

THE RITE OF HER RECKONING

*The ceremony by which the Regulator answers, and is restored
Companion to When She Falls Short — for adults 18 and over*

ON THIS RITE

When She Falls Short establishes that the Regulator answers within the covenant. It gives her a standard, and it gives her failures a consequence. What it does not give her is a shape — and a consequence without a shape becomes an argument that happens to end in a paddle, which is precisely what this house does not do. So this Rite supplies the form: an order of stages, performed the same way each time, so that neither of them is improvising while one of them is naked.

The form is deliberately close to the rites of the older Christian households, from which this house takes what is worth taking: that discipline is announced rather than sprung, that it addresses a named failure rather than a mood, that it is administered by someone with a cool head, and that it ends in restoration rather than resentment with the slate genuinely wiped. Those instincts are sound and this Rite keeps them. What this house does not take from those households is the theology of permanent hierarchy — here the polarity runs the other way on every ordinary day of the year, and this Rite is the rare exception that proves it rather than the rule that governs it.

Performed rarely. Occasioned, never scheduled. There is no maintenance version of this Rite and there never will be — a woman corrected on a timetable is being corrected for existing, and this house corrects conduct.

He answers nightly by design. She answers when she has actually failed.

THE THREE GATES

Nothing begins until all three stand. They are checked aloud, and any one of them failing ends the matter for that night without discussion.

- She is entirely sober, and this is not the same evening. If drink was in it, the Rite waits for the following day — not two hours and a glass of water. On the night itself he gets her home, gets her water, puts her to bed, and says nothing whatever about consequence.
- She raised it herself, unprompted, and named it without minimising. If he had to bring it to her, they are having a conversation instead.
- This is a lapse and not a pattern. Fewer than three such occasions in a year. At the third, nobody goes over anybody's lap: they sit down sober in daylight, and one of them says the true sentence — that this needs a doctor rather than a paddle.

Her halt word is then spoken aloud once by each of them, exactly as at any other rite in this library. It governs every stage that follows, at a syllable, without explanation and without cost.

PREPARATIONS

The room warm and private, the door locked, the phones silenced. A chair without arms. Her hand and the leather paddle set out where she can see them — nothing hidden, nothing produced as a surprise. Water. A soft towel. If the house keeps the cold stage, a shallow basin of cool water or a cloth, set ready — cool, never iced. The completed assessment, or the blank one if it is to be filled in together. And light: this Rite is performed in enough light to read skin by, which is not romantic and is not meant to be.

He is locked, as he is every other day. Nothing in this Rite opens it, and neither of them raises the possibility.

I. THE SETTING DOWN

She undresses completely, by her own hand, and folds what she removes. Not partially and not for convenience — wholly, because the office comes off with the clothes. What stands in the room afterward is not the Regulator but the woman who wears that office when she has earned it and cannot hide inside it when she has not. She says so aloud.

SHE: *"I set it down. Tonight I am not governing. I am answering."*

HE: *"Then I hold it for you until it is yours again. Not longer."*

II. THE INSPECTION

She stands, hands at her sides, and he walks around her once, unhurried. He is looking at her properly — not appraising, not performing sternness, simply seeing her without the office on. And she is seeing something too: he is locked, and visibly so, and that is the point of him being bare for this. The steel in front of her is the whole weight of what she holds every other day of the year, standing there while she answers for having held it badly.

This is also where he checks her body honestly, because he is about to strike it. Old marks, tender places, anything she has not mentioned. She tells him the truth about all of it. A woman who conceals a healing bruise to get through a rite has broken something larger than the rule she is answering for.

III. THE RECKONING

She remains standing, and the ledger is read aloud between them — all ten questions, one at a time, her answering in her own voice. He records. She does not argue the score afterwards: an answer given is an answer, exactly as it has always been for him.

Then the total is spoken, and the count that follows from it, and she says it back to him so that both of them have heard it in her voice. Nothing is added to it once it has been said. Nothing is added during. This is the whole architecture of the thing: the number is fixed before the first stroke, by arithmetic she participated in, and it cannot grow because of how the evening feels.

HE: *“That is the count. Nothing will be added to it, whatever happens in the next ten minutes.”*

SHE: *“I have earned it and I will take it. Thank you for holding me to it.”*

IV. THE CORRECTION

He sits. She goes over his lap. And the striking obeys the same anatomy that governs every other page of this library, because bodies do not change their construction according to which of them is being corrected.

