

Kaylee's Keeper
Masters of the Castle, Book Two

by

Maren Smith

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CHAPTER ONE

“This is fantastic!” Selena stepped off the tour bus grinning, her blue eyes wide and sparkling. “Have you ever seen anything like this?”

Disembarking behind her, Kaylee gave her new friend a nudge on the shoulder to keep her moving and then stepped down onto the gravel parking lot beside her. She knew her own expression could not have been any less awed. The Castle looked just like...well, a castle. The medieval stone-block structure towered atop its earthen plateau, surrounded by sparse acres of grassy meadows, which were in turn surrounded by tall, leafy trees. Condemned as a derelict (according to the six-panel photo-packed brochure, which Kaylee had faithfully read the whole way here), it was spared the indignity of the wrecking crew by an anonymous overseas buyer. Dismantled on the moors of its native Scotland, it was moved—first by cargo ship, then train, then truck—until it arrived at its new home in America, where building authorities nickel and dined and permitted all restoration attempts half unto death before finally—finally!—allowing its noble reconstruction. And now, here it sat, a grand and historical site, slightly out of place in this remote Ohio valley and ultimately considered by the kinky-inclined to be *the* resort to end all fantasy resorts.

Multinational banners snapped and waved in the breeze along the parapet walls. The massive iron portcullis was raised then the drawbridge lowered; beyond that, the cobble-stone courtyard of a bygone era awaited its most recent busload of vacationers. There were wooden carts, horses neatly stabled amongst round bales of hay and sacks of grain. Leather harnesses, pony whips and riding crops that sent tiny thrilling shudders racing up her spine hung casually about. It was truly awe-inspiring, not to mention a little bit scary, but Kaylee was not immune to the historical romanticism attached to every crenellated tower, high-arching doorway and ghostly grinning gargoyle.

“We are going to have such a good time,” Selena squealed, clutching at her arm and hugging it.

Kaylee certainly hoped so. In fact, she had every expectation that she would have a fabulous time. Fantasies fulfilled, the website had

claimed. Anonymity assured, the brochure vowed. Safe, sane, consensual play was advertised on every ad and every page. The reviews (and not just those posted on the Castle's website) had raved that this was a "must go" place, and Kaylee had saved her pennies for almost two years, mentally debated for six months, changed her mind no less than two dozen times then finally purchased, not the ten-day package or even the five—she just didn't have enough money for that. What Kaylee had, though, was still her dream come true: three full days in a kink-oriented castle that promised to be the vacation of a lifetime.

Singles or couples welcome. Bed, board and costumes provided. Consensual atmosphere strictly enforced. Art gallery, gift shop, group activities and how-to panels available, and on the last day of every month, a masquerade ball. She wouldn't get to see that, darn it, but everything else...

Beside her, Selena screeched another excited squeal and grabbed her hand; behind her, a man wanting to disembark cleared his throat. Kaylee quickly got out of the way and they moved to stand in line with twenty other people while their suitcases were unloaded from the outer luggage compartments. *En masse*, they then headed for the main gate.

This many people all tromping across the drawbridge at one time sounded like the marching of a small army, and it sent a gaggle of women in maid costumes (some quite modest, some anything but) scampering from the courtyard where they had been setting up chairs in a semi-circle near the front door. They assembled into a hasty line at the bottom of the main steps, looking as one to a tall, butler-like figure waiting at the door. His hands were clasped behind his back and a neat cluster of birch switches peeked out from behind his leg. At a gesture from him, the line of maids retreated up the steps and vanished into the house. The last maid through the door received a snap on her skirted fanny from that birch-switch bundle. The maid barely made a sound, but Kaylee felt that snap all the way across the courtyard. Her bottom tightened, tingled, suddenly so sensitive that she could feel the scraping fabric of her panties and jeans with every step she took.

Beside her, Selena's fingers clutched at Kaylee's arm, squeezing as she squealed yet again. Her face was flushed; her eyes, bright. That single swat put a bounce of excitement in both their steps as they passed under the shadow of the iron portcullis and into the cobblestone courtyard.

