

New Venetia; City of New Venice; the upscale neighborhood of Barbara Overlook, northwest shore of Durante Bay

Torrents of cold rain and mighty gusts of chilling wind lash the lone figure making its way down the isolated lane. No trees provide cover from the elements; only ornate statues of mythical creatures stand silent guard along the narrow black strip of pavement leading towards the dark, foreboding house. Angry waves bash themselves on the rocky shore just over the edge of a nearby cliff, a tableau hidden by a curtain of rain and mist. Flashes of massive lightning strikes are followed by equally powerful claps of thunder from the dark roiling clouds overhead.

The leather poncho the rain soaked figure wears provides little protection against the rage of the storm. The skirt of a dress plasters itself against her legs revealing their shapely form. The only acknowledgement the young woman gives to the elements' assault is to try and draw the hood of her poncho further over her head with her shaking hands. Her bare feet make inaudible splashes in the water running off the pavement as they slowly trod forward, one foot in front of the other.

The house provides little shelter from the wind and rain as she presses the doorbell. A vidcomp screen comes to life as a small spotlight overhead bathes her drenched form in a sterile circle of light.

A digital voice cuts through the noise of the storm and says, "Please state your name and the purpose of your visit?"

Out of habit, the young woman looks to either side before answering; she raises her head towards the vidcomp and says loudly over the storm, "Juliet. I ... I ... I need to speak with the Master and Mistress of the house."

"Please wait," the voice replies. The vidcomp and spotlight go out, leaving the woman the storm's darkness again.

Several minutes pass as the woman waits for the double doors to open. When they do not, Juliet drops her head in defeat and turns to walk away. But before she can begin her return journey down the long, dark, walkway, the door behind her clicks and they swing open enough to allow her entry; a flickering firelight from within being the only invitation.

She hesitates a few moments, but eventually steps inside.

The doors automatically close and lock behind her as she enters the welcome hall of the house. The only illumination in the room is from the distant fireplace. Standing near it and staring into it is a tall man with an exquisite form wrapped in a silk house robe. His lusciously full mane of black hair flows down behind his shoulders. The warmth of the heat in the room is a welcome respite from the punishing cold outside. But the memories of previous encounters with that man and his methods warm Juliet in other ways.

Juliet snaps back into the present and croaks out, "Master!" She begins moving towards him leaving a trail of rainwater behind her.

She gets three steps beyond the door when long, intertwined leather cords; wreathed in tiny arcs of blue energy, lash out from the darkness. Unerringly, they wrap around her throat. Then something gives a savage jerk so hard she hits the marble floor on her back. Juliet struggles with the leather whip around her throat, gasping for air, and writhing on the floor like a fish out of the water. Her feet slipping and sliding; failing to make purchase on the rain slicked marble floor.

A tall, extremely attractive woman, wearing a silk robe similar to the man's, but not tied closed, appears out of the darkness. Her long red hair tied up into a ponytail that reaches down her back to her waist. The robe barely covers the leather bodice and pants; both the color of dried blood. The matching stiletto heeled boots make no sound as she moves. In her right hand is the other end of the leather whip. The anger in the woman's eyes says volumes about her feelings towards Juliet.

"You useless tramp," the woman snarls as she uses the whip to make Juliet flop around on the floor from side to side and onto her stomach. Eventually, the woman maneuvers her intended victim onto her back with precisely aimed kicks to the young woman's ribs with the silver shod tips of her boots. She kneels down and puts her left knee squarely between Juliet's breasts and bends over to look deeply into her eyes; her face just inches from her quarry. The younger woman's eyes are open wide in abject terror. "I am going to enjoy watching you die," the whip bearer says with great malice in her voice.

Throughout this exchange, the man Juliet called Master remained by the fireplace but now walks over to the two women and crouches down to look at Juliet. His face is serene and peaceful.

"Stay your wrath a moment lover," he says. Even Juliet's current state of heightened terror, the sound of his voice is like a cooling salve to a burn. "I desire to know why the child came back here after failing so miserably," he adds.

The woman looks to the man for several moments considering the request then flicks her wrist and the whip uncoils from around Juliet's throat. She stands up, grabs a handful of the young woman's poncho. With little effort, she lifts Juliet off the floor upright and slams her back down on her knees.

The woman then circles behind Juliet and cracks the whip near the young woman's head. "Your Master asked you a question tramp," she says viciously, "You had better answer it before I make you."