- The target is the fleshy lower curve of the buttocks. Nothing above it, nothing at the hips, nothing on the spine or the lower back where the kidneys sit.
- His hand first, always, until the skin is warm and evenly pink. This is not ceremony — cold tissue bruises where warmed tissue does not, and a rite that skipped it would injure her on principle.
- The paddle after, and only after, if the count calls for it. Never opened at force. Never on any area already marked.
- He looks every ten or twelve strokes. Rose is where this lives. Deep and even red is the ceiling and it ends there for the night, whatever the arithmetic said. Purple, white patches, or any break in the skin stops it at once and the remainder is not owed.

She may make whatever sound she makes. She may not be required to count aloud, to thank him between strokes, or to hold still under pain — those are performances, and this house has never confused a performance with an answer.

V. THE STANDING

When the count is finished he says so plainly, and she stands. Hands behind her head if the house keeps that posture, feet apart, everything exposed and nothing covered — and she stays there for as long as he chooses, which should be a short while and not a long one. This is the stage the older households understood best: the sting is doing its work, she is entirely without defence, and neither of them is speaking.

A word on what does not happen here. Nothing strikes her sex — not with the paddle, not with anything. That tissue is thin, densely vascular, and sits directly over the urethra and the clitoral structures; impact there produces vulvar haematoma, which is a surgical emergency, and urethral and nerve injury that does not reliably heal. There is no count at which it becomes safe and no technique that makes it so. The exposure in this stage

carries the meaning that impact there would only ever have carried badly — she is standing utterly open, having answered, with nothing hidden from him. That is the whole of what such a stage is for.

VI. THE OFFERING TO THE COLD

He answers to the cold at the great rites — his scrotum and the steel lowered into her water, her hand stirring it, nothing lifted until she says so. It is the plainest thing this house does, and it is right that she answers the same way. So she offers her sex to the cold as he offers his, and the meaning is identical: the most defended part of a person, given up to the other's keeping, and released on their word rather than a clock's. Two forms are kept, and a house uses whichever suits the woman it belongs to — or neither, at no cost to the rite.

THE COLD LEATHER. A broad, soft, flexible leather — kept somewhere cool so it arrives cold against her, which is most of the sensation and the reason she asks for it. Never wood. Never anything rigid or edged. Never anything narrow enough to concentrate force in one place.

- She is warmed and open first. This is not decorum: engorged tissue is more resilient and reads the sensation differently, and the same tap on an unwarmed body is a shock rather than a pleasure. The correction and the standing have already done this work; this stage follows them and never precedes them.
- Taps, not strikes. The weight of the leather and the wrist only — no arm, no swing, no follow-through, and nothing held against her on landing. The leather lands flat and lifts.
- Her established ceiling, written into their Schedule and not derived from any total: twenty at the light weight, ten to twelve if firmer. That figure comes from her body and stays there. It does not rise because a ledger came out high, and nothing in any assessment may add to it.
- Flat contact across the outer lips. Not directed at the clitoris or its hood, and never at the urethra — those structures take no force at all, and there is no count at which they do.
- She sets the pace and she calls the end, whether or not the number is reached. Her halt word governs as everywhere, and here it is expected to be used freely rather than saved for emergencies.

Stop signs, and they are absolute: any sharp or radiating pain as distinct from the intended sting; numbness; swelling that does not settle within minutes; any bruising or mark that persists; any bleeding whatever. Any of these ends the stage and the evening, the remainder is not owed, and if swelling or bruising appears there it is looked at by a doctor rather than waited out.

THE COLD WATER, where a house prefers it. Cool water, never iced — refrigerator-cool, or a bowl in which any ice has fully melted. Two to three minutes, not the ten of his Test,

because his scrotum is skin where her vulva includes mucous membrane, which is thinner and reaches cold injury sooner. External only; nothing enters her. A shallow basin, or a cloth wrung out and held against her by his hand — the gentler option and the better one the first several times. No salt at all: weak brine is harmless on scrotal skin and a needless sting on mucous membrane, so the Salting belongs to his rite and stays there. And he stays with her, skin against her back, warm above while the cold works below — the same sermon his own Test preaches.

Whichever form the house keeps, the ending is his to give and that is the point of the stage: the clock says only that time has passed, and she comes away when he says so — a breath or two, not a minute. If she has ever had cold sensitivity, Raynaud's, or anything that makes cold unsafe for her, the water form is simply not part of their rite.

SHE: *"I give you what he gives — the part I would keep from anyone. Hold it as long as you judge, and tell me when."*

HE: *"Held, and given back. Nothing of yours stays a moment past my word."*

Afterward it is patted dry and left to warm slowly at the room's own pace, uncovered, nothing hot applied — and the returning ache is hers to feel, exactly as his is, because that ache is the last of the stage rather than something the aftercare erases.

VII. THE OFFERING

Then she offers herself, and this is the part that turns a correction into a reconciliation. She comes to him rather than waiting to be fetched, and gives him her body freely — his hands, his mouth, whatever the Schedule between them allows — and gives up steering it. He remains locked throughout. He takes what he chooses, including choosing to take nothing at all, and she accepts either without negotiation.

This goes by feel and never by number. Her pace, her word, and his attention on her rather than on a total. Where he brings her to her own pleasure it is a gift and not a further consequence; where he does not, that is his to decide and she does not ask. An offering that is counted is a performance, and a performance is not an apology.

SHE: *"I am yours to have. Take what you want of me, or nothing, and either is right."*

VIII. THE CLOSING AND THE LOCKING

If the house keeps a device for her, it is fitted now by his hands, and she chooses to have it fitted rather than merely permitting it — she steps forward for it, exactly as he steps forward for his at the Rites. Where the house keeps no such thing, this stage is a plain sentence spoken instead: that it is finished and paid.

Cleansing belongs here too, and it is his to do: warm water, a soft cloth, gently, over whatever the evening touched. Nothing hot on skin that has been struck. If the house

uses a weak saline rinse it is exactly that — weak, warm, and rinsed clear afterward, never left to dry on skin.

HE: *"It is paid. It is finished. It will not be raised again."*

IX. THE RESTORATION

He holds her. Water, warmth, his hands over the colour he raised, and time — no hurrying back to ordinary talk. And he says plainly, in words, that it is done and that nothing is held against her. She is permitted to find it difficult, and most women in her position do; a woman who has spent years being the one who holds may find being held the more disarming half of the evening.

Then the office returns to her, explicitly and aloud, before the night ends. This is not optional and it is not assumed. Both of them need to hear it said, because a rite that ended without it would leave the household's authority ambiguous overnight, and ambiguity is the thing this whole library exists to kill.

HE: *"It is finished, and it is yours again. Tomorrow you govern as you always have. Take it back."*

SHE: *"I take it back. And I am glad of a man who would hold me to it."*

If she walks back to her room carrying her clothes rather than wearing them, let that be her choice on the night and not a sentence imposed on her — the sting will carry the meditation on its own, and a woman who has just answered fully should not have a further thing exacted from her on the way out.

X. THE MORNING

In daylight, he looks at the skin, and she lets him. Warm colour fading is a rite well judged. Deep colour still present after a day means the count or the implement was wrong, whatever it felt like at the time, and the next occasion is lighter. Bruising means it was too much, and it is said aloud rather than absorbed.

And the two questions, asked honestly: how does it look this morning, and was anything about last night more than either of us wanted. Both of them answer. His answer matters as much as hers — a man who finds he enjoyed it more than he should have is obliged to say so, and saying so is not a failure but the single most important safeguard in the document.

At the annual review it goes in the record like everything else: what happened, what answered it, whether it worked. A couple who find themselves reluctant to write it down have just learned something worth more than the rite itself.

XI. WHAT THIS RITE DOES NOT TOUCH

She commands the estate. She keeps the ledger and sets his standard and holds the key at her neck. Her work, her money in her own name, her papers, her friendships, her standing in every public room: none of it is in play here, on any night, at any total. The Floor is hers as absolutely as it is his, and a house that begins trimming her independence in the name of devotion has stopped practising this covenant and started practising something else.

Nor does this Rite make him the head of the household. He is not promoted by it. He administered a consequence she agreed to, while locked, at her invitation, on a failure she named herself — and then handed her authority back with his own mouth. Everything about the shape of it is designed so that neither of them can mistake it for a change of order.

She is corrected by a man she owns, for a failure she named, and she governs him again before the night is out