Gazing up at the points on the iron teeth, Kaylee was distracted by a flicker of movement from one of the castle windows. It took her a moment to separate the figure watching them from the curtains. One hand in his pocket, one shoulder propped against the sill, a man in fine 1800s

clothing stood framed by the second story window. His shirt was white, his pants and vest black, and flashes of gold from his waistcoat watch caught the afternoon sunlight, reflecting it back at her. Sipping from an elegant coffee cup, he was watching as they filed into the courtyard, approaching the line of tables set up just inside, and then his eyes caught hers. He smiled, though only slightly, pushed away from the window and vanished beyond her sight.

Selena pulled at her, reclaiming her attention. “Come on. We’ve got to get registered.”

The vacationers divided down into four short lines, one for each of the waiting attendants, all of whom were so well-versed in their set procedures that very short work was made of the whole process. The lines moved quickly, each person signing in, picking up a thin packet and then adjourning to find a chair from the selection set up in the courtyard near the castle door. Waiting behind Selena, by the time Kaylee stepped up to the table herself, she had overheard enough to know exactly what to expect.

“Welcome to the Castle!” The perky young blonde looked up from the notation she was making in Selena’s file and smiled at her. She looked right into Kaylee’s eyes when she did it, and though there were a lot of people there, in that moment, the young clerk made it seem as if she and Kaylee were the only two people in the courtyard. “Do you have your number?”

“Yes.” Having fished it from her pocket back when it had been Selena still standing here, Kaylee gave it to her and then waited quietly while the woman fished a manila envelope with a matching number neatly penned in the upper corner out of a dwindling stack.

“Anonymity is strictly protected and strongly encouraged,” she said as she opened the envelope and neatly removed all contents. She handed Kaylee the plastic wristband that spilled out along with her initial online application. Selena’s wristband had been bright pink; Kaylee’s was jet black. “For the duration of your stay, you will be provided with a new name and a new identity. Please don’t give any of your fellow visitors your real name, unless you want that contact to be continued outside in the real world.” The young woman stopped sorting papers to pin Kaylee with a stern but still-smiling look. “We don’t encourage that.” She clipped the papers she’d gathered onto a clipboard and handed that to Kaylee along with a pen. “We have preselected a name that will be used by you and you alone from now until you step back on the bus to return home. The name Mystery was selected for you. Would you like to keep it or do you have a different name in mind?”

Kaylee didn't even hesitate. "Do you have something that's more average or...normal?"

The young woman arched both eyebrows. "Normal?"

"My first name is Bay," Kaylee confided, offering a pained smile when the woman arched her eyebrows even higher. "I go by my middle name, but I've always wanted a nice, normal non-estuary name."

"Oh." The woman locked her lips together. She looked like she wanted to laugh, but didn't quite dare. "Okay, um...so are you looking for something like, Sarah or Mary or maybe Judy—?"

"Judy!" Kaylee latched onto it, her hands catching the lip of the table, as if she could physically hold onto that name and keep it for her own. "I could *so* be a Judy."

"I'll see if it's available. In the meantime, here is your application, your acknowledgement of intent and consent, a list of Castle rules and your bracelet. Looks like we have your medical records, so go ahead and find a seat and while you're waiting, please read over your application. Make any changes necessary, initial each paragraph and sign at the bottom. The same goes for the Castle rules: read each article carefully and initial that you understand and intend to comply. Sign at the bottom. Bring your application back as soon as you're done. Everything else will be explained at orientation, which will start in just a minute. Okay?"

Nodding, Kaylee accepted the clipboard and pen and turned from the table. Selena waved from where she had already selected a chair and Kaylee headed straight for her, grateful for a little familiarity amidst all the rest of this novelty.

Having already finished her own paperwork, Selena latched onto her arm when Kaylee sat down, all but dancing in her seat as she, very softly so as not to disturb anyone else, squealed her excitement again. "I have been looking forward to this since forever!"

Laughing softly, Kaylee went over her application. Using her pen to keep her place, she carefully reviewed each numbered question. There were nine pages total, starting with the question: *Have you ever engaged in BDSM play before?* Kaylee checked off her answer, yes, and kept going, swallowing back that same slight twinge of guilt that she'd felt back when she first typed in that lie. She had never played. Up until now, all of her spankings had been received through fantasy and daydreams. When she walked through those massive castle doors, her first spanking here would be the first real spanking she'd ever received in her entire life. She wasn't about to put that down on this questionnaire though. She didn't want all the experienced people here to treat her like a newbie. She only

had three days. She wasn't going to waste a single one of them trying to convince people that she didn't need to take it slow.

