

# Chapter One

## *The Intake Cottage*

Lord Bardwick couldn't pace, not in such a small boat. With no other means to relieve his irritation at what he perceived to be the ferryman's painfully slow rate of progress, he stood in the prow, fairly vibrating with impatience, and glowered out at the dark water. The journey had already taken three full days, and he was tired. And impatient to lay foot on the island. For the third time in as many days, Bardwick cursed Tillmore for placing the school in such a remote location although he knew full well there was good reason for that.

It had been a letter from Tillmore that had caused him to drop his business in London and hasten to this best forgotten corner of the country. The missive had been brief, and more than a little circumspect:

*"Our agent in Cornwall has secured goods that would undoubtedly interest his Lordship. If his Lordship would be so good as to visit the island at his earliest convenience, a private viewing will be arranged."*

This message, worded so discreetly, was clear enough. One of the scouts had finally found a girl that met his specifications. It had certainly taken them long enough, he thought with a scowl.

It had, in fact, been nearly a year since he'd issued his instructions, through Tillmore, to the small network of scouts. Since then, he had made a pest of himself with inquiries on their progress.

It was better, naturally, not to ask too many questions as to how the girls were acquired. Even Tillmore maintained a careful distance from the scouts despite the fact that they worked for him. One had to protect oneself, after all, and the academy, from any whiff of impropriety.

Nevertheless, Lord Bardwick had, over the long months of waiting, occasion to wonder about the scouts' methods. It seemed likely that money changed hands in at least some cases. A relative selling off a girl to settle a pressing debt, perhaps, or simply to be rid of one mouth to feed. But other girls, he imagined, were spirited away without anyone's acquiescence.

No matter. Bardwick did not trouble himself with moral qualms. He was firm in his belief that every one of these girls was fortunate to find herself at Childebride Island, regardless of the methods employed in her procurement and transport. Once a girl had accepted the necessary training and learned to submit unquestioningly, she was carefully placed in the household of a gentleman who would prize her above all other possessions. Safe in the confines of a fine home, a Childebride graduate lived a cosseted life, free from labor, hunger and plagues. That she had precious few other freedoms troubled Bardwick not one whit. In exchange for her submission, a Childebride graduate gained attentions and satisfactions few women could even hope to obtain through conventional marriage or lesser domestic arrangements. Further, as a condition of placement, graduates were settled with incomes that would provide for them long after their benefactors had passed on.

Such musings occupied Lord Bardwick's mind long enough that it was nearly dark when the small ferry finally bumped against the dock. By what prior signal he knew not, Mrs.

Markham was awaiting him, the collar of her thick wool coat turned up against the chill wind off the water.

“Good evening, my lord.”

She greeted him politely, if with not quite the level of deference he expected from a woman. No help for it, he supposed with more munificence than was his wont. As head matron, Mrs. Markham had a position of some authority on the island. That was Tillmore’s concern, not his own. As trustee, Lord Bardwick had a certain degree of influence on how the academy was staffed but he rarely chose to exercise it.

“It is good to see you back on the island again, my lord.”

The tall man nodded, and started with long strides up the ramp to shore, forcing the older woman to hurry after him.

“I’ve had a long journey, Mrs. Markham. As I’m sure you can appreciate, I am anxious to see the girl, and wish to do so immediately.”

“As you wish, my lord,” the woman said from behind, a touch peevishly, or so it seemed to Bardwick. “The girl Mr. Tillmore has in mind for you has been assigned to Ingrid, and naturally she’s still in intake. She arrived only a fortnight ago. I’m rather surprised you’ve come so early in her training. You must have received word very quickly.”

Bardwick grunted, turned, and fixed a stern look upon the much shorter woman before him.

“I expect no less from Tillmore given the fees I pay,” he said sharply.

They were both stopped now, at the fork in the path that led in one direction to the main buildings of the academy, and in the other, to the lightly wooded area midway up the hill in which were clustered the intake cottages.

“You, too, are in my employ, Mrs. Markham, and I’ll thank you not to forget it.”

“Yes, my lord. Of course, my lord.”

Mrs. Markham dropped her eyes before he could read her expression, but he was sufficiently mollified by this gesture of deference to forego any further discourse on the matter. She bowed slightly as she passed ahead of him so she could lead the way safely by the light of the lantern to Ingrid’s cottage. They walked in silence.

