



Harp Strathe

Panitus
Maiden

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Panitus Maiden
A Tatus World Novel

by

Harp Strathe

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First to DL, Always.

And to Belle, another writer for the love of it, exes and ohs, my muse.

Chapter One

Ione Avena Canosh stood on the gallows, her heart pounding, the rope around her neck. All around her below it was quiet, people watching, the great hush of a crowd waiting. Ione was breathing fast, but she kept her face calm and proud.

Kye Min stood at the bottom of the stairs, looking up at her. The Tatus rebel smiled directly at her, a satisfied, hateful smile. Ione looked away. She hoped he was enjoying himself.

Actually, she hoped he choked.

Ione was a Panitus Maiden. She was promised to Beshiel Dvorak, Captain of the Panitus Legion. When Beshiel found out what had happened to her, he would never stop until these Tatus rebels were dead and Kye Min with them.

The Panitus were the ruling class, the elite. The Tatus mob surrounding her who jeered were commoners, inferior, a worker class, servants. It was the way of things, how it had always been. Panitus were benevolent rulers, shepherding the less civilized Tatus people, helping them to be more productive, keeping them safe. Tatus couldn't possibly be trusted to govern themselves.

Tatus knew this, accepted it. A good Tatus was grateful, humble, willing to be directed. They were a content, homely people who understood their place. Only a few violent criminals like Kye Min stirred up the rest with their lies. She hated him. Tatus like him had always envied Panitus.

Panitus were more intelligent, better in every way in contrast to the dirty, ignorant Tatus. Tatus looked roughly the same, but Panitus were stronger on average, more agile, much smarter, more pleasing to look at. Her own beauty was Panitus beauty. It was the natural order.

It wasn't the fault of the Tatus that they were born naturally lazy. Unattractive and unintelligent. Most of them were so stupid you couldn't even educate them. Of course they were natural workers. They only understood simple

directions. But some of them didn't like that. They didn't want to do honest labor, always demanding more comforts.

Her father had said at dinner last week that the Tatus workers had threatened to stop working in the mills he managed, making demands. Her father hadn't even arrested them. Instead, he had given Tatus an extra three days of rations, but they hadn't been grateful. No, they had rioted, violence in the streets. They only understood a firm hand, her father had said, direct consequences.

And now they had just come and taken everything.

She and Beshiel Dvorak were to be married within the month. She had watched from her father's estate in the city as Beshiel had ridden out with the Panitus Legion to put down the Tatus uprising. But he hadn't come back. There had been terrible noise in the city, explosions and gunfire, yelling, so much yelling. Tatus men had shown up at her father's residence and directed she and her father into a carriage, her father pale.

The carriage had rattled through the streets, buildings on fire, Tatus everywhere, pounding on the doors of the carriage, yelling at them. Lone hadn't known where they were being taken, and her father wouldn't answer her questions, seeming dazed. Out of the window, she had seen a man running across the street, looking terrified, and then three pursuers. It was shocking, the man in Panitus dress.

The driver had brought them to the center of the city, to the place reserved for the very worst Tatus offenders, people so violent they were more like animals and there was simply no other option. Lone had suddenly realized as they stopped, seeing the gallows, beginning to breathe fast.

Her father had exited the carriage and walked up the stairs, his eyes full of blank, dim horror, Lone following to stand at the bottom of the stairs. They had put a rope around his neck, the crowd yelling horrible things, their faces full of hate. Kye Min had nodded at the executioner and there had been a scraping sound and then her father

had just dropped and been gone, the space under hidden from the watching crowd, a small mercy.

They had brought her straight up the stairs after him, lone's heart pounding, terror going all through her. She was going to die. She could see the thick crowds of Tatus, hear what they yelled, calling her terrible names. Right now, here, she was going to die, this fast.

Kye Min nodded to the executioner, his eyes returning to her. lone stared back, drawing a sharp breath. She realized she had spent her last moments thinking about them instead of everything else she could have thought about, that there was no more time for thinking. She had a moment of deep, mortal terror, flashing on the birds kept in a cage in the corner of the Maiden's Courtyard, their bright colors, the sounds they made—.

There was a loud scraping sound and the floor dropped from underneath her, gone. lone waited for blackness to take her, hoping it would be fast, and instead she continued to fall, nothing bringing her up short.

She fell through a hole and the hole became a scoop, rounded, her hands still tied behind her, the rope following, going down and then flattening and then curving sharply up and her body arced and then dropped onto soft sacks full of meal, a great waft of dust coming up, lone on her side hearing the dim echoes of the cheers from above her. She looked straight up into a shaft of light that fell, feeling winded.