The next question: *Would you rate your level of experience as new, low, moderate, high or professional-level?* Kaylee had answered the last: professional. She reaffirmed that lie now as well.

Please list your favorite play experiences. Kaylee put down all her best fantasies. For years, they had been heating up her otherwise empty bed and now she was more than ready to experience the reality.

What do you enjoy most when you play? Spanking! Kaylee had provided that answer in all caps. It was probably a good thing this questionnaire had been filled out online, otherwise she'd have underlined the word several times, circled or highlighted it, decorated it all around with little red, black and blue stars to signify all the pain she wanted her poor bottom to be in by the time her vacation was over.

Kaylee squirmed in her seat, starting to feel the first pulse of arousal as her blood steadily relocated down between her thighs. She also began to skim the rest of the application but she wasn't thinking about what she was reading now. She was thinking about all the new experiences that lay ahead. She hoped she was assigned to someone who was caring and nice, yet strong and authoritative and who wanted to play right away. She couldn't wait to meet him, whoever *he* was. She couldn't wait to be bent across his lap with her hands and her legs pinned. Would he bare her bottom right away, or would he want to get to know her first?

The questionnaire continued.

Would you like sex to be an integral part of your experience at the Castle? Who wouldn't want that, Kaylee wondered. Sex and spanking went so completely hand-in-hand in Kaylee's fantasies that sometimes it became impossible for her to tell the difference between them. Besides, what was a vacation without a little sex? Granted, she wouldn't know the real name of the man she was going to be intimate with, but people had one-night stands all the time. Kaylee never had, but there was always a first time, and this—*this*—was going to be hers.

She wanted to experience everything the brochure and all the reviews had hinted of. She wanted to submit to the sensual whims of another. She wanted to be held down, pinned in place, tied to a bed. She wanted to be spanked, caned, caressed. She wanted to feel a fist lock in her hair and push her to her knees while she sucked a cock in penance. She wanted to feel the hot ache as she ground her well-spanked bottom against the mattress, the carpet, the edge of a hard, unyielding table, while she was penetrated. She wanted to be ridden, to be made love to, to be bent over and just plain fucked—her mouth, her hot and throbbing pussy, maybe

even her ass. Even if it hurt. Maybe even because it would hurt. She'd heard first times usually did, but Kaylee was so ready for this. For the next few days, from now until she had to step back up on the outgoing bus for home, Kaylee wanted to feel owned in every possible and sensual sense of the word.

She wasn't even reading the application anymore. She was just checking off one answer (lie) after the other—no one told the truth on these things anyway—and when she was done, it was a fight just to sit there while she waited for the rest of the orientation to start.,

Just reading her own questionnaire had made her horny as all hell. Her cheeks grew hot. Her breathing was shallow and just a little too fast, and her vaginal walls kept flexing, tightening in what felt like tiny shocks. When she stood up, she knew there was going to be a wet spot on the metal seat. She squirmed, already mortified, but even that felt good, amplifying rather than killing her excitement.

Beside her, Selena bounced in her seat and clutched her arm again. "It's starting!"

Turning, Kaylee followed with her eyes as a very tall and stiffly-proper woman ascended the two shorts steps and walked to the center of the dais. Her costume was similar to the maids Kaylee had seen earlier, but where their skirts had been shorter, hers was full-length, black, severe in cut, and as utilitarian as it was authoritative.

"Good morning," the woman addressed them, clasping her hands over her stomach, her cool voice carrying easily across the open courtyard. "I am Mrs. Hardwick, the head housekeeper here at the Castle. I hope you've all had a pleasant trip thus far. I know you're eager to get started, but there are some rules that must be gone over before we separate dominants from submissives and your fantasy adventures are allowed to begin.

