

## Chapter 1

The woman who would soon be Mary's senior sister-wife said, "Mary, you must expect that Elder Jones will wish to have you many times, on your wedding-night. He is getting on in years, but when he takes a new bride, he can still make her very sore by the end of her first night with him."

"Sore?" Mary Haven asked innocently, her eyes wide in alarm.

"You'll see. Just make sure you do as he says, and you won't get a whipping as well as the rest."

"The rest?"

Anne Jones, whom Mary had learned at school to call *Gracious Mother Anne*, looked gravely into Mary's eyes. "You must stop asking questions, child. The elder has chosen you as an eon-wife. In the forever future that is to come, you will be truly blessed. What the elder asks of you on your wedding-night will be a brief ordeal, even if he does decide he must punish you as well as taking his pleasure. The universe that is to come will last forever. That is why we call it the forever future, just as the Eternal Teller has told the elder we must call it. Now take off your clothes, so that I may inspect you, and prepare you between your legs and between your bottom-cheeks to receive your bridegroom."

"I... I don't understand!" Mary pleaded, cowering back into the simple chair at the kitchen-table of Mrs. Jones' house in the elder's compound. Her mother had walked her over from their own house three streets over in the little suburb of Concord where Elder Jones' people had gathered themselves from the different parts of Fidelia colony in order to prepare for the journey to eternity. Mary's father had recently been chosen for the elder's special Judicial Tribunal, which meant that their family were now members of the highest epiphanies. But all Mary knew about the epiphany concerning eon-brides was that the Eternal Teller had shown to the elder that the men of his inner circle should begin to bring young women into their homes as junior wives.

Nor did Mary's mother know much more, she said, but Bridget Haven's faith in Elder Jones was absolute. "This is a great honor for your family, Mary," said Bridget. "It seems strange

to us now, but when Elder Jones marries you, our family will be connected to his, and we will receive forever thrones, in the universe that is to come."

"But..." Mary said. "But you don't want Father to bring home an eon-wife, do you? Sarah's new eon-mother isn't very nice."

Bridget pursed her lips at the mention of her husband, now away on an extended mission trip to the Eastern end of the continent, but due back in a few days, for Mary's wedding to the elder. "Sarah's father put a stop to that, though, didn't he?"

Mary remembered the embarrassing story. The new Mrs. Klein, Ted Klein's first eon-wife, had sassed Sarah's mother, and ordered Sarah around, until finally Violet—Sarah's mother and Ted's senior wife—had dared to complain to Ted about Georgia's—the new wife—behavior. Ted had laid down the law, and whipped Georgia's bare bottom over the spanking stool in front of Sarah and Violet. Then he told them that from then on the elder's recommendation that the senior-wife should discipline her junior eon-sisters as she saw fit would be in effect. Violet would paddle Georgia if Georgia sassed her, and if Georgia made any fuss, Ted would take the strap to her bare backside as well—and do it as often as necessary.

Mary wondered if her mother had heard from Violet Klein the even more embarrassing part of the story, which Sarah had whispered to Mary. After the whipping, Ted had taken Georgia to his bedroom and the sounds coming from there had been very hard to ignore. That was the part Mary really wanted to ask if her mother thought she could bear.

The girls of the Concordist community knew nothing for certain about what happened in the marital bedchamber, but stories like Sarah's of hearing her new eon-mother scream, along with the idea instilled in them from an early age that a wife must obey her husband as if he were the Teller himself, made Mary think that husbands reserved a special kind of punishment for the bedroom. And at weddings, of course, the unmarried girls could see the veil in the upper room of the Assembly Hall, knowing that after they left, the bride and groom would go behind the curtain to do something secret—something that made the bride blush crimson. Every time she thought about Sarah's eon-mother and now about her own life as the elder's second eon-wife, the butterflies in Mary's tummy seemed uncontrollable.

"But still," she insisted, feeling desperate for even a little information, "you won't like it, will you?"

Bridget's face crumpled a little, but she spoke bravely. "If our house is lucky enough that the Teller gives your father a sweet eighteen-year-old like you to serve him and me, and to bear him children, I will welcome her, as Mrs. Jones will welcome you today."

Now, told to take her clothes off by that same Mrs. Jones, Mary wondered whether Bridget Haven would someday do the same to a new sister-wife. It didn't seem possible. How could Mrs. Jones be serious?

"Mary," said Mrs. Jones. "I can tell you're a sweet girl, but the elder doesn't put up with any nonsense. As soon as you were betrothed to him, your discipline became his responsibility, and as I think you know, that makes it also my responsibility, as your senior sister-wife. Take off your clothes, or I will have to paddle you."

So Mary received the first adult spanking of her life. She tried to run away, but one of the elder's men—the captain of the honor-guard who kept watch day and night over his residence—brought her back.

"Bare her bottom," Mrs. Jones said coldly, "while I fetch the paddle."

They put Mary over the spanking stool, and the man, whose name Mary didn't even know, pulled up her long dress to reveal her panties.

Mrs. Jones tsked at the sight. "Wordly panties. Not proper Concordist undergarments. I hope you're as ashamed as you should be, Mary."

Mary felt her senior sister-wife pulling her panties down. "Please, Mrs. Jones!" she wailed. "Please don't paddle me!"

"You'll call me *ma'am* from now on, Mary. You're going to feel a great deal of the family paddle if you can't learn to accept discipline like a good wife should. The elder doesn't mind giving daily whippings until he's sure a new eon-bride has learned her place. Ask your sister-wife Emma about that, if you have any doubt. The elder had me flog her in front of him every evening for two weeks, when she didn't please him on her wedding night. Now we'll have this disgraceful underwear right off, and you won't see it again. You'll go home today in the clean, white undergarments of an obedient bride, the halter and the drawers."

Mrs. Jones pulled the blue panties with the flowers all the way off. Feeling terribly ashamed, Mary turned her head to see that the older woman had handed the panties to the man from the honor-guard.

"Have these burned, Mr. Berson," she said. "And have Bridget Haven's underwear inspected. I imagine she's wearing secular panties, just like her daughter."

"What?" Mary cried.

"Hush, child," said Mrs. Jones. "Your family is connected to the elder's, now. You must submit to the discipline of the inner circle. If your mother is found to be wearing improper underwear, she will be made to change it, and she and your father will have a lesson in the Hall of Assembly."

"A lesson?" Mary asked weakly.

"Mr. Berson, why don't you tell young Mary about assembly-lessons? Now that she's a bride herself, it's time for her to hear of such things. Besides, I know you're enjoying looking at this sweet virgin bottom, and you'll want to spend a while explaining things."

"Oh, please," Mary said, feeling her face turn crimson but also realizing that Mrs. Jones's humiliating words made her feel terribly funny, at the thought that big, handsome James was looking at her bare bottom.

"Hush, Mary. One of the privileges that come with being an honor-guard is that Mr. Berson is allowed to take his eyes' fill of the elder's wives' charms. Did not the Teller reveal to the elder that a man's eyes, in that they give special encouragement to his natural desires, should take their fill of the sights he wishes to see?"

Mrs. Jones bent over slightly, and Mary cried out as she felt the older woman's hands on her bottom, spreading the cheeks.

"What are you doing?" she wailed. "Ma'am?"

"I am showing Mr. Berson your secret flower," Mrs. Jones said matter-of-factly.

"S—secret flower?" Mary stammered.

"That is what it is called in the higher epiphanies of the Teller. Is it not a nice flower, Mr. Berson?"

"Yes, Mrs. Jones," Mr. Berson said. Mary turned her head wildly and saw a wolfish smile on the man's bearded face.

"Will not the elder enjoy himself, when he opens her?"

What did she mean? Mary wondered desperately. What could she mean? What were the higher epiphanies? She had so many questions that she could only open her mouth, as her heart

raced and her breathing came in little pants at this strange, embarrassing treatment from a woman she had always thought so respectable.

"Certainly, Mrs. Jones."

"Do you have Delilah's flower often?" Was there no end to the confusing questions?

"Yes, Mrs. Jones. Nearly every night. Thank you for choosing her for my first eon-wife. You know that Reba never liked having me open her flower, but Delilah knows her place."

"Mary," Mrs. Jones said, "this is what assembly-lessons are all about. Reba is Mr. Berson's first wife. She was reluctant, when Mr. Berson decided to have her in a certain way, a way that involves her secret flower, which is a way the elder will have you very frequently, when you are married to him. It is not permitted that you learn the higher epiphanies yet, but you can certainly understand the importance of a wife's obedience to her husband, and both their obedience to the elder, and to the epiphanies of the Teller. Mr. Berson brought Reba to the Hall of Assembly for a lesson, just as your father will bring your mother, and Reba learned to submit as she should, even though she didn't enjoy the way James had her. Now, thanks to their obedience, Mr. Berson has Delilah, his first eon-wife, and Reba is allowed to make Delilah submit to Mr. Berson in the opening of her secret flower, just as I will make you submit to the elder when he wants to open a secret flower and enjoy himself there. Your new sisters Jane and Martha had to provide their bottoms in the same way, when they were the elder's junior wife, and now it will be your turn."

Mary's mind sought desperately for some way to understand what Mrs. Jones had said, but found nothing. She felt her senses nearly overwhelmed with the shame of knowing Mr. Berson was looking at her bottom-hole and with the strange confused sensations that Mrs. Jones's odd words seemed to provoke. Mary had never imagined she could find herself over the whipping stool of the man she had been told she must marry, waiting for a paddling from his first wife with her panties confiscated and her bottom not just bare but spread wide for a man's lustful eyes.

"Listen to the Gracious Mother, now, Mary," Mr. Berson said. "It's just like she told you. If your ma is wearing naughty underwear, she'll go with your pa to the Hall of Assembly, and the Prester will teach him to whip her good and soundly, so that she wears the proper undergarments from now on. Then the Prester will watch them have congress, the way the elder's going to have congress with you. If your pa doesn't know how to get the joy he should get, the way the Teller

says a man must if he is to be in concord with the powers, when he has congress with your ma, the Prester will show him how to do it. After the lesson, your ma will be a better wife, and then when your pa gets an eon-wife, as he will, since you're going to be married to the elder, she'll be able to train the new wife properly."

"The way I am training you now," said Mrs. Jones. She stood up abruptly, and the feeling of gratitude Mary felt at feeling her bottom-cheeks close and hide her... her—she felt the heat in her face grow even greater—*secret flower*... couldn't match the fear of what would happen next. "Time for your first paddling, Mary. I hope now that you've seen how easy it is for me to call Mr. Berson or another of the honor-guard in to put you over the stool, and how embarrassing it is to have your bottom bared for punishment in front of him, you'll think twice about disobeying me again."