

CAPTIVE DISCIPLINE

DEMETRIAN BRIDES BOOK ONE



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BLUSHING BOOKS

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CHAPTER 1



She was dressed long before the knock came, her eyes heavy from watching the two suns rise. "Janys Livingston," the voice boomed. "It is time to leave for your trial." Slowly she opened the door and let the two men into the narrow room where they had brought her the night before. Once more they clamped their hands onto her forearms as they steered her out into the public square.

Already the crowd was gathering to see how the Council of Elders would deal with an off-worlder who had broken their laws. As the guards marched her up the steps to the meeting hall, Ambassador Nadakov blocked their way with her stocky body. Cropped gray hair framed a face etched with fatigue. "I'm sorry, Janys, but the Protector has decided not to intervene. He says it would compromise his position on planet's rights."

"What do I do then?" Janys asked, trying to keep the panic from his voice as she was pulled past the ambassador.

The older woman shouted over the bobbing heads and arms. "Remember what we talked about last night. Defend yourself any way you can."

As she was propelled into the stone building, Janys desperately tried to come up with a plan. According to the Ambassador, her best chance was to plead ignorance or confusion. The problem was that everyone knew she was a trained sociologist familiar with their laws. All would believe Janys knew exactly what she was doing when she slipped out of the visitor's house after curfew and spied on the men's gathering.

"Say you're not guilty," the ambassador had directed. "This isn't the first time an Institute researcher has run afoul of local customs. Even if I can't get the Protector's ear, the Interplanetary Court of Justice may do something to help an innocent young woman trapped in a punishment happy society. Just give me something to work with on appeal."

But as Janys approached the six elders who would decide her fate, she knew that Demetern justice rendered the concept of appeal moot. If Janys were convicted, she would be stripped of all belongings and transported to Kollent. Even natives found it difficult to survive for long in the desert colony. For off-worlders, the life expectancy was less than two Earth months.

"Here!" Janys felt cool fingers shove something into her hand. She clutched it as the guards maneuvered her into the open area in front of the dark-garbed figures. To her side stood a boy whose freckles stood out on a face from which all other color had disappeared. A moment later, a balding man led in a woman wearing a dark blue tunic trimmed with silver jewels. She had her chin up, but her legs were shaking so severely that the gems seemed to be dancing.

The men released Janys and drew back. The elders were huddled together in conference, and at the moment, no one seemed to be looking at her. Surreptitiously, she unfolded the crumpled paper and read:

"You do not have to go to Kollent. I have worked out another choice. But first you must admit you have broken our laws and ask

for punishment. There is no place on Demeter for those who refuse discipline. "

It was signed Shalimerie. Twisting slightly, Janys scanned the crowd until she glimpsed the dark hair pulled back into the three signature combs. Next to the woman was her husband Kronitin. Beside him Janys caught a glimpse of sun-bleached hair that could only be Martel, Kronitin's brother and her unwitting accomplice. Her stomach heaved as she realized that if she did things the Ambassador's way, she'd have to accuse Martel of entrapment, although they both knew that wasn't true.

Finally a brown-bearded man who looked too young to be labeled an elder called for order. "I, Tadewidan, will be presiding over the hearings today," he announced. "We will dispense of the two shorter matters first. I call the case of Vilding."

The boy stepped forward, his hands scrabbling at the front of his well-worn tunic. Tadewidan looked at him sternly. "You have been accused by those at the marketplace of stealing a rudanko pastry from Mistress Milner. Do you take responsibility for that action?"

"I so admit and I offer my body for correction," the boy replied rapidly, looking down at the floor.

"Then I will ask your parents what they wish to impose," the elder continued.

Immediately a man and woman stepped forward, flanking the accused. The woman patted the boy's his shoulder while the father addressed the council. "I will see to it that he is soundly switched. In addition, for the next two decedons, he will be barred from having any type of dessert or treat."

The rest of the elders nodded. "That is acceptable to us," Tadewidan told them. "But how says Mistress Milner?"

A ruddy faced woman stepped up, wiping her hands on her tunic. "Well, I don't know about the 'no dessert' part, because that cuts down on my business," she laughed. "But the switching is what I'd suggest myself if it were my boy."

"Then it will be done," Tadewidan proclaimed as the parents led the child away, his rear end twitching slightly as he were already anticipating the spanking. "Now for the case of Mistress Plettigan." The woman in the jeweled tunic moved forward, her face flushing with embarrassment.

The elder looked at her coldly. "You have been accused by Mistress Donawirt of conducting yourself in an unseemly manner before her husband. Mistress Donawirt further states that when she brought this matter to the attention of your husband, Master Leonid, you denied the conduct, although it occurred at a music gathering before many witnesses. Before this Council, do you now accept responsibility for your action?"