"First and foremost, this is a consensual establishment. That means consent must be given at all times, by all submissives each and every time play is enacted, for each and every aspect of play enacted, every single second of every single day, even when that play focuses on the illusion of non-consent. No means no, ladies and gentlemen, even here. To break this rule means, at a minimum, you will be expelled from the premises. At most, you'll be prosecuted to the full extent of local jurisdiction. Every room, elevator, stairwell, dark-lit corridor and dungeon cell has cameras and voice-activated microphones and is never more than two minutes away from a rapid-response security team. Unfortunately, since 'no' only rarely ever means 'stop' in a BDSM crowd, even when you're tied over a

wooden horse with a ginger plug and bullwhip making very short work of your resolve not to scream—”

A few nervous twitters of laughter rippled the crowd; Kaylee giggled along with them, but her eyes were huge and for a moment it felt as if her heart had stopped beating.

Smiling thinly, Mrs. Hardwick allowed time for silence to reign once again before she continued. “Since “no” rarely means stop, the Castle operates under a universal safeword: onion. You can say onion or onions, it doesn’t matter. The immediate result is going to be the activation of every camera in the room. The microphones will switch on and one of the guards on duty will demand an immediate cessation of play. Security will be immediately deployed and they will not be stopped or waylaid until they reach the submissive in question. For that reason, I always recommend that you arrange a mediary word that you or your play partner can use to slow or stop the intensity of your play without bringing the entire Castle guard charging down upon you.”

There went that laugh again.

“But, Mrs. Hardwick, you ask,” the housekeeper said. “What if we’re gagged? How will we be able to use the safeword then? You can’t. Which is why gags are never permitted anywhere on the premises except under a very special set of circumstances. The dominant will need to apply for a license, the submissive will need to give written consent, and her consent must be notified and witnessed by the Master of the Castle. The play will then occur in a specific area of the castle and believe me when I tell you, you may be the only two people in the room, but you will never be alone when gags are in play. You will be observed from the moment you enter, until the moment you leave. Cameras randomly monitor all areas of the Castle at all hours of the day and night. Anyone caught using a gag outside of these set parameters will be automatically charged with breaking the rule of consent and immediate action will be taken to protect the submissive.

“Also,” Mrs. Hardwick continued, and held up her arm to show everyone the yellow and white bracelets she wore. Apart from color, hers looked exactly like the ones Kaylee and the other guests had been given, “every single person here, be they guests or staff, wears at least one of these. Each bracelet is color-coded to match a particular aspect of play that we offer. Doms wear two: a white band—” She pointed to hers. “—and a color-coded one to match them with a particular fantasy. I cannot stress enough how much it doesn’t matter if blue matches your eyes or if green is your favorite color. Put on the bracelet you’ve been given and do not take it off until you either switch fantasies or depart the premises. Bracelet

swappers don't get spanked here, ladies and gentlemen. They get prematurely sent home on the Bus of Shame. So while I'm watching, everybody get your bracelets out, put them on and set your minds right now to leaving them on for the duration of your visit." She paused and watched. "Does everyone have their bracelet on?"

Shuffling her papers in her hands, Kaylee slipped her black band over her hand and looked over at Selena's pink one; Selena looked at hers. They both looked at one another—so much for her spot of familiarity—before turning back to Mrs. Hardwick.

Two fingers tapped at her shoulder and Kaylee swiveled in her seat to find the peppy young woman from the sign-in table hovering just behind her. "Hi." She smiled and patted her shoulder. "I just wanted to let you know, Judy, your name was approved." As unobtrusively as possible, she crept back out of the assemblage, leaving Kaylee even more nervous and excited than before.

"Arms up; I want to see those wristbands," Mrs. Hardwick ordered, and like obedient school children, Kaylee held up her arm along with everyone else. "Perfect."

As if on cue, the Castle's front door opened and a uniformed line of men and maidservants all with yellow bracelets on their arms stepped outside.

"Masters and mistresses." The head housekeeper drew herself slightly stiffer. "It's time to say goodbye to your submissives. Please hand your information packets to Mr. Grimsley—" The head butler separated himself from the men and maids and marched forward to execute a formal bow. Like Mrs. Hardwick, the white wristband of a dominant coupled with his yellow one. "He will escort you to Wardrobe to receive your costumes, tour you through the Castle and explain its equipment, and finally show you to your room assignments. If you did not bring one with you, your assigned submissives will soon be joining you shortly."

Kaylee felt herself quivering, a sensation mirrored by Selena's grip on her arm when most of the men among them (and two women) stood up and filed their way to Mr. Grimsley's side, handing in their packets as they reached him. Each was wearing a white bracelet along with a veritable rainbow of secondary colors, the meanings of which were a complete mystery to Kaylee.