Lord Bardwick had been in this area of the grounds before but it was his first time near Ingrid’s cottage. The cottages were kept quite separate, not only from the other buildings of the academy but also from one another. The intake cottage was the place where a new arrival was made to understand and accept her new situation, and this, it was judged, was best done in complete isolation from the other pupils. The reasons for this were many, not the least of which was the frequency with which one was likely to hear, in the vicinity of any of the intake cottages, the sound of a paddle or strap falling on a bare bottom, and the desperate cries of the girl being disciplined.

Nearly the entire process of bringing a new arrival to accept her fate was done one on one, the girl made completely dependent on one female nurse, who rarely, if ever, left her side during her months in the intake cottage. Isolation fostered dependence, and dependence fostered submission, the ultimate goal of all training at the academy.

As they approached Nurse Ingrid’s cottage, Mrs. Markham held her lantern high, the better to illuminate the path. The intake cottages on Childebride Island were identical – quaint one-story dwellings with just one spacious room inside. The exterior walls were white, with high, wood-framed windows that let in plenty of light but did not permit a view from the outside in nor from the inside out. Everything about the simple structures, including the placement of the

windows, was designed to make the girl within feel cloistered and safe. Despite the sameness of the cottages, Lord Bardwick sensed, even in the dark, that Ingrid's cottage was somehow better cared for than the rest.

Mrs. Markham seemed to read his thoughts.

"Ingrid came to us from Austria," she informed Lord Bardwick in a low voice, for they would soon be within hearing range of the cottage and it would not do to have either nurse or charge become aware of their approach. "She is an excellent nurse and perfectly suited to the work here.

"Her methods are perhaps a bit unorthodox but one cannot argue with her results. Her girls are charming, and very obedient. We just recently placed one of them, Annelie, in an unusually favorable situation. The gentleman is getting on in years, and not free to marry her, but he has brought her into his household as a beloved daughter, of sorts, and she gets a great deal of his attention..."

Here Mrs. Markham paused and smiled.

"...much of which is directed to her lovely round bottom. He is delighted with his obedient little girl, although he calls her quite naughty, and has already bestowed upon her a sizeable inheritance beyond that which is required for placement."

They were nearly at the cottage now. Mrs. Markham raised her finger to her lips, cautioning the trustee not to speak. She stepped up to the heavy oak door to the cottage. There was a peephole cut in the door, exactly at eye level for an adult, used for looking into the room but never out. The hole was covered by a little wooden door on wrought iron hinges. These were kept perfectly oiled so the door could be opened and closed without a sound. Mrs. Markham carefully raised the small latch and motioned to Lord Bardwick. When he was close she pulled the little door open, and he placed his eye against the hole and his cheek against the smooth wood of the heavy door.

Bardwick was a man of spare emotion but what he spied within the room stirred him so much that he very nearly gasped. He was not conscious of it, but his right hand rose to his chest and pressed against his heart. Through the peephole, Bardwick saw Nurse Ingrid in profile, seated by the fire, her back straight and erect. He had seen Ingrid before, of course, and a handsome woman she was, attractive even in the prim uniform, even with her lovely blonde hair pulled up in a utilitarian bun at the base of her unquestionably graceful neck and half hidden beneath a nurse's cap.

But it was the girl that made his chest tight. She was young -- how young, it was hard to say, but in her white cotton nightdress with her hair loose about her shoulders, she was the very picture of virginal innocence. Her skin was clear and white, her cheeks round and rosy. Ingrid had the girl seated before her on a low leather hassock, and was brushing her hair with a heavy hairbrush.

Lord Bardwick had been pestering Fillmore to find him a red-haired girl, for he loved these hues above all others, but this little penny was a prize among prizes. Her hair was thick and long, a rich auburn, but interwoven with strands of strawberry blonde that made him want to thrust his hand into those thick tresses, the better to draw her close to him. He had hardened the instant he spied her, but this image of her burnished locks wrapped around his hand made his pego throb against his thigh. He wanted her. He wanted her all for himself, locked away safely in the old nursery on the third floor of his grand ancestral home, where he would make her his child-woman and play with her at will.

Lord Bardwick noiselessly closed the observation hatch and turned away from the door. It took all his strength of will to hide his exhilaration from Mrs. Markham. He fixed her in his iron gaze.

“I wish to see her unclothed.”