"I so admit," she replied softly, turning even redder. "And I offer my body for correction."

"That is as it should be," Tadewidan said approvingly. "Now your husband will tell us what punishment he intends to administer."

The balding man put his pudgy arms on the woman's shoulders. "For six decedons, she will be barred from attending any music gatherings in which Mistress Donawirt or her husband are in attendance. In addition, I will strap her buttocks and thighs harder than ever before until I am completely certain she will never again even think of offending any marriage vows."

The woman gave a little cry as the council contemplated the offer. "That is acceptable to us," Tadewidan began, "but how says Mistress Donawirt?"

A rat-faced woman in a dowdy gray tunic scampered up. "That would have been acceptable as a private matter when I first went to Master Leonid," she told the council. "But when Mistress Plettigan denied what she had done, I had no choice but to come here. I have now lost a morning of work and been wrongfully called a liar. I request public justice."

"We understand your position completely," Tadewidan murmured as he glanced at the rest of the elders. "Mistress Pletti-

gan, you will receive your whipping today in the square. Master Leonid, we will expect you to take care of this matter as soon as we adjourn so that Mistress Donawirt does not lose any more time from work." As her husband led her away, Janys could tell the woman was already crying.

There was a long pause before Tadewidan said heavily, "And now we have Janys Livingston, who is not a citizen of Demeter but nevertheless must answer to our laws. Do you understand why you have been brought before us today?"

Janys had been so caught up in the other stories that for a moment she had almost forgotten her own peril. "Yes," she replied, surprised how hard it was to form even that simple word with a mouth that was as dry as the Demetian sands.

The man's dark eyes stared implacably at her. "You have been charged with breaking the curfew and violating the confidentiality of the men's gathering. In addition, we have learned from the notes we confiscated that you have been gathering forbidden knowledge, apparently for the purpose of publishing it to others. Do you take responsibility for these actions?"

"I—" Janys choked out. If only she had a lawyer to deny the accusations on her behalf! But Demetian society had no use for anyone whose job was to help others avoid correction. How could she put herself at the mercy of these people who believed so strongly in corporal punishment?

"Continue," the elder ordered.

From the corner of her eye, she watched Shalimerie. The dark head was bobbing as though urging her on. Now her heart was pounding so loudly that she thought she would collapse. How could she depend on the ICJ to save her if they didn't even have the power to be in the room with her this moment? If she fought the charges, she would certainly be in Kollent by nightfall.

Were Shalimerie's words a trick? Although Janys couldn't think of a compelling reason why someone she barely knew would want

to help her, by the same token she didn't know any reason why the woman should cause her harm. Maybe this was her only lifeline. And no matter what the ambassador had told her, it was Janys alone who was only a few words away from being sent to virtual death.

"I— I so admit," she said finally, the words awkwardly tumbling out of her mouth.

Everyone in the room relaxed audibly. "Very good," Tadewidan told her. "Perhaps you have learned more of our customs than we had thought. You will now continue."

What was the phrase she had just heard? "I give—no, I offer—my body for correction," she got out.

"Excellent." Suddenly Janys understood completely what Shalimerie had been trying to tell her. Obviously they had thought the off worlder was going to deny the charges, perhaps by accusing one of their own of complicity. Now although no one was smiling at her, she could feel a shift of opinion in her favor as Tadewidan and the others gazed at her with something resembling compassion.

"Janys Livingston," he continued. "You have admitted responsibility, and offered yourself for discipline. We do not commend you for this act, because it is what we expect of all those in our world, but we understand that you could have done differently according to your customs. However now you have presented us with a dilemma."

He stroked his beard while two of the others chattered together. "If you were one of our people, this matter would be simple. You have heard us endorse sentences to be carried out by parents and spouses. But if punishment cannot be carried out within the society, as elders our only alternative is to remove the person from our community. So even if it is more severe than we would otherwise find appropriate, we have no choice but—"

"A moment, Elder Tadewidan." Shalimerie was rushing forward from the side of the meeting room. As two small girls scurried

aside to let her pass, Janys saw to her chagrin that Martel was directly behind her.

"Mistress Shalimerie," Tadewidan began. "Interrupting a meeting is cause for—"

"Yes, I know," she broke in again. "Kronitin is back there with my bibalon, recording every rule I break. If you wish, he will tell you what price my backside will pay tonight for each violation." She smiled almost impishly, then looked graver. "But I have a solution to the dilemma of which you speak, and in the interests of justice, I believe the council should hear it."