"Hello, little maiden," a voice said.

There was a form above her, a cloth over her face, and she didn't remember anything after that.

lone woke. She opened her eyes. She felt awful. She was lying on a metal table, the head of it raised. She tried to move and couldn't. Her arms were restrained to her sides, her legs straight and together, her ankles in cuffs. She lifted her head to look down at herself and realized she was

naked. She fought a sense of unreality. She had thought she was dead, but now she didn't think she was. She dimly remembered falling, the muffled sound of people cheering. The gallows. It all came back to her. Someone had taken her.

She heard a step and from the shadows in the corner, Kye Min emerged, a large man, tall and solid, wide shoulders, huge hands, brown hair to his jaw. A Tatus male, a worker. Ione had never seen one up close, not that she remembered. She didn't understand. Ione felt her face go hot. She had never been naked like this in front of a man. She faced forward, not looking at him, feeling like her breasts were on display under the lights, unable to look at herself, her body just there, so much skin.

"Let me out of these restraints. Get me clothing, Tatus," she demanded to the ceiling.

"No."

Like he was part animal, just a grunting syllable. Panitus scientists had conjectured Tatus might not be fully developed, a lesser race. Ione turned and looked at him. Kye Min had taken her, she realized, tricking everyone. Stupid but cunning, like all Tatus.

"Why didn't you execute me, Tatus?"

"Because I'm not done with my revenge yet," he said, his eyes roaming over her body.

She looked at the ceiling again, her heart pounding.

"Don't look at me, Tatus. Turn your eyes away."

"No."

It was like he couldn't hear her. He stepped toward her, standing over her. His eyes went to her shoulder, to the Maiden's Mark there. Did he even know what it meant? He was never supposed to look to her directly, never.

He reached, putting his large hand on the pale skin of her bare belly, spanning the whole area. Ione looking down. She made a short sound, her mind struggling to accept it. He had *touched* her.

"You can't, Tatus," she breathed, his hand warm, her skin flinching and jumping.

"I can."

His hand moved, his fingers tracing up until he found her breast, his hand moving to cup it, the shape of it filling his hand. His fingertips ran over her nipple lightly, a touch she felt all through her, the perversion of it too much. Her nipple tightened, rising.

She gave a sharp cry, unable to believe he'd done it. He couldn't touch her, he just couldn't, much less her breast. His fingers brushed across her nipple again. Lone made a sharp noise again as he brought his other hand up, both hands now. She glanced down. He was slowly squeezing her nipples between his thumb and fingers, plucking at them.

The sensations were wrong, so wrong. Nobody was allowed to touch her except the matrons. She was a Panitus Maiden. She was promised, no man could touch her. And a Tatus. She shuddered with revulsion. This couldn't be happening. She felt dirtied, fouled. She realized she was breathing fast, the feelings too intense.

"Stop, Tatus," she said.

"No," he said, his breathing slow and heavy. "I'm going to touch you, Panitus. I'm going to touch your breasts, your belly, your ass, between your legs, anywhere I want."

Lone went still. He couldn't mean it. Her eyes shifted to him, the sensations so distracting. Kye Min. He was far too beautiful to be a Tatus, tall, broad shoulders, his features bitter and strong, intense eyes. He looked like Panitus men were supposed to look.

Well, like they did look, obviously, Beshiel did, although she had wondered about some of them, if Panitus were supposed to all be so perfect, remembering Marco she'd only just met, who had worked for her father and was always staring at her, his weak chin, his strangely nasal voice. She realized her mind was scattering, going in every direction.

Kye Min's fingers on her nipples kept touching, the feelings so strong. She didn't want it. She faced forward. Her breath choked.

"Don't, Tatus," she said.

"Is it true that your marriage to Beshiel Dvorak was not consummated?" he said.

She was breathing fast. She turned and looked at him, trying to ignore what he was doing, failing.

"Of course it's true, Tatus," she said. "I had not yet turned twenty."

"But you are twenty now. You were promised to him when you were eighteen. He hasn't fucked you in all that time?"

She made a small face at his crudity, disgusted, looking away again.

"We were to be married this month," she said coldly, wishing he would stop touching her, her breathing uneven.

"Has he seen you before?"

"Yes, Tatus."

"Well, he must be a strong-willed fucker," the Tatus said, his eyes on her body again. "Are Panitus Maidens really untried, or is that just a name?"