“That’s quite impossible, my lord! It’s simply not done!” Mrs. Markham retorted in a stern whisper, drawing herself up in an effort to impress upon him her full authority.

Lord Bardwick stepped away from the cottage that he might raise his voice without the occupants of the cottage overhearing. Once safely out of hearing range, the tall man spun to face the smaller woman, who once again had been forced to follow after him.

“I am a trustee, Mrs. Markham. I shall see her bare soon enough.”

The matron pressed her lips together into a thin line, unable to refute this. Trustees had certain rights of access to all the girls.

“Arrange it,” he commanded.

“I disapprove, my lord. The girl has only just arrived two weeks ago. It will disrupt her training, perhaps with disastrous consequences. She is not ready to be inspected by any gentleman, let alone a stranger to her.”

“Then arrange it so she is not aware she is being viewed,” Bardwick stated flatly. Sensing the matron’s continued resistance, Bardwick pressed his case.

“Mrs. Markham, pray consider this: If I am pleased with what I see I may decide to reserve this young lady as my own. If I do, it is likely that I shall order some very specific education for her. It would be for the girl’s own good if such training were incorporated from the beginning, rather than introduced only upon her arrival in my home.”

As this was undoubtedly true, Mrs. Markham did not argue but continued to frown at the very idea of such an unprecedented event.

“And if that is not enough to convince you to do my bidding without further discussion, Mrs. Markham, know that I can be decidedly unpleasant when someone crosses me, and I intend to have my way on this.”

He glared at her fiercely until he sensed her backing down.

“I return to London in the morrow, Mrs. Markham. Call me when preparations have been made. You may find me in the lodge, in the trustees’ quarters.”

At this, Lord Bardwick turned on his heels, confident that the matron would make the necessary arrangements immediately. As he strode up the path to Tillmore’s office, he congratulated himself. Much as he wished to inspect the girl unclothed, he liked even better the idea of observing her unawares. How much more delicious it was to spy on a female in dishabille when she was innocent of her exposure.

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A fortnight earlier, Clara Louise Anton had arrived on Childebride Island, making her entrance to the intake cottage bound up tightly inside a scratchy burlap sack. She was carried in the arms of a rough character who dropped his burden unceremoniously to the floor as soon as he was over the threshold.

“Tsk! Take a care, man!” Ingrid had scolded as she bent down to undo the rope that circled the coarse sack. “You should be more careful. There’s a girl in there, not potatoes, and I’ll thank you not to put bruises on her.”

“Yawl find she’s as dirty as a whole row a’ po’taters, Miss. Put up quite a struggle, this one did,” the big man spat out. “And yawl find ‘er backside’s already got a bit a’ black an’ blue upon it. Oy ‘ad to take me belt to ‘er twice a’fore she quieted down for the voyage, and she’s got a rag tied in ‘er mouth even now.”

Ingrid said nothing but pressed her lips together disapprovingly as she continued to work at the knots in the rope.

“But she ain’t been touched otherwise, if ya get me meanin’. And don’ ya worry, Miss. Oy made sure she ain’t never been touched at all. Had to, a’fore oy troubled to haul her all this way,” the scout added, grinning lasciviously at the memory of how it had taken two of his mates to hold the little wildcat down long enough for him to pull open her pretty limbs to check. He knew a virgin when he saw one, and it would be a cold day in hell before he’d forget the sight of that untouched quimmy nestled sweetly between youthful white thighs. He had been particularly taken with the little tuft of red hair adorning it, just above where his calloused fingers had parted her silky folds until everything within was revealed. Oh, how she had cried at this humiliating violation! His member stiffened at the memory, and he rubbed at the front of his trousers right there in front of the foreign nurse, whom he thought a comely piece of woman herself.

Irritated, she stood up and showed him the door, thanking him for his trouble. She locked the door securely before she went back to the knots, and slipped the key into her apron pocket.

“There now, little one,” she soothed to the unseen girl trussed inside the sack. “I’ll have you out of there just as quickly as I can.”

The last knot gave way, and Nurse Ingrid opened the mouth of the sack to spy a tangle of the most beautiful auburn hair she’d ever seen. So the rumors were true. This girl was intended for Lord Bardwick, the tall, manly trustee she’d seen striding across the grounds on more than one occasion. Ingrid thought it an honor to train a girl for him, for she sensed he was a man who would treasure a woman even as he ruled her with unwavering strictness. A girl would be fortunate to be placed with such a man. Nurse Ingrid pulled the bag down further until the girl’s whole head came free.