Tadewidan's eyes circled the council. "Proceed then," he said after a moment...

"It is Martel who needs to speak," Shalimerie responded, quickly switching places with the big man.

Janys was struck by the difference in the man who had been her friend. The first day she had seen him at the document depository, she'd mistaken him for a farmer due to his wide shoulders, strong arms, and tanned skin. She had been very impressed with the easy command of his body, including the way he set off the white tunic worn by men of marrying age. Now it was bunched around his neck as though he couldn't bear to have the cloth touch his back, and he held his body stiffly as he addressed the elders.

Although he was near enough to touch her, he didn't even glance her way. "I offer to marry Janys Livingston."

For a moment Janys couldn't tell what was louder—the roar in the room or in her head. Marry her? This man couldn't want to marry her. They'd only known each other for a little over a decedon—twelve Demetian days in all. Why, they'd barely clasped hands in greeting. There was no way he could want her as a wife, or she him for a husband.

Tadewidan for once seemed nonplussed. "Martel, you wish to join yourself to an offworlder?" he asked doubtfully.

"Yes," Martel replied firmly. "I will see that she learns our ways

and receives proper correction for her actions, including those that concern the council today."

My God, she thought, he's telling them he's going to punish me. Her mind flashed with a vision of Mistress Plettigan being strapped by her husband... Now was the time for her to tell them all that this idea was completely crazy. She started to speak, but someone grabbed her arm, spinning her partially around. "Think." Shalimerie mouthed at her.

Janys closed her eyes. As she had many times since the night before, she wondered how any of this could be real. After all, yesterday morning everything had made sense. She was Janys Livingston, one of the few people in the galaxy who had actually grown up on Earth. For three years she'd worked at the Institute under the Prof, doing research assignments that had already led to three publications in the leading sociology journals. Her only purpose on Demeter was to study a settlement that had successfully escaped from technology by migrating to a vacant world. How could anyone expect her to give up life at the Institute to live with this stranger on a back planet that believed in straps and whips but not data implants?

Yet the Prof was breaking into her thoughts. "The operative word, Janys, is 'live'. This offer isn't coming in a vacuum. Your choice is to stay safe until we have the chance to rescue you, or to die in Kollent. For once stop being stubborn. Listen to someone and do the best thing for yourself..."

But I can't, she cried silently. I can't do it Prof, especially because of you. How can I marry someone when I still—"

Tadewidan broke into her reverie. "We appreciate what you are trying to do, Martel. But there are two concerns. First, we know that marriages are difficult under any circumstances, and more so when people of two cultures come together. While I do not wish to embarrass Mistress Shalimerie or Master Kronitin, I am sure your brother has told you of the problems he has faced as a Wyteen joining with a Lycarta woman, even though both

communities raise their children in much the same way. Do you think you can handle a wife whose understanding of our ways is at best academic, and who may be able to fit the demands of her role?"

"Yes, I can," he said firmly. This time he looked at Janys squarely on, though the small smile on his face looked forced... "I believe that under my guidance, she will make an excellent wife, and become a law abiding member of Wyteen."

Even Janys couldn't doubt his sincerity. Yet underneath his formal words, she could feel something seething. Anger? Sexual attraction? The desire for a challenge? Something strong enough to make this man cast away all his ideas on how he'd thought his family life would unfold in order to take her on.

"Well said, Martel," Tadewidan responded. "But in a way, that brings us to our second concern. Although we did not explore the facts of the offenses today, we have heard you provided information that led to their occurrence. Is your reason for saving this woman unclouded by your own responsibility in placing her in this situation?"

There was a long pause, and Janys wondered if Martel had been knocked off balance by the elder's question. But if his response was quieter than before, it was no less firm. "Last night I admitted my participation in this matter to my father," he told the council. "He carried out my wishes regarding punishment. The next time the men gather, I shall admit the same to them and offer my body for correction. My proposal today is not part of that penance."

Tadewidan studied Martel as though trying to divine the reason for the man's extraordinary sacrifice. "I am satisfied that we understand the alternatives presented," the elder said at last. "The council must confer to make our decision. But before we do, I have one more question." He stared at Janys. "Are you willing to marry this man?"

As her thoughts raced, she wondered if she could buy a little time. "Elder Tadewidan," she began carefully. "I didn't know Master

Martel's intentions until this moment. While the council is conferring, I would like to speak with him and Mistress Shalimerie."

"An excellent idea," Tadewidan responded drily. "There is a chamber down the hallway door that you may use for that purpose. Guards, please escort the lady and her companions there, but remain outside."