She didn't answer. Stupid Tatus. He shouldn't even be speaking to her. His fingers changed, suddenly not gentle. He took her nipples and pinched, twisting. Sharp pain went through her and she cried out.

"Yes, Tatus!" she said, tears forming in her eyes.

"It's true?" he said, twisting again.

She wailed.

"Yes, it's true! We aren't touched by men."

His fingers stilled, to her relief, her eyes tearing up with the pain. Her chest was heaving under his hands, realizing her situation. She was alone, abandoned to them, nobody to defend her from Tatus barbarism.

"You are now," he said, his hands leaving her.

She watched as he walked down to her feet. He worked the mechanism, stomping, changing something, the

machine making a sliding thump, and her ankles weren't freed but they moved. He maneuvered the table with his hands, which split into two parts at the bottom, sliding outward. He pushed and her knees began to come up at the same time that they opened, her thighs spreading.

"What are you doing, Tatus?" she cried.

"This table was used by Panitus to rape Tatus women they took."

"You're lying, Tatus," she said. "A Panitus would never touch a Tatus."

"I am not lying," he said, still pushing, the apparatus clicking into place, locking. "Does this look like a Tatus mechanism to you?"

It didn't. Her legs were spread open.

"Don't look, Tatus," she said helplessly.

"I'm going to do more than look," he said.

"You're an animal," she said, closing her eyes tightly.

"I am an animal, yes," he said, leaning in. He was over her. Her eyes opened, staring into his, appalled at the vicious hate she saw there. An aroused Tatus male was dangerous. "Panitus made me one. A Panitus man took my wife on the table you're lying on right now and then he murdered her to hide the truth of it."

The Tatus couldn't possibly be telling the truth. But the look in his eyes. Ione was staring at him. It was too awful to imagine. Terrible, of course.

"But she was still just a Tatus," she told him.

It wasn't the same. Tatus women were naturally oversexed, everyone knew that. Many of them were prostitutes, lying with anyone who would pay for the comforts they craved.

He grinned at her, stepping between her spread legs.

"As I am just a Tatus. And now you are going to be just the whore of a Tatus," he said, working the buttons of his trousers.

Ione felt a blossoming of horror in her chest, disbelief. He couldn't be serious. She was a Panitus Maiden. He couldn't think he could—. No. She struggled in the restraints. He absolutely could not do this.

She cried out like he'd hurt her when she felt him touch the inside of her knees. She heard him laugh softly. She could feel cold air on her privates, the parts only touched by the matrons who shaved all the Panitus Maidens after they were eighteen.

"So it's true you remove your hair," he said, his eyes shifting.

She felt so exposed. He could see everything about her sex, crudely displayed. The light above was relentless. His hands ran down her thighs. His thumbs went to her outer lips, spreading her. She cried out again, unable to stop, his Tatus fingers on her most private place. Her face was burning with humiliation. She thought she would die of shame.

"Your pussy is as pretty as the rest of you, I must say, but it looks just the same, Panitus," he said.

He met her eyes and his fingers came down and touched between her legs, exploring. She went rigid, breathing fast. He licked his finger and returned, spreading her again, rubbing gently all around, his eyes on her face. The sensation was too much. It was like what the matrons had always done while they were shaving her, leaving her with those awful feelings, but this was worse.

"Stop, Tatus," she said shakily.

"No."

The sensations began to build, his touch light, everything feeling even more sensitive. She couldn't escape it. He would pause and then come back to touch again, beginning to rub, watching her face, interested.

"What are you doing, Tatus?" she said, breathing fast.

"It feels good, doesn't it?" he said. "I can't believe you're getting wet."

He touched her entrance, lone jerking. It was wet all around where his fingers went, returning higher, rubbing again.

"It doesn't feel good, Tatus," she denied. "It feels awful. Stop."

His finger was making small circles, the feelings brought by his touch tormenting her as they always did when she was touched there. She felt like between her legs was swollen. The sensations were so sharp.

He leaned down and to her disgust put his mouth on her nipple, licking it and then drawing it into his mouth, sucking gently, his fingers still stroking between her legs. Sharp pleasure went through her.

"You filthy Tatus," she said sharply, trying to make him stop, saying the words, saying anything. "You are sickening. Get your hands off me."

He laughed softly again, coming up and putting his mouth by her ear.

