# THE SENTENCED



JOANNIE KAY

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## CHAPTER 1



### STATE OF THE LAKES, 3018

inerva, are you not the least bit frightened to face the Council of Wrongs? You sit there so calmly, while I am terribly worried. I wish to know our fate."

"The Council of Wrongs is like a group of old women with nothing more to do than gossip, and wish they were young again. I have no desire to be questioned by them. The most they can do is sentence us to remain at home, within our lodging, for a period of time. That is nothing. We still do as we please, and avoid charges of wrongdoing by stating we were in our chambers as ordered by the Council."

"My father is not like yours; he will not lie for me. I have embarrassed him by my presence here, and he has sworn to see me obey the Council of Wrongs. He has spoken to your father, Minerva. We shall no longer be friends, I fear. Father will forbid it."

"Really, Teena? You would permit your parent to control your life?" Minerva asked scathingly, giving the younger girl a look of contempt.

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"It is customary for children to obey their father. It is one of the Great Father's Commandments, "Thou shalt obey thy father and mother," Teena recited. "Are you not aware of those laws?"

"It applies only if your father is deserving of respect. Mine isn't," Minerva said without emotion.

"Girls, the Council requests your presence in the meeting room," their attendant said. "Please come with me." Teena and Minerva did as they were told for different reasons. Teena was obedient; Minerva wanted to get the inconvenience over and done. She hated being confined anywhere, and this building was the worst, with all of its rooms and no windows.

The Council of Wrongs consisted of five older, respected men and women, who were from all segments of the population. It was a fair way to judge an individual, and there were few complaints from the jurisdictions in the United States. Lawbreakers faced the Council knowing they would receive a sentence designed to help them improve and become model, productive members of their state. Murderers faced mandatory death, unless they had killed in self-defense or to protect another. Thieves were sent to work doing jobs that were unpleasant and tedious until it was determined that they wouldn't steal again, and they earned enough to pay for what they'd taken. The Council had absolute authority to make a sentence; there was no appeal; if you did wrong, you would eventually be taken in front of the Council and sentenced to an unpleasant punishment.

Minerva saw that her father was in attendance, but she refused to look at him. She hoped to be sentenced to marriage. It was preferable to remaining in his home. He was addicted to alcohol and pills, and that was all that he cared about since her mother died.

Minerva and Teena were told to stand in front of the Council of Wrongs as their charges were read aloud.

"The charges to be considered for Teena of Bernstein are trespass, climbing in a window, with the intent of frightening another.

This is determined worthy of punishment because it was done as a malicious prank."

"The charges to be considered for Minerva of Strong are trespass, climbing in a window, with the intent of frightening another, and instigation. This is determined worthy of punishment because it was done as a malicious prank."

"We shall consider your charges first, Teena. Do you have anything to say? This is your one chance to make a plea."

"Thank you, Council. First of all, I am sorry I did this. I have embarrassed and shamed my father, and I am sorry for that too. I promise I will never do anything of this sort again. What I did was childish, and I ask the Council's forbearance."

"It was not your idea to harass Miss Kincaid?"

"Miss Kincaid was difficult, and I went along with Minerva because I did not take the time to think it through. I am ashamed I went along with Minerva." She bowed her head.

"Minerva, what do you have to say for yourself?"

"It is Miss Kincaid who should be on trial for her lack of teaching skill. Miss Kincaid is a mean witch with no compassion for anyone who does not agree with her ideas and thoughts. She holds a person up for ridicule, but gives no way to redeem oneself. Once you earn a bad grade from her, she gives up on you forever. She is a terrible teacher."

"So, are we to gather you have no remorse for your actions?"

"My remorse is that Miss Kincaid will go on teaching young women and influencing them to think with narrow mindedness. I am not the only one who believes as I do, but I am the only one with the conviction to try and do something about it. Miss Kincaid was not harmed; I had no intention of harming the woman. I only wanted to frighten some sense into her and give her pause to think of what she was doing to those of us she chose to ridicule on a daily basis. We are grown women and deserved better. That is all I have to say."

The Council of Wrongs deliberated quietly, and for quite some

time, while Teena and Minerva were seated in two chairs, facing the people in attendance. Teena wept; Minerva kept her gaze straight forward and steady. She refused to cower in front of anyone sitting there. She had no respect for any of them, especially that witch, Miss Kincaid. That woman was boiling with temper and rage, and would take it out on her students at the first opportunity. The difference being that now others would be watching her, taking note of her poor teaching skills. Eventually, right would win out, and she would be sent to a remedial teaching academy and be forced to start all over.

After a two-hour wait, a decision was reached by the Council of Wrongs. Teena and Minerva were once again requested to stand before the Council.

"Teena of Bernstein, we believe you were unduly influenced by your companion. You have expressed remorse, which we feel is genuine. Your father has expressed his desire to bring you home, and go forward with marriage options that are in your best interests. You are hereby remanded to his custody, and your criminal record expunged, provided you are duly wed within a year's time. You may leave the room."

Teena thanked them, then ran to her father, who was waiting for her with open arms.

Minerva tried not to be jealous of the love shown between them, but it was most difficult. Her own father cared nothing for her, only for the numbing effects of alcohol and pills. He would not stand for her; even now he was too inebriated to stand. Unfortunately, society did nothing to solve this problem. As long as her father did not harm anyone in his state of numbness, he was free to do as he pleased.

"Minerva of Strong, the Council of Wrongs is very disturbed by your lack of remorse, and for accusing a teacher with an excellent reputation of being narrow minded. We are not a narrow minded society; you need to learn this in a unique punishment. Your father has concurred that he is unable to influence you positively. Therefore, we are sending you to a time when women were treated with narrow minded attitudes. You will be given period clothing, a bit of money to survive on until you find work, and our best wishes for you to learn the advantages that we have acquired since this olden time period. Your sentence is banishment; not for the prank you pulled on Miss Kincaid, but for your accusations against her, and for your attitude. You do not belong in this society; if you stay you will be teaching your beliefs to young girls. This, we do not need. We have struggled for years to acquire a calm society. Banishment to another time period will occur once you are clothed appropriately. If you wish to say goodbye to your father, do so now."

Minerva was shocked and frightened. "I expected to be sentenced to marriage!" she exclaimed.

"This is not possible. Your father is not willing to make arrangements for you to wed."

Minerva whirled around, her green eyes searching for him. When she found him, he was swaying on his feet. She turned back to the Council to say bitterly, "You would allow a drunk to make decisions for my life? Can you not see how inebriated he is, even at this early hour? Tis best I go away; if I stay, I would ruin him completely. Say goodbye? I would rather tell him to go straight to hell!"

There were gasps in the Council of Wrongs meeting room. Cursing was not considered polite, and was frowned upon. Women were expected to show more class and manners.

"This outburst only confirms our decision. Please escort Minerva to the travel room. I shall be there to observe the transport in a few minutes." The Council of Wrongs left the meeting room, and then Minerva was taken to the travel room, and told to change into the clothing that was already hanging in the dressing chamber.

Minerva was not about to give them the satisfaction of seeing her cry, and she was not going to beg for a last minute reprieve. She donned the unfamiliar clothing, finding it restrictive. The cham-

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ber's attendant fashioned her hair, then pinned a hat on her head. There was no communication at all. Minerva was taken to the transport, handed a valise, and once the member of the Council was present, Minerva was sent back through time.

## Texas, 1871

MINERVA SLOWLY WOKE from the deep sleep brought on by traveling backwards in time. To her shock and horror, she was lying on the ground beside a coach that was riddled with arrows. The two men who had been on top of the coach appeared dead, as did three others who were lying on the ground near her, arrows protruding from their bodies. One was an Indian lying near her, his face painted. Minerva had been taught the history of the old west, and it did not take her long to realize that the coach had been subject to an Indian attack. She looked around for the Indians, terrified that they would spot her and kill her simply because she was Caucasian. She could not see anyone at all, in any direction. That, too, was frightening.

Minerva checked to verify that the men were all dead, and they were. There would be no help from any of them in finding a town. She sat down, frustrated. Now what did she do? This so-called "punishment" was more like a death sentence. If they were so determined to send her back in time to live, the least they could have done was to place her in a town and give her a chance to live. Minerva sat there and tried to remember her history. She did not know which tribe of Indians attacked the stage, and she did not see anything on the coach itself to tell her where she was. Surely the stage would be missed, and someone would come to investigate? What would she do if the Indians came back to make sure everyone was dead?

Minerva finally decided that she needed to find some water.

The sun was very hot, and she was going to fry her poor skin if she didn't get some shelter. She was already thirsty as could be. Just as she was heading out, she heard the clip clop of horse's hooves. Minerva searched the horizon, and finally spotted a man approaching on horseback. When he spotted the coach, he urged his horse to a faster pace.

"What happened here?" he asked, giving her a strange look.

"What does it look like?" Minerva asked sharply, glaring at him. The man looked so different from the men she knew. For one thing, he did not bother hiding his emotions under a fake façade of polite indifference. He also appeared hardened and quite capable of defending himself.

"It looks like the stage was attacked by the Comanche, miss. My real question is, how did you survive? Why didn't they carry a pretty girl like you off with them?"

"Are you the type who thinks an Indian has the right to enslave a Caucasian woman?"

"No, ma'am, I am not that type. I'm the type who believes in taking a sharp-tongued little wildcat like you over my knee for a sound lesson. I know you've had a bad scare, but that's no excuse for being so rude to a man who only wants to help. Are you injured in any way?" he demanded.

"No, I am not."

"That is surprising." His stare was accusatory, and it made Minerva uncomfortable. "I am pleased you weren't harmed, but that isn't the Comanche way. Either they kill a woman, or they take her captive. Perhaps they may be afraid of your red hair?" He made a guess.

"I am not sure what happened," Minerva replied. "I came to and it was all over. The men were all dead, the horses gone, and the stage upturned."

"You must have hit your head when the stage turned over, and the Indians assumed you were dead, which is very lucky for you. I'll take you to the relay station and send someone out here to get the bodies and the coach. Come on over here," he bossed.

"I cannot. I do not know you." Minerva backed away from the stranger. She did not know what he would subject her to once away from this site.

"Don't get all missish on me, girl. I need to get you out of here before those redskins head back here to make sure they didn't miss something."

"I will not go with you on that horse. I am afraid of horses," she declared. "You cannot force me to be agreeable with your plan. I do not know you or your intentions."

"I can tell you what those Comanche will do to you if they come back, and I guarantee you won't like it. Now, pull yourself together and come along. No more fuss, or else."

"I have no wish to subject myself to your caregiving. The answer is no. Go along. Send others to bring help." He looked at her as if she had taken leave of her senses.

"That tears it," the man growled in frustration. He jumped down from his horse and stomped towards her, chasing after her when she started to run away. Before she'd taken six steps, he caught her. He knelt on one knee, threw her face down over his bent knee, then he raised his hand and spanked her.

"Ouch!" Minerva cried out. "Stop immediately. You have no right to strike my person. Let me rise."

"I'll let you rise when you stop acting like a fool and agree to get on my horse and hightail it out of here." He continued to spank her, doing his best to set her fanny on fire, and stop her foolishness.

"You are causing me pain. Please stop hitting me!" Minerva screeched loudly. "Ow!"

"Are you going to settle down and come with me?" he asked, giving her bottom another hard wallop.

"Yes!" Minerva agreed, anything to stop the man from striking her where she sat. She had read about that somewhere, but could not recall what she had read, only that it was painful as could be. She could attest to that.

The man rose and pulled her over to his horse. He picked her up and plunked her on the front of his saddle with no care whatsoever to her sore backside. Then, he mounted, wrapping his arms around her, and whirling the horse around to take off at a brisk gait. "My bag!" she gasped, pointing. He leaned down as they passed and swooped it up. He added it to the saddle, and kept right on riding.

The longer they rode, the more Minerva's bottom hurt. She wanted to rub her posterior so badly that the feeling brought tears to her eyes.

"What's your name, little girl? You got folks waiting for you in Cartersville?"

"I have no one anywhere," she answered bitterly.

"You're all alone in the world?" he demanded, shocked. "No folks at all?"

"No one," she repeated.

"I'm sure sorry, Miss..."

"Minerva of Strong," she gave her name, and surname. "Who are you?" Her curiosity got the best of her.

"Ben Granger." He waited for the usual reaction, but Minerva acted as though she'd never heard the name before. "Are you positive you weren't harmed by the Indians, Miss Strong? You can tell me if they hurt you; I will take you straight to Doc's house if they did."

"I have already answered that, Ben Granger. You are the only one who has harmed me, and I am still suffering from your abuse."

Ben whooped with laughter. "If you don't beat all, girl. I didn't abuse you; I gave you a little spanking."

"Yes, that is the word I was searching my memory for. You did a spanking on me."

"You sound like you've never heard of a spanking before," he teased.

"I have heard of it now, and I do not like it very much," she told him.

"It wasn't anything but to get your attention and calm you right down when you were being foolish. I know you don't know me, but I know me, and I know I would never harm you. I had to get us away from that coach, and arguing wasn't going to get it done. Now, please, you calm your temper and I'll take you to the relay station just as I promised. I've never felt the need to force a girl. My ma raised me better."

"Better than what?" Minerva asked, confused.

Ben laughed again. "You and Ma will get along just fine; both of you are redheads, with the temper and sharp tongue to match. Just a word of advice, honey, the men who run the relay station don't have much of a sense of humor. Don't go giving them attitude or they'll turn you out and not give a care if you end up in some Comanche's teepee."

Suddenly, two Indians came charging at them, screaming as loud as they could. One of them shot an arrow, and it struck Ben in the shoulder. He managed to get his gun and fired at them, but missed. He tried again, his head spinning in circles, and again, he missed. He knew the two men were chasing them, but he needed to stop before he fell off his horse. He headed his mount behind a large boulder. "You hide yourself, girl. Here." He thrust his handgun at her. "Take this; there's one bullet left. Use it to keep them from taking you alive." He aimed his rifle, but fell over, unconscious, before he could fire.

Minerva could not believe the man called Ben Granger thought that she should deliberately kill herself! Such a thing was unthinkable. Their Great Father did not condone violence to one's self.

The two Indians suddenly realized that Ben wasn't firing back. They dismounted and ran toward the rocks where Ben and Minerva were hiding. The first brave had his knife raised in the air, planning to kill Ben and take his scalp. She did not know much about ancient weapons, but Minerva fired the gun. The Indian

looked at her in surprise, then hatred. He started to run toward her, and fell dead. Minerva picked up his knife, prepared to fight the other man if she had to. That man saw the other Comanche lying there, and he exploded in rage and grief. He pulled his knife and ran toward Minerva.

Minerva calmly told herself that she had no choice; it was her responsibility to defend her very life. She suddenly sprang into action, the skirt hampering her movements somewhat, to kick the Indian in the stomach. He flew backwards, grunting in pain. "You stop now!" Minerva ordered in her firmest tone of voice.

The man didn't respond. He shook his head and came at her a second time.

This time, she was forced to use the knife in her hand. He fell dead at her feet. She had given him a chance and he didn't take it, but it still made her feel terrible to take a human life. She went to help Ben Granger. She checked to be sure he was still alive. Once that was established, she methodically removed the arrow from his shoulder by breaking off the shaft, then using a rock to push it out his back. She knew it hurt considerably, but Ben Granger didn't make a sound. Minerva went over to his horse and looked into the leather bags on the back. She knew that was where cowboys used to keep their belongings. There was a bottle of whiskey in one bag, and a shirt she could use to make bandages in the other. She poured the whiskey over the wound, in front and in back, put pads made from his shirt over the wounds, then tied them in place.

The next step was getting Ben on his horse again, but Minerva did not think she could do that all by herself. She put the whiskey bottle back into the saddlebag, and prayed he would wake up. The Great Father of all heard her prayers, and Ben woke with a start, ready to fight. When he saw the dead Indians, he demanded, "Who else is here, Miss Strong?"

"There is no one but us, unless you count these two men who are quite dead," she answered.

"You fixed me up?" he asked in surprise.

"I did what I could. You will need a real medic."

"How did these braves die?"

"I had no choice but to defend myself. I used your gun on that one, and a knife on the other man. They gave me no choice." She bowed her head in shame. "I am sorry."

"You were very brave, honey. Let's get on my horse and move along before some others come looking for these two."

"You are well enough to stay on your horse?" she questioned.

"We won't know until I try, Minnie."

"That is not my name," she scolded.

"It suits you much better than Minerva. You aren't some old maid schoolteacher. You are doing a fine job. Let's get on to that relay station. Those Comanche won't be kind to you if they figure out you killed two of their own."

What kind of time is this that the Council of Wrongs sent me to? Minerva asked herself. Since arriving here, she had been spanked, and forced to defend herself from two men. Now those men were dead. Is this part of my punishment? If so, it was truly a harsh one.

"Are you all right, Minnie?" Ben asked when they'd been riding for nearly an hour.

"No. I am quite sore where I sit. I am not accustomed to being spanked. Do not do that again, Ben Granger. My studies implied that is a punishment for small children, and I am not a child," she insisted.

"Your studies?" he questioned. "You studied about spankings?"

"Yes, it was part of our Ancient Cultures classes. Why do you people feel it will improve behavior?" she asked curiously.

"It improved your behavior, didn't it? You stopped arguing with me and let me get you away from the stagecoach. Where are you from, Minnie? You ask the silliest questions."

Something warned Minerva that telling the truth would only cause serious problems for her. She made a conscious decision to change the subject. "What is it you do as your life's work, Ben Granger?"