"Lords and ladies," Mrs. Hardwick dipped her head in a respectful bow, bidding them farewell. "Welcome to the Castle."

Kaylee's chest felt so tight she had to remind herself to breathe as she watched them file from the courtyard, vanishing into the shadows of the castle. Even knowing it was completely pointless, she tried to guess

which man she might be matched to before the line of them disappeared from sight.

“Where are my green bracelets?” Mrs. Hardwick asked, becoming imperceptibly just a little bit stiffer, just a little more austere. Three women stood up (among them, a very attractive Japanese woman with bright pink and blonde highlights in her very long hair). “Mr. Brody.”

A second man, stepped forward, separating himself from the female servants and what looked to be two Victorian-era policemen. Dressed simply, Mr. Brody’s tan trousers and plain white shirt said plainly he was not a butler. He also wore both green and white bracelets.

“Stable master,” Mrs. Hardwick announced, “please take possession of your ponies.”

Kaylee and Selena looked at one another, startled. The Japanese "pony" gave her head a very imperious toss, and beside her, Selena struggled to stifle a giggle. It was a sound Kaylee had a hard time not echoing. It wasn’t mocking, just sheer nervousness. The group was being very quickly and expertly whittled down.

“Blue bracelets.” The head housekeeper’s tone gentled, and a handful of women and the last remaining man among them stood. “Nannies Bess and Rosa will take you to the nursery.”

Kaylee shot Selena a look, but her new friend was watching the Blue Bracelets go. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes were sparkling. Kaylee could feel her trembling with hard-suppressed anticipation.

“Pink bracelets,” Mrs. Hardwick announced, and Selena jumped to her feet. She gave Kaylee a grin and one last squeeze, and then she let go. Her hands wiped nervously at the legs of her jeans as she quickly made her way out of the cluster of mostly empty chairs. “There’s our little princesses.” She watched as nine young women—and getting younger by the minute—hurried to assemble before her. “Governesses Victoria and Odelette will take you upstairs. A word of warning, girls. You’ll have to work very hard to impress our new schoolmaster, especially since you are already late for classes.”

Selena had never looked so happy or so thrilled. Admittedly, Kaylee hadn’t known her very long, but she still felt a tiny pang of separation anxiety as she watched the "princesses" fall obediently into line between the two governesses. Off they went, disappearing into the castle like all the rest.

Kaylee watched until she couldn’t see them anymore. Suddenly, her tiny pang of anxiety became a heart-jolting thump as she realized she was the only guest left in the chair. Mrs. Hardwick was looking right at

her, a very small smile twitching on her lips. The two Victorian-era police officers were looking at her too, except they weren't smiling.

"Come here, girl," Mrs. Hardwick said. A deer, frozen in the headlight, Kaylee couldn't make herself move. At least, not until the head housekeeper inquired, "Black bracelet?"

Feeling silly, her palms sweating now, Kaylee stood up. She came out of the rows of empty chairs, making her way to the dais and showing her bracelet as if there were any doubt that she might simply have missed hearing a previously called color. The two policemen were coming toward her, both very formidable-looking with their night sticks tucked into their belts, black top hats and shiny copper buttons running all down the front of their coats. Yellow bracelets peeked out from under their sleeves.

"Welcome to the Castle." Mrs. Hardwick stepped down off the dais, but it didn't help much. She was still quite formidable looking herself, very tall, almost a full head taller than Kaylee. "Normally, we don't issue black bracelets to guests on their first visit here. However, considering your application, we felt this was the best fit we could offer. So, before the constables take you into custody and your fantasy vacation begins, I just wanted to let you know that great care was taken in selecting your Dom. Ultimately, we decided on our very own Master Gaoler instead of a guest. He is very experienced, trustworthy and competent, with a soft touch at times and a stern hand at others." She touched Kaylee's shoulder. "I am telling you this only because you are new to us, and I want you to know you'll be well taken care of."

All Kaylee could feel was the wild jumble of knots where her stomach used to be. Since Mrs. Hardwick seemed to expect a response, she swallowed hard to muster one. "Thank you."