"Look at you panting and flushed, your little pussy getting all slick. Panitus whore. I'm not even going to need the oil I brought. Maybe I'll hurt you between your legs instead of giving you pleasure. It's all the same to me."

She was flinching with what he said, her humiliation forgotten when his fingers began to pinch her sex, digging in, little sharp tugs. She cried out sharply, again and again, her voice echoing in the room. He did it until her eyes were tearing up, her cries getting desperate. It hurt.

He stopped, watching her face closely. He reached. She flinched in anticipation, but he touched her lightly again. She was so much more sensitive, blinking, her eyes getting heavy.

"So that's also true," he said, his fingers still gentle on her. "I heard Panitus Maidens were trained to please men."

It was an awful feeling, getting stronger, bad pleasure, his fingers between her legs. He grinned at her slowly, seeing something in her face.

“You have to stop, Tatus,” she said, her breathing stuttering.

“I’ll make you a bargain, Panitus Maiden. I’ll stop if you can keep yourself from coming.”

She didn’t know what he meant. She cried out as his finger pressed into her entrance and then slipped slowly into her, the place she had never felt anyone touching her, even as his thumb found that same place he had touched before.

She heard herself and shut her mouth, biting her lip. Pleasure shot through her. His thumb was rubbing now as he bent again to suck her nipples. He began to sometimes bite them, painful, pleasurable bites. She couldn’t possibly slow down the sensations, her eyes unfocusing. He drew back.

“You are so tight you have to be untried,” he said, breathing fast. “I’m going to enjoy this.”

She focused. She was panting. His fingers were still moving, every stroke more intense than the last, building to such keen sensations.

“Come for me, you stupid spoiled bitch,” he said.

It happened. Pleasure began between her legs as she made a surprised sound and strained against his fingers, his mouth returning to her nipples, biting them, the pleasure getting so much worse. She cried out, good, feeling herself spasming around his finger, against his thumb, waves of pleasure. She’d never imagined feeling anything like this.

She reached a height, trembling against the restraints, and then crashed over it, pulsing wildly, finally feeling it begin to slow, the pleasure leaving her, coming back a little and it was gone. She had wanted that for so long, her whole spine warm, that terrible need finally met. Her heart was pounding, hot shame replacing it.

She focused again, his eyes on her face. Ione began to cry, turning her face away as his fingers left her, the whole area throbbing and sensitive.

“Like the rest of the Panitus, you lose really fucking spectacularly,” he said, his breathing heavy. “Now it’s my

turn.”

She saw him doing something under his shirt as he stepped closer, felt him between her thighs, felt something hard against her entrance, seeking. It was his sex. He wasn't even going to bother taking off his clothing.

“No, Tatus,” she said, her voice muffled with crying.

“Oh yes. I've waited a long time to do this. I want you to look at me,” he said. “Don't stop looking at me, or I'll bring three other Tatus men in here to do the same to you.”

She faced him, terrified, crying.

“Please don't,” she said.

“There's the begging I was looking for,” he said, giving her a satisfied smile. “Don't look away.”

He reached down and put his hand on himself, rubbing the tip of the hardness all over her sex, his eyes shifting to her Maiden's Mark and back to her face.

“In all the times I imagined this, I never thought you'd be so ready for me, so fucking wet. You really are whores.”

She cringed, still looking at him, afraid not to, afraid he would bring other Tatus men to defile her. It wasn't true, what he said. He positioned himself and looked deeply into her eyes. She wanted to look away. He had beautiful eyes, green and brown, heavy sweeping brows, his gaze intense. He pressed into her.

She felt herself opening impossibly wide and then he thrust his sex into her and grunted. She tensed, crying out. It hurt. She wanted to look away so badly. He pulled back and thrust again, working himself into her. There was more of him, so much more.

“Fucking tight,” he grunted, staring straight at her.

Ione cried out again, the sound of her cries changing as he rocked in her. He thrust again and she cried out sharply with pain, not able to stop from breaking her gaze, her head shaking from side-to-side and then thrashing. His hands came down, immobilizing her head, huge hands, forcing her to look at him as he began thrusting into her faster.

“Do you like pleasuring a Tatus?” he ground out, getting under her, thrusting into her hard, all the way deep.

A Tatus male inside of her. Ione’s shoulders were shaking, crying as he continued to thrust into her body. The strokes were long and deep, getting faster in her. It felt hot, a deep ache and burning. She wanted it to stop. His breathing was stuttering and he began grunting with every thrust.

She felt such pain and then with it the beginnings of a terrible pleasure. She went still to feel it, her eyes slitting open as her head fell back, her mouth parting, her face relaxing, beginning to pant with it. He looked down at her and saw it. He grinned again, bitter and cruel. It seemed to excite the Tatus, his thrusts became irregular, urgent.

The feelings were building, pleasure again, but before it could reach its end again he went rigid, his face twisting. She felt him flex in her, and again, more warmth in all the painful heat of it. His teeth were clenched as his breath rushed out and he flexed and grunted again. He held there for a long moment, pulsing inside her, and then he was panting over her.

Ione turned her face to the side, her mouth trembling. She firmed it, still feeling the tears leaking. He pulled himself out of her. She couldn’t even close her legs. She looked at him. He was buttoning up his pants, watching her face.

“Wash up and get dressed.”

He walked and hit a lever by the door and the chair released her, Ione sitting up quickly and covering herself with her arms. Between her legs throbbed and hurt, sticky. She swung her legs off the chair and got off, walking out of the room, afraid he would touch her again.

She stopped. She was in a cell. He closed the door to the room with the chair behind himself and locked it and went past her, opening the cell door to her prison and closing it behind himself, locking it, and then he went through and

closed the door leading out of the room beyond and she was alone.

Chapter Two

The cell was inside the room as if it had been put there later, a door past the cell door leading upstairs. There were a shower and a toilet behind a screen, primitive. Lone turned on the shower. The water was tepid. There was a crudely cut block of soap made of lye, she could smell it, practically burning her eyes from here, Tatus soap. She washed herself the best she could, careful between her legs. She hurt there like she was bruised, her nipples sore.

She found clothes on a thin bare cushion on the floor. She looked at them, disgusted at the idea, at the spite behind it. Traditional Tatus servant clothing. Off-white and worn cloth, flat shoes, loose rough and thick shapeless muslin pants and a shirt, crude stitching. She put them on, if only because it was better than being naked. At least they were clean.

Her hair was still bound in the Maiden's tail. Panitus Maidens didn't cut their hair. They bound their hair until they were married when they were twenty, but she would never marry Beshiel Dvorak now. Lone rubbed at her temples, a headache building there.

She was shamed, ruined. She didn't have the right to wear it bound anymore. She pulled the long line of hair over her shoulder, slowly undoing it, tied in thick bands. She started at the bottom, beginning to cry. She moved up, releasing each band, her hair emerging in long waves, a deep brown that shone in the harsh light of the overhead bulb.

When it was free, she ran her fingers through it, loosening the strands. It fell over her shoulders, down her back to pool onto the thin cushion. She lifted it, so much of it, pulling it over one shoulder, bringing it across herself for warmth. She lay down, curling into a small ball. She was still crying when she fell asleep.

Lone woke. She was groggy, confused, cold. She went to the toilet behind the screen, in the same room, disgusted

again. The light above was relentless. Her thighs had blood on them. For a moment she was sure he had broken something inside her. Then she felt the familiar throbbing in her temples, rubbing them. Of course.

She went to the shower, still behind the screen, and took off the pants. She was so cold. She put them under the water, shivering, the flow almost feeling warm it was so icy in here. She scrubbed where she had bled on them, taking up the soap, getting it out, and then washed herself, looking around. She didn't have anything. She put the pants back on, wet now. She went back to the bed and pressed her knees together, lying on her side. She waited.

The door opened and he came through. Kye Min. She didn't move, watching him. She heard his feet come to the edge of the cell and heard a clatter of metal. She looked. A tray with food. She heard his footsteps going back to the door.

"Tatus!" she said, sitting up sideways, still on the floor, her knees pressed together.

He didn't respond, didn't stop.

"Kye Min," she said desperately.

He stopped, turning around. His eyes took in her hair, narrowing, looking angry. He walked back and this time he brought the key out, putting it in the lock to her cell, lone's eyes going wide. She pressed herself against the wall as he came and picked up the bands she had taken out of her hair, swiping at them and turning around and leaving, locking the bars.

"I require something," she said.

She was afraid to address him as Tatus.

"You have everything you need," he said, moving to the door that led out of the room.

"Please, Kye Min," she said, choking on the words, humiliating herself.

She couldn't get up. She was afraid she had bled on her pants again. He peered at her, coming back to the bars.

“What do you think you need so badly?” he said.

She felt herself flushing. He was such a huge, primitive Tatus, cruel and barbaric.

“I am bleeding,” she said under her breath, not looking at him, hoping he would understand from that.

“You’re not injured, Panitus,” he said, losing patience, turning around and leaving, closing the door behind himself.

She clenched her hands. Disgusting, stupid man, filthy Tatus. She couldn’t just sit here in the bed and bleed. She slowly straightened, getting on her knees and then her feet, removing the pants. She walked to the shower, turning on the water and rinsing it, washing herself, the soap stinging.

She began to shiver. She didn’t know what time it was—there were no windows—but the air was getting even colder. She ripped up a part of the pants at the bottom, folding the piece of cloth carefully. She ripped the other leg in the same place, wrapping it around the first and putting the cloth between her legs.

She walked back to the bed carefully, curling up. She didn’t have a blanket. The temperature turned to true misery, cold. She drifted to sleep. She would wake, trying to find another position, trying to preserve her warmth. She finally got up, going through the ritual with the shower again. The pants were wet with water now, clinging to her skin, the rags as wet, trying to wring them out.

She stayed there, huddled against the wall behind the screen, no way to get warm. She fell asleep again and woke with a start when she heard him come in the door and then into the cell door. She was stiff, getting to her feet, leaning against the wall. He came behind the screen and hauled her out by her arm.

“Eat your fucking food.”

He pushed her toward the tray. She fell on it, the whole thing upending, immediately scrambling to her knees, putting her back against the bars. She looked up.

“You’re not getting more until your next meal,” he said.

She glared at him. She hated him, hated him with every bit of herself. He was less than an animal, a...a *monstrous* animal. His eyes went to her pants, narrowing. She looked, feeling her face go hot. The smear of blood showed clearly on the white material. She covered it with her hand, flushing harder. She couldn't look at him, her hair falling in front of her face.

He was in front of her, leaning down. He caught her chin, dragging her face up. She closed her eyes, completely humiliated.

"Is it time for your cycle?"

She nodded slightly.

He released her roughly, standing. The cell door clanged behind him and then the other door and he was gone.

He didn't come back for hours. The cell got a little warmer. She piled the ruined food on the tray and rinsed her hands and put the tray outside the cell. Lone drifted in and out of sleep. She couldn't get warm. When he came, he put his hand through the bars and dropped something onto the floor of the cell, took the tray with the ruined food and left without looking at her. He hadn't brought her more food.

Another pair of Tatus servant pants, white. Underwear, cheap and rough, scratchy. A box of absorbent rags like Tatus women used. Lone made a sound of disgust. She didn't even know if they were clean. Panitus women had them manufactured from soft material and disposed of them later.

She smelled at them. They smelled of soap. She changed out of the other pants, completely ruined, ripped. She rinsed them until they were clean and then draped them over the faucet of the shower, no other place, and put on the underwear, the clean clothes, caring for herself.

She felt miserably better after that. She waited for hours, hungry now, thirsty. The door opened. She looked up. Kye Min was carrying a tray. He put it under the bars and walked away, closing the door. She went to it. Some kind of meat.

Grain. A piece of bread. She smelled at the tray, drawing away sharply.

She couldn't eat the meat. She just couldn't bring herself to do it. She ate the grain, the bread, still hungry. By then she was also very thirsty. Did he mean to leave her without water, for her to die of thirst? That was stupid, there was a shower here. She realized. That was where he expected her to drink.

She got up, turning on the shower, tepid. She cupped her hands, slowly filling them in the fall. The water was brackish, strong-tasting. She turned off the flow, wiping her hands on her pants, no towel. They made rust marks on the white pants. She had touched the faucet. She looked down, disgusted, and then took them off and washed them. She couldn't get the stains out. She took care of her other needs, putting the torn ones on, almost dry, and hanging the others.

Then there was nothing to do. She sat. The room was empty, no windows. A bare light on the ceiling, always on. There was the thin cushion. The screen. The shower. The toilet. The bars. The floor. The floor beyond the bars. The door leading to the stairs, the door in back of the cell behind her. She turned her eyes away from that.

The walls were dark gray, rough, the ceiling the same. She walked, pacing for awhile. Then she sat. She lay back and then slept, and she didn't know what time it was when she woke, couldn't find any sense of it. Cold, she was so cold. She tended to herself. Her hair was tangled, getting messy, and she combed through it with her fingers. She was hungry. She'd never felt so undone.

The door opened. She looked up. He came in and looked at the tray with the meat on it. He turned around and walked to the door without giving her the new one.

"What are you doing?" she said.

"You get more food when you finish what you've been given," he said.