“Such a little beauty you are!” she exclaimed softly, looking gently at the frightened girl. “Why, those pretty eyes of yours are just exactly the color of the sky in my hometown on a warm spring day.”

She wiped at the dust and grime on the sweet tear-stained cheeks.

“You’re a dear one, you are. You mind me, little one, and we’ll get along very well.”

In this manner, Nurse Ingrid reassured the new arrival, with kind words and gentle touches. That was her style for early training. Naturally, she had no compunction about spanking a girl when necessary – she wouldn’t be employed at Childebride Academy if she had.

But unlike some of the other nurses, Ingrid didn’t feel it was necessary to spank a girl as soon as she was brought in. Others, notably Nurse Colleen, liked to establish authority by upending a girl the very moment she was pulled from the transport bag. Colleen would haul the frightened, disoriented girl across her own broad knees, bare the girl’s bottom, and use the hairbrush as long and hard as necessary to ensure the fight was beaten right out. Nurse Ingrid had no doubt such methods created fear, but she did not believe it fostered true submission.

So instead of spanking the little redhead, Nurse Ingrid soothed her. She cut off the dirty rag bound between the girl’s teeth, clucking at the tiny bruises at the edge of the girl’s mouth. “Poor little dove,” she cooed. “You’ve had a hard trip. Never mind. You’re safe now. Nurse Ingrid will take care of you and teach you to be a very good girl.”

Still crouched next to the bound girl, Ingrid unpacked the wads of flannelling that had been pressed into the girl's mouth to silence her during transport.

"Let us get this nasty cloth out of your poor sweet mouth. Do your lips feel very dry?"

The girl nodded silently, new tears forming at the corner of her eyes.

"Let me help, little one," Ingrid said, kneeling close so she could take the little face into her hands. She brought her mouth close to the girl's lips and moistened them with tiny flicks of her own soft tongue.

"And inside? Your poor mouth must feel terribly dry."

The girl's eyes shot open in astonishment when the nurse slipped her tongue between the girl's lips, moving it to moisten what the cruel gag had dried. Then Ingrid stood and brought a small glass of water, pressing it gently to the girl's lips so she could drink.

"Can you speak?"

The girl opened and closed her mouth, moving her stiff jaw, trying to find her tongue.

"Yes, Miss. I think so."

Ingrid was surprised by the educated way in which the girl spoke. This was no urchin snatched from the slums. She was tempted to ask her where she had come from, but in the end, of course, it didn't matter.

"What is your name, girl?"

"Clara, Miss. Clara Louise Anton."

"Clara will do here, little one. Unless someone decides you shall have a new name."

The girl's eyes went wide. "Wh-wh-where is here, Miss? If I might ask."

Her lower lip quivered and tears pooled in her eyes. "I'm so very frightened."

Ingrid kissed her softly on one cheek, just as a tear ran down it.

"You need to forget about your old life, little Clara. You are on Childebride Island, in an intake cottage with Nurse Ingrid, whom you must learn very quickly to love and obey. It is my job to prepare you for a new life, one that will be rich and full and rewarding."

"I don't understand, Miss." The girl's lip quivered again. "I want to go home."

"You can't go home, Clara. You have a new life now."

Nurse Ingrid ran her hand along Clara's tangled hair.

"That's all you need to know, little one. If you behave, I shall care for you and pamper you in ways you never dreamed possible. And if you act willful or spoiled, or if you disobey me, I shall punish you in ways you never dared imagine."

She paused to let those words sink in, and saw from the fear in the girl's eyes that they had.

"How old are you, Clara?"

"Nineteen, Miss. Almost twenty."

"You look much younger."

Clara's brow knit together. "That's what that man said. The man who put me in the bag." She began to cry again.

"Did he hurt you, little one?" Ingrid asked, pressing the palm of one hand against the side of the bag where she presumed the girl's bottom must be. Clara nodded as she sobbed.

"Then let's get you out of this bag and wash you up. I need to attend to those bruises."

She helped Clara up, holding on because she knew the girl would be unsteady on her feet.

"Now listen to me carefully, my little Clara girl. I'm going to undress you and wash you. You must not try to push my hand away or cover yourself or hide in any way from me. Is that understood? I will have my way with every part of your body, even places that you used to think

were private. They no longer are. They now belong to me, and any other adult on this island who wishes to see them or touch them.”