Juliet flinches at the crack of the whip as she massages her throat. She keeps her eyes downcast on the floor and says in a hoarse voice, "Yes Mistress." She pauses for a couple of seconds to cough then adds, "I had no place else to go Master."

The Master smiles, stands up, and begins pacing back and forth in front of Juliet. The Mistress remains quiet behind the young woman, whip in hand, and stares daggers at her.

"So let me get this straight," he begins, "We save you from certain death at the hands of some low class, drug dealing pimp. Clean you up, complete the education you so willingly abandoned, clothed you, fed you, and finally taught you the finer arts of pleasure and pain; years of investment of time, money, and effort. All we asked you to return our kindness was for you to perform just one simple task. Does that about sum it up child?"

"Yes Master," Juliet replies, not looking up from the floor.

"Then you go and completely botch the task up," he says immediately, "So bad in fact, that now the target is beyond our reach. All that effort wasted. And yet, the only place you can think of returning to is here? Why is that? You should have run when you had the chance child."

Juliet takes a few moments to collect her thoughts then says, "This is the only place I have ever known love ... even with the beat..."

The Master advances on Juliet, snarls then slaps her across the face with the back of his hand. The force of the blow almost knocks Juliet to the floor. The Mistress watches hungrily, licking her lips in anticipation. "Punishment and beatings are two very different things child," he says as he looks down upon the young woman. "Believe me, if we ever beat you, you would understand the difference."

The Mistress then crouches down beside Juliet and pulls her upright by pulling on her arm. She gently strokes the cheek where the Master struck her moments before. "Now lover, she just misspoke," she coos into Juliet's ear, "Didn't you child?"

"Yes," Juliet croaks out as tears stream down her face, "I am sorry Master. I for what I said and for not getting you the Guildsman you both wanted."

"And why is that child?" the Master asks, "Could it be that you were more interested in achieving orgasms with the Guildsman instead of taking your place by his side?"

"No Master," Juliet blurts out, "The affair was going along nicely and he had gone to an attorney to start the divorce proceedings... But then something changed. He came to me last night and said that the whole thing was off and if I knew what was good for me, I would forget ever being involved with him. He went back to his wife."

"If you had such 'nice' control over the situation tramp," the Mistress says sarcastically, "He would not have done so. We trained you better than that. What changed his mind?"

"I do not know," Juliet says as her sobs begin anew.

"So what are we to do with you now?" the Master asks.

Juliet looks up and says, "I do not know. But if I must die, I would rather die here by your hands than out there alone."

"Then death it shall be," he replies as he turns his back and begins walking away. The Master makes a single hand gesture over his shoulder, a curt wave goodbye.

The Mistress stands up and moves behind Juliet. She uncoils the whip to its fullest length as she moves. Juliet closes her eyes but a peaceful look replaces the fear as she accepts what is about to happen.

Just before the Mistress begins moving the whip, the Master stops and turns around; his face showing a new idea in his mind. "Wait lover," he says, "I have another idea."

Juliet looks between the two of them as they stare at each other for several moments. As if an unseen communication takes place, the look on her Master's face eventually replicates itself on the Mistress'.

"Yes lover," she replies, "I concur, but I require a test; a proof that she is willing to undergo the ordeal."

The Master looks thoughtful for a moment then says, "What sort of test do you require?"

Juliet grasps her head in pain as the Mistress utters a phrase in the one language that it pains her to hear.

The Master raises a single eyebrow at his Mistress then nods affirmatively. "Very well," he says as he unties the robe and reaches behind his back. The Master wears no shirt beneath his leather vest and has pants that match; both the same color as the Mistress' outfit. Even in the misery she currently feels, Juliet desires to run her hands beneath the vest and feel the warmth there. He brings out a small black rod with some sort of ornate gold carvings along its length.

"Stand up child," he commands.

Juliet does as she is told. Once she is standing, she holds her hands together against her chest and continues to shiver.

"Look lover, she is cold. We should do something about that," he says as he flicks his wrist. A small point of blue light leaps from the rod and stops about three feet from it.

The Master walks over to the fireplace and picks up a small log. He tosses it up into the air and watches it fall. Leaping into motion, he waves the rod towards the log and the blue point of light leaves a light trail behind it but passes beyond the log. Small arcs of blue light play around the log then it hits the floor and breaks into three pieces; all without a sound.