Mrs. Hardwick slipped her hands into her pockets, hidden in the folds of her full-length skirt. "Nervous?"

"A little," she admitted.

"That's to be expected. Still, I have something that should help you make the transition from reality into fantasy." Stepping in close, Mrs. Hardwick swept Kaylee's hair back from her neck.

Kaylee saw it coming. She felt the scrape of dark leather as it settled around her neck, heard the faint clink of the buckle as the housekeeper fastened it in place. Her smile even broadened when she stepped back again, leaving Kaylee touching the collar she now wore as if it were a necklace made with dynamite. "Wha—" Kaylee tried to laugh, but she couldn't quite manage it. "What is this?"

"Your costume. Are you ready to play?"

The knots in her stomach tightened. She nodded. “Yes,” she breathed.

That sparkle of mirth in the housekeeper’s eyes played at complete opposites to the stark authority that abruptly filled her voice when she snapped out, “So, you like to run away, do you, girl? Well, we know how to deal with that. Constables!”

Kaylee jumped, stiffening with a gasp when her arms were physically seized.

“Take this disobedient wretch to the dungeon. We’ll see if a few days in the Master Gaoler’s care won’t teach her how to behave.” Mrs. Hardwick turned her back on Kaylee’s involuntary squeak as the constables dragged her from the courtyard. All of a sudden, just like that, it all became shockingly real.

Onions. It sprang right to the tip of her tongue as she stumbled, quickly falling into step between the two guards. Somehow, Kaylee kept from saying it. This was a fantasy, after all. Just a fantasy. She’d saved up for two years, flown halfway across the country, and then bussed for two hours just to get here, and really, it wasn’t real. She knew that—never mind how scary it all looked or (even scarier) how it unexpectedly felt.

Though she hadn’t struggled, the constables held tightly to both her wrists and her arms as they hustled her, not up the steps and through the front door like everyone else, but around the side of the castle into a shadowed alcove where a pair of cellar doors had been levered open to receive her.

The closer they pulled her to them, the more the doors began to resemble a giant gaping maw set into the ground. Steep stone-block steps led down into ill-lit darkness. With one guard walking ahead of her and the other prodding from behind, Kaylee was led down the long, narrow passage that run beneath the Castle.

It was like descending into a cave. Cool stone blocks surrounded her. There were no windows and only a few doors—large wood-plank and iron bolt varieties, sunk into dense stone archways to either side of her. The massive cellar doors at the top of the steps behind her had been left standing open, but the sunlight seemed loathe to accompany her. The constables pulled and shadow swallowed her, the cold raising gooseflesh up both arms. Torches lined both walls, but still the hall grew darker, until the only illumination became small pockets of flickering torchlight interspersed amongst the shadows. The air smelled smoky and dank. Water dripped from the ceiling, making the flames dim even more. Some sputtered and hissed, and the sounds intermingled with other much more frightening noises.

Somewhere beyond her sight, a heavy door bumped closed. Chains rattled and clanked. A groan echoed up the passage, bringing every fine hair on Kaylee's tense body to standing on end. She heard a distant smack and then (every bit as distant) the responding cry. In the cell right next to her, the low grunting groans of a man in pain were abruptly silenced with a hard slap and a woman's snarling, "Take it, bitch!"

This wasn't real, Kaylee struggled to remind herself, but right now she just could not make herself believe it. She forgot to breathe, remembering only when the tightness deep in her chest turned into a dull head-pounding ache. And then the constables pulled her into the alcove of a doorway, and suddenly, they were standing at her apparent destination.

Taking a torch down off the wall, one constable pushed the massive door open. He walked into the utter blackness ahead of her, making a slow circuit around the chamber while he lit the torches inside.

It was a prison cell, probably no larger than her living room back home, but filled with contraptions that made her stop breathing all over again. She saw the shine of iron manacles on the floor and dangling from the walls. There were stocks, a rack, a cage only large enough for her to occupy on hands and knees, and a wooden horse with a sharply triangular peak. Restraints suspended from the ceiling showed that particular device was not meant to be bent over, but rather to hold its victim perched upon a most uncomfortable seat.

Kaylee shivered. Her legs locked, but the remaining constable dragged her inside, ruthlessly providing her with a much closer inspection of ropes and pulleys, a spreader bar affixed to the floor with an adjustable impaling bar rising out of the center, and a series of shelves lined with its eye-popping assortment of dildos and anal plugs, the sizes and dimensions of some of which were truly horrific. There were even hooks, bulbous on the penetrating end instead of sharp.

And the implements—oh God, Kaylee shuddered all over again. Opposite of the door she had entered through was a second, the small barred window of which let in just enough dancing torchlight to cast a ghoulish glow over every imaginable contrivance a Dom could ever desire. Hanging upon the broad wall were a wide variety of whips, tawses, paddles and canes. A steel bucket stood off to one side, fully stocked with leather-wrapped birches and slender bark-stripped switches, still soaking in the briny water that guaranteed to keep them both willowy and sturdy for extended use.

Her knees tried to buckle, but the constables kept her upright and brought her to the *pièce de résistance*. It stood in the center of the room: a steel bondage bench, thinly-padded at the knee rests, with bars and

restraints for every part of her body, including her waist and her neck. From the moment she was affixed to it, it would leave no room for her to wiggle, struggle or kick.

Kaylee's gaze snapped from one horrible corner to the next, unable to believe what she was seeing. She couldn't count the number of times she had fantasized about being in a place like this, and yet Kaylee could not find one shred of eroticism in any part of this.

She couldn't breathe...she couldn't breathe...

"At this point," one constable told her, "you have two options."

Kaylee looked at him, her eyes huge.

"Runaways are never treated gently." Dear God, he was smiling as if he were enjoying this. It made him look positively demonic in the flickering light of the torches. "If you want to make this as easy and as painless as possible—"

"Which will not be entirely painless, no matter what you do," the second added.

"—I suggest you strip down to your costume and assume a penitent pose before your gaoler gets here."

Everyone stopped when the rattle of keys clanked into the lock in the second door.

"Too late," the constables said in unison, all too cheerfully, and Kaylee shrank from everyone as the Gaoler entered the dungeon.

Kaylee had always been an avid reader. In her mind, there was nothing better than curling up late at night with a cup of hot chocolate and good book. She had often read of heroines who took one look at a man only to feel their hearts skip a beat. Well, Kaylee had seen many a fine specimen of manliness in her life, and that had never once happened to her. She'd always believed it a cliché...until now.

The gaoler came into the room clad entirely in black: leather pants and boots, leather cuffs and a pair of black and white wrist bands on his arms, and a hood over his head that revealed only his unsmiling mouth and the dark intensity of his eyes. He wore no shirt, showing thickly muscled arms and a ripped six-pack the lines of which she hadn't known existed outside a Bowflex commercial.

Kaylee took one look at him and her heart didn't just skip a beat. It stopped entirely. And fell, all the way down into the pit of her stomach, where it lingered, cowering for a place to hide and shaking, pretty much like all the rest of her was doing.

"You," the Gaoler stated to both constables. His voice grew ominous and soft. "Leave." They did, and once the door had closed behind

them, his dark eyes returned to her. A corner of his mouth curled. “How are you doing? Enjoying your vacation?”

She was so unnerved, she just stood there, staring at him.

“I just back from mine. Today, in fact. About forty minutes ago. I’m not even scheduled to work today, but when they brought me your file and asked if I wanted to, I thought, what the hell. I spent four hours this morning trapped on a plane next to a screaming six-month-old. Guess whose ass is about to pay that price? The word for stop is red. The word for slow—” his dark mouth twisted into an even darker smile, “—is airplane. You have five seconds to take off all your clothes and get on your knees. And don’t even think about not swallowing, or we aren’t just going to end with the bullwhip, we’re going to start with it too.” He flexed the fingers on his right hand and Kaylee heard his knuckles crack. “One…” he counted, a corner of his mouth lifting into a predatory smile. “Two…”

Kaylee bolted.

She didn’t remember hitting the door or throwing it open so hard that it sent a rain of paddles falling off the wall. She didn’t remember running back down the hall, either. Or shoving past both startled constables, or jerking sideways when one tried to grab after her, or ripping her arms out of their reach. They ran after her, calling for her to stop, but Kaylee didn’t stop and she didn’t say anything beyond onions—that she pretty much shrieked all the way up the dungeon steps and back out into the full bright whiteness of the shadow-banishing sun.