Clara trembled, trying to understand the significance of the older woman’s words.

“Heed me, Clara, because if you resist me in any way – any way at all – I shall have to use this...”

Nurse Ingrid pulled a sturdy hairbrush from her apron pocket and held it up.

“Or this...”

Nurse Ingrid displayed a stout leather strap, pulled from another pocket.

“...to put a number of fresh welts on your backside.”

Clara was shaking visibly now.

“Is that understood, Clara? Do you understand that I want your unquestioning obedience now and always, and that if I don’t get it, I will punish you?”

“Yes, Miss,” Clara whispered. “I understand.”

“Good. Mind me, my little Clara girl, and we’ll get along just fine.”

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Many hours later, after Clara had been washed and fed, Nurse Ingrid looked up at the high window over the bed.

“It will be dusk soon, child. It’s time I administered your dose.”

“Dose?”

Clara was clean and warm, and very sleepy, but she still felt decidedly awkward in the odd clothing Nurse Ingrid had dressed her in after the embarrassingly thorough sponge bath. The entire outfit was very old-fashioned and childish, from the white pinafore tied neatly over the plain gray frock, to the petticoat and long white bloomers and black button-up boots underneath. Her hair had been washed and combed and was tied in two satin ribbons.

“A dose of medicine to protect you from the night vapors, child. There are poisonous gases that rise at night from the swamp at the low end of the island. The vapors creep into your body through your nose and mouth while you sleep. If you aren’t protected, you’ll suffer a terrible bellyache in the night.”

Clara looked skeptical but held her tongue.

“We all take the medicine, every day,” her nurse assured her.

“Please, Miss. May I not?” Clara said politely. “You see, I hate draughts. They taste so foul.”

“You needn’t drink a thing, child. The medicine is mixed into a plug of beeswax that goes up your bottom.”

Clara’s eyes went wide in a look of horror. “Up my...?” She shook her pretty little head vehemently. “Oh, no. I could never!”

The nurse looked disapprovingly at her charge. “You refuse your dose?”

Clara hesitated briefly, worried by the change in the older woman’s tone, but forged on bravely.

“I don’t mean to be disobedient, Miss,” Clara said, her eyes flicking briefly to the hairbrush on the end table. “It’s just that...that...well, I’m sure it’s not needed, Miss. Not in my case. You see I’m of a most healthy constitution. Why, I never even catch colds! Please, Miss. I don’t want anything in my...” Clara blushed deeply.

Ingrid set her mouth in a thin, disapproving line.

“Very well, headstrong child. Do as you please. But I imagine you’ll be singing a different tune tomorrow.”

Clara sighed in relief that the matter had ended without argument. Or a spanking, although she could not, in fact, imagine being spanked by this woman. Or anyone else. She hadn’t been spanked since she was four or five years old, and she could hardly remember it anymore.

Her nurse stood up.

“I’ll fix you some porridge and tea. Then it’ll be an early bedtime for you. You need rest to recover from the trials of your transport.” She trailed a finger gently over the rope burns on Clara’s wrists, sending a funny thrill up Clara’s straight young back.

“You rest there and stay warm under the duvet.”

Clara was happy to receive these instructions, after all the bathing and brushing of the past few hours, not that those ministrations had been entirely unpleasant. She was indeed tired and it felt so nice to be comfortable again after the horrid way she had been kept during the abduction. Tied up in a rough sack, gagged, unable to see a thing, so terribly, terribly frightened! Just remembering the ordeal made her tremble. She closed her eyes and sank gratefully into the soft warmth of the divan, pulling the fluffy comforter up close around her neck and shoulders.

At the brazier in the little kitchen, Nurse Ingrid smiled to herself as she prepared porridge for Clara. Things were going well. Exactly as planned. To Nurse Ingrid’s mind, her own methods were preferable, and more effective, than those used by the other nurses. The school specified that every girl must have her dose every day, by force if necessary. And force was almost always required for the first week or so. New arrivals always resisted going across their nurse’s knees so the plug could be inserted up their bottom, but they were soon convinced that this humiliating invasion of their person was preferable to being spanked first and dosed anyway.

Ingrid was unique among the nurses in that she felt spankings were often counterproductive at this very early stage in a girl’s training. She preferred to bring a girl to obedience through more subtle means. She had her own way to break a girl into accepting the dose; one that she felt was better in the long run. Certainly, her results spoke for themselves: the girls who received their initial training from Nurse Ingrid were among the best of the graduates of the academy. They were prized within a discreet circle of wealthy gentleman who vied for the privilege of having a Childebride girl as their very own.

If any of the other trainers had thought to ask Ingrid about her methods, she might have explained that the first step had been setting the scene so that Clara refused her dose. The second step had been letting the child believe she had won a little victory and that she had been successful in determining her own fate. The final step was to make sure that the consequences for Clara’s decision, her disobedience as Ingrid saw it, were as unpleasant as possible. Ever afterward, Clara would doubt her own intuition and rely on her nurse in every matter, great and small.

Smiling to herself in the kitchen, Nurse Ingrid drew a small vial out of her apron pocket and mixed a tasteless but potent potion into the hot porridge. It was made from moss and herbs Nurse Ingrid gathered from the woods. The potion would do Clara no real harm but for several miserable hours it would make her bowels cramp most violently. Nurse Ingrid planned to retire at the same time as her charge, that she might catch as much sleep as possible before the potion took effect.

There were, of course, no vapors on the island. This was a ruse invented to give reason for the daily insertion of the beeswax plugs. It was imperative that the girls of Childebride Island



come quickly to submit to the dilation of their bottoms, for this method of training, which was used extensively at the academy, was more effective than nearly any other in bringing a girl swiftly to rein. In addition, most of the gentlemen who were their patrons took particular interest in this part of a woman's body. Thus, it was simply expected that any Childebride girl had been made accustomed to frequent penetration of her sensitive back chamber, for it was more than likely that the gentleman who acquired her upon graduation would probe that very place just as frequently with all manner of instruments and objects, including that which was attached to his own person.

Naturally, it embarrassed a new arrival no end to be required to lay herself across an adult woman's lap that her garments might be lifted, and to have her intimate flesh exposed to full view. Most certainly, she was mortified to have her most private place not only examined but also probed. And worst of all was that the thick plugs held her bottom hole quite pointedly open, which could be felt most keenly for a full hour until the dose was absorbed and the beeswax began to melt.

The use of beeswax was deliberate because it was messy. Even after holding the dose in her bottom for the required time, the ordeal was not over until the girl had laid herself once more across her nurse's lap so her bottom could be cleaned with a soft white flannel. The wax tended to dribble out as it melted, often mixed with brown from where it had been. And a good trainer never failed to take this opportunity to shame the girl for making a mess. Some nurses insisted that the girl look at the soiled flannels and launder her own undergarments if she had messed them. Nurse Colleen, the strictest of the nurses, would hold the soiled flannel right up to her naughty girl's face and make her smell her own mess.

A few girls tended to mess excessively, or worse, expel the plug prematurely. For such transgressions a girl was always spanked soundly. Afterwards, the naughty girl would be placed on a bed, right down on her freshly spanked bottom, and ordered to raise her legs that a second plug might be inserted. The prone position was embarrassing, naturally, but it was also convenient because it facilitated the next humiliation: the girl would be required to open her legs so her nurse could wrap thick wads of cottony diapering between them, angrily scolding as she secured the diaper with pins.

Of all the trainers, Nurse Colleen was the strictest with her charges when it came to accepting the daily dose. She brooked no argument whatsoever, and spanked long and hard if her girl failed to cooperate. And if a girl messed, Nurse Colleen would make her stand outside the cottage door for the full hour of dosing, frock and petticoat raised, the hated diaper visible for any passerby to see. As a result, Nurse Colleen's girls were among the quickest to develop muscle control. After a few weeks under Nurse Colleen's supervision, no girl dared allow so much as one drop of wax to dribble out of her bottom.

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Ingrid woke first, awakened by soft moans from the young woman sleeping next to her on the soft bed. The cramps were starting, she observed, surprised that Clara was still able to sleep through them, although her slumber was obviously no longer peaceful. Fine drops of perspiration had risen on the sleeping girl's brow, and her lips were pulled into a troubled frown. Nurse Ingrid held her gently, waiting. Within a few minutes, the girl's eyes fluttered open. "Oh, Miss," she gasped. "My belly hurts!"

“It’s the effects of the vapors,” Nurse Ingrid said gently. “I’m afraid you’ll suffer like this, and worse, until dawn when the gases recede.”

Clara’s eyes went wide as she took in this frightening information. A wave of stronger cramps hit her, and she doubled up onto her side.

“Come, girl. We’d best get you on the chamber pot before you mess yourself. Hurry, now!”

For four hours, Nurse Ingrid stayed with her charge, wiping the sweat from her brow and cleaning the chamber pot without comment or censure. She changed Clara’s nightgown twice, setting the soiled garments aside for cleaning in the morning. And precisely on schedule, just as the first light appeared in the high window to one side of the room, the agony subsided. Nurse Ingrid settled Clara into bed, where the girl fell into an immediate and exhausted sleep.

Clara did not refuse her dose the next day. She went across her nurse’s lap most reluctantly, but she held very still and didn’t fuss as her skirts were pulled up and her drawers pushed down.

“There’s a good girl,” Nurse Ingrid said when Clara’s bottom was completely bare. She patted Clara’s bottom affectionately before parting the plump cheeks confidently with one hand.

“What a pretty little pucker you have, child. No, don’t clench your muscle or it will only hurt more. Relax. Yes, that’s better. I’ll rub in some oil this time, but you must learn to take things in your bottom without anything to smooth the way. My colleagues in the infirmary are not so gentle when they administer enemas, and you’ll be having plenty of those when you move up to the main building.”

Clara shuddered, and Nurse Ingrid used her free hand to rub the small of Clara’s back, pressing her warm palm up under the waistband of the skirts that were piled atop the bow that tied Clara’s childish pinafore in place. It really was a pleasure to have a lovely round bottom like this perched on one’s lap, Ingrid mused, pleased that Clara was submitting so well to these unfamiliar ministrations to her bottom. She sensed that this new arrival was naturally disposed to the training she was to receive, and would make an excellent child bride for Lord Bardwick.

Sensing that the girl had relaxed a bit, Nurse Ingrid pressed her well-oiled index finger into the circle of Clara’s bottom hole.

Clara cried out, shocked to be penetrated so.

“Don’t panic,” her nurse coached. “Relax your muscle so I can push my finger in and out. There! Doesn’t that feel nice? This needn’t be unpleasant, you know, not if you cooperate.”

Clara tried to lie still as her nurse’s finger probed, but the sensations made her wiggle atop the woman’s broad lap.

“Oh, Miss!” she moaned softly.

“It feels good, doesn’t it, Clara girl? Girls who cooperate are rewarded with lovely feelings. There is much more pleasure in store for you, if you behave. Now, breathe evenly because I’m going to give you two fingers in your bottom. No, don’t clench. Relax and let me stretch you. You’ll take the plug much more easily if I stretch you first.”

Clara pressed her hands over her face, embarrassed to be opened so, ashamed that it gave her such pleasure.

Nurse Ingrid rubbed her back, praising her in a quiet voice. Then Clara felt her nurse shift, as she reached for something from the table next to her chair.

“Now the plug, Clara. This will hurt until you become accustomed to accepting the plug, but it’s for your own good. It’s far easier to take that the sickness of the vapors.”

Something big and hard was abruptly pushed deep into Clara's bottom, causing her to stiffen across the nurse's lap and scream out in pain.

"Oh, Miss! Take it out, please! It hurts! It hurts!"

"I know it does, but you have to take your dose, Clara. Calm down and relax your muscle. It will soon adjust to what's holding it open so rudely. In a few minutes, the heat of your body will soften the wax, and it will be easier to bear." She rubbed Clara's back, trying to soothe her through the pain.

In a few moments the sharp agony of the insertion had receded to a dull, throbbing pain, and Clara slumped across her nurse's lap, sobbing. Her tears came not only because of the horrid pain she'd just endured, and not only because her bottom was now held open by a large plug, but also because of a certain resignation to her fate. She couldn't imagine having to do this every day, yet she knew she would never again argue about it. She knew she would go obediently across her nurse's lap whenever so instructed.

Above the sobbing girl, Nurse Ingrid straightened in her chair and smiled to herself. She had trained enough girls to know she had successfully guided her new charge through the very first phase of her submission. And it hadn't *all* been unpleasant, she thought with a small grin, recalling how the girl had wiggled as her bottom hole was fingered.

Clara, Ingrid now realized, was a natural. The girl didn't realize it yet, but she had been born to this role. It was to be Nurse Ingrid's privilege to guide this girl through her journey, helping her reach her full potential as a gentleman's treasured plaything.