Juliet gasps and instinctively jumps back, but the Mistress' firm hand grasping her hair holds her in place.

The Master tosses the three pieces of wood into the fire and walks over to Juliet. With a simple motion of his fingers, the Mistress releases her hair and makes her way towards a nearby room. Juliet closes her eyes tightly and makes her body go rigid.

"If you wish to continue living, you will hold very, very still," he says. A couple of seconds later, the Master whips the rod around and the blue point of light disappears into Juliet's clothing. Small arcs of blue energy play across the area where the point of light travels, the smell of burning leather and synthetic materials fills the air.

Eventually, the Master stops moving and Juliet opens her eyes ever so carefully and looks at herself. Slowly, the soggy mess that was her clothing falls to her feet leaving her totally naked. Her feet covered in the damp mass of fabric and leather. She looks up to the Master with a question on her face.

The Master stares at the point of light and it eventually moves back into the rod. He holds his hand out to her and says, "Come my child. Come and warm yourself by the fire."

Juliet slowly takes his hand and allows herself to be led to the fireplace. She holds her hands out to it trying to absorb the heat as quickly as possible.

The Mistress returns from the other room carrying a large, comfortable blanket. She walks up behind Juliet and wraps it around her tightly. She turns Juliet around and says softly, "Please sit down."

Juliet takes a seat on the brickwork in front of the fireplace and pulls the blanket tightly around herself. Without saying another word, the Master and Mistress take a seat on either side of her and begin to rub her arms, shoulders, and back through the blanket. They each take turns inhaling the smells from the young woman's hair and neck.

After a couple minutes, Juliet asks, "Di...Did I pass?"

The Master and Mistress look at each other for several moments before both break out in laughter. "No my dear, the test hasn't even begun yet," the Master replies between chuckles.

He pulls the rod back out and lets her see it. "I cannot tell you this item's real name without causing you great pain," the Master says, "But it is very, very old and powerful. Older than you could possibly realize child."

The blue point of light appears and moves out six inches from the end of the rod. "When used quickly, it is capable of breaking apart things at the molecular level as you just saw. But when used slowly... ever so... slowly..." He slowly passes his wrist between the point of light and the rod and a blue energy plays across his wrist. The Master closes his eyes as his face goes from grimaces of pain to pleasure repeatedly.

Juliet looks on in stunned silence with horror her face as the wrist passes through the area between the light and the rod. The Mistress' breathing quickens as her bosom begins to push against the leather bodice more rapidly, causing it to make little squeaks. The young woman's thoughts drift to a time when she last felt those beautiful mounds of flesh beneath her own hands.

After his wrist passes completely through that area, the Master holds his hand up for Juliet to see. It looks whole and unfazed as he turns his wrist and wriggles his fingers. "It inflicts a pain so pure, it feels like pure ecstasy, but leaves the material it passes through unharmed. Move to fast..." He nods towards the pile of soggy rags near the door.

"Lover, may I?" the Mistress asks while holding her right hand out towards the Master.

"Of course my dear," he replies as he moves the point of light to a few inches in front of Juliet's chest. Slowly, the Mistress moves the palm of her hand over the point of light and moves it towards the rod; the point of light appearing to penetrate through to the opposite side of her hand. The Mistress gasps in pain and then looks at her lover with eagerness until her hand closes around his on the rod. As slowly as she moved towards the rod, she pulls away. Once her hand clears the point of light, she opens and closes it to show Juliet that it is unharmed. The light withdraws back into the rod.

"That child," she says as she begins to nuzzle Juliet's neck, "is the test. You will either survive the experience... or be tiny bits of kibble that we will feed to stray dogs."

The Master begins on the opposite side of Juliet's neck. "Survive child," he says slowly between soft kisses on her neck, "and we will give you another chance to honor our investment. But know this, either way Juliet dies tonight. You just have to decide how."

The young woman looks from person to person confused. Slowly, both the Master and Mistress reach inside the blanket to caress the young woman. She is petrified of what she has seen but the sensations and emotions from the gentle caresses of these two people flood her body. Eventually she says, "I want to please you. Please, I will survive... I will do whatever it takes."

The Master and Mistress look into each other's eyes and smile. "Let us begin then," they say simultaneously.

Outside the dark house, the sounds of thunder, rain, and crashing waves drown out the soul rending screams of a young woman. If anyone could hear them that person would have to wonder if she was in the grip of indescribable pain or the throes of indescribable ecstasy.