Janys kept her eyes down as they once more began pushing through the horde of people. Just before they reached the doorway, they paused. Standing to one side was a tall woman with fading blonde hair pulled severely back by two combs. At her side was a young brunette whose steely blue eyes cut through Janys. The older woman took Martel's arm. "Are you certain you want to do this?"

"Yes, Mother," he said, giving her hand a gentle squeeze. "As I told you last night, I know you had something else in mind for my marriage, but this is my decision."

"That it is," she sighed as the procession pulled ahead. "I just wish you would reconsider."

Soon Martel, Shalimerie, and Janys were bundled into a small dark room with two chairs and a table. Shalimerie took one look around, then started backing out the door. "I really believe that the two of you should talk by yourselves."

"Wait—" Janys began, but before she could say anything, the guards had shut the door, leaving her alone with Martel. She sunk down onto one of the chairs while he continued to stand. To her horror she realized that both his unnatural stiffness and avoidance of contact were probably the result of the punishment received from his father.

"The council cannot force you to take my offer," he told her quietly. "What will you say if they offer you that choice?"

"I don't know," she told him honestly. "Nor do I know why you made it. Not only am I an outsider whom you hardly know, but you probably feel I used you to locate the men's gathering. Why would you want to speak to, much less marry someone who got you into so much trouble?"

"I let myself get into trouble," he said shortly. "I knew you were getting more information from me than I should be giving. But I wanted to continue talking with you. I enjoyed the time we spent together. And perhaps I see what you did a little differently than the others."

She watched as he pushed the blonde hair back from his forehead. "You told me so much about your research on other worlds that I understand why you wanted to go to our gathering. How much it would mean to you to include in your project something that no offworlder had ever seen before."

Now she felt worse than ever about getting him involved. "So you're not angry with me?"

"Not in the way you mean." He shifted uncomfortably, his eyes not meeting hers. "But you do need to be punished, and if it comes to me to do so, the fact that I understand what you did will not lighten my hand."

His hands. Janys went cold as she realized that he was talking about using them on her body in a way certain to be painful. She was barely able to concentrate as he continued. "However I do not believe that you deserve a death sentence for curiosity, or for over eagerness in doing your job. And I meant what I told the council. Although you do not know me or my people very well, I think there is a time when you will learn to—benefit—from this arrangement, and come to fully accept being a wife and citizen."

She entwined her hands on the table to keep from tearing at the skin around her nails. There was a long silence. He was waiting for her to respond, but her mind was blank. How could she possibly decide between two horrendous futures?

There was one question she hadn't asked... "You say you wanted to marry me, but Shalimerie has acted as though it were her idea. Did she talk you into it? And if so, why? I don't know her very well either, so I can't see why she put herself at risk for punishment on behalf of a stranger."

"Shalimerie has had a difficult time with her move from Lycarta.

I know she empathizes with your predicament as well as being concerned for my involvement." Now he looked her full in the eyes. "The idea was mine before the words ever left her mouth. But from what I knew of you, I believed you would completely reject it, so I was unwilling to go forward. Shalimerie is the one who believed it might work, in much the way her marriage to my brother has defied the odds."

There were so many other things important to ask, but she wasn't certain she could handle the answers. Did he expect her to sleep with him? Have children? She didn't get the feeling he was offering a marriage of convenience. In their brief time together, she admitted that she had found him attractive. However Prof had trained her well, and she knew to stifle any feelings that compromised objectivity towards her research subjects. Besides, for her passion was as much about intellectual compatibility as chemistry, and usually arose only when she had spent many hours talking with a man on the subjects she loved best.

"Perhaps you should look at it this way," he said finally. "When someone is sent to Kollent, their marriage bonds are automatically dissolved. If life in Wyteen becomes unbearable, I will do nothing to prevent your going there."

That's right, she could hear the Prof pounding away. Divorce. Going to Kollent is not the only way to end a marriage. Remember the ICJ also has authority to free you from this coerced arrangement if it finds in your favor.

A guard opened the door. "The council has reassembled," he told them. "We will now return to the hearing room."

This time she barely noticed the people clustered around as she followed along behind Martel. The coldness inside was numbing her, getting her ready for the painful announcement she must make.

The group shuffled forward as Tadewidan resumed his place and turned his full gaze on Jany. "Marriage in Wyteen is taken very seriously. We are prepared to allow you to resolve your situation

today by assuming its responsibilities, but only if you do so with your full heart. Knowing that, do you accept the proposal?"

Marriage is a convenience, the Prof whispered in her mind. Say yes, and we can be together again. Refuse, and you will be dead before I can even get passage to Demeter.

"I understand," she told the council, mentally crossing her fingers. "And I do."