to touch down there herself, only enough to clean herself up when needed and during her twice-weekly baths. The smell of that pungent flower filled the room as she was carefully dried and even more carefully pulled apart again. She knew vaguely what was happening down there from having seen the procession occasionally herself on the rare occasions she was allowed into town. Her lips – inner and outer – were being painted a bright, gaudy red dust made from the clay that was available in the hills, all the way down to her bottom hole and up around the edges of her cheeks there.

When that was done, everyone helped her up, and her immediate reaction was to cover herself with both of her hands, but the hood merely nodded, and her arms were held out from her sides so that she couldn't interfere with her preparations. At first, she was turned around, and she couldn't imagine what was going to be done to her, but then she felt the same brush strokes – only broader – painting her bottom. She'd forgotten that they were supposed to be accented as if she'd only recently been punished.

Not that she needed any help in that area. She was always getting it for something – usually speaking when she hadn't been spoken to, like she'd gotten yesterday morning. Her cheeks were probably still plenty rosy from that.

The hood was the only one of them that was allowed to sit at the table with him, and even that was done somewhat grudgingly, and she was only actually allowed to eat after he'd taken his fill and left the table. Then she could eat what she wanted, keeping in mind that the others would eat whatever was left after her.

She hadn't meant to sass him – not at all. He'd called for a refill of his homemade wash at breakfast, and she'd spilled some, which was enough to earn her a good hard spanking right there. But then she'd compounded her error by apologizing for it in her desperation to avoid a punishment, and she'd heard every female in the room – which was everyone, because they were always all gathered to serve him and watch him eat before them – draw a gasping breath, knowing what she'd be subjected to from just that small lapse.

He hadn't even missed a bite, saying only one word as he swallowed that made the rest of the room shudder, "Downstairs."

She hadn't gotten any of the morning meal yesterday. He'd taken care of her before he left to go into town, and Abril was grateful for having made the error when he couldn't take the time to be as elaborate as he usually was, although she was the least punished of any of the females. The hood got it the worst of any of them; only partially because she also got punished when any of them misbehaved. The principal seemed to enjoy punishing her, and there were many nights when the sounds of the poor woman's screams drifted up through the floorboards and lulled her to sleep.

She had left the table immediately, as required, and found her way down the creaky stairs to the most dreaded part of the house. She knew she was to arrange herself over the heavy oak table that served as one of the punishment tables. There were straps to be done at the middle of the table that would hold her hands still with her wrists above her head, as well as more straps around the legs of the table that would keep her legs from the kicking and twisting and writhing they wanted to do quite naturally. Whether or not he would use those would be entirely up to his own tastes at that moment.

The snaps that ran up the back of her robe were pulled apart up to her waist as she gathered the rough material in front of her, so that it wouldn't offer her any refuge and wouldn't get in his way. Then Abril had bent over the table, her backside completely exposed from waist to heels, to await his descent with her cheek on the hands she'd folded nervously under her head.

It wasn't long – she'd known it wouldn't be. He didn't get up until he absolutely had to, so he wouldn't have much time to punish her, thankfully, but that wasn't much comfort as she heard his boots clunking loudly down each step, knowing what was waiting for her at the end.

He didn't waste any time, walking over to the innocuous looking cabinet in which he kept such things and taking two things out. As soon as he hit the bottom stair, she had closed her eyes. She didn't want to see which adjuster he'd decided to use on her this time, and she already knew one of the things he was getting that he always insisted they all wear while they were being corrected.

She could hear him step closer to her, then felt the familiar blindfold as he fitted it over her eyes. He hadn't said anything to her, not one word, and experience told her that he wouldn't. He knew that she knew what she'd done wrong. There was no need in belaboring the point, as far as he was concerned.

He put the implement he'd chosen against her bottom, giving her as much of a warning as she was going to get that the ordeal was about to begin.

With the first stroke, she began a howl that didn't end until he turned away, leaving what had to have been the strap lying next to her, as it was her duty to put it away.

Abril was left there, trying to come to grips with the pain, trying to compartmentalize it and put it away, because she wasn't going to be allowed to wallow in this one spanking in any way – especially one that was so short.

It had only lasted twenty strokes, less than ten minutes of his time, but a lifetime of remembrance for her. He'd laid that strap onto her with all of his strength, and he hadn't done it long enough that he would have been tired by the time he stopped. He knew exactly what he was doing. He knew how to inflict the maximum of pain in the minimum of time. She knew there were livid wheals and welts across her bottom from the kiss of the strap, but she had to stand back up, snap her robe back together and get upstairs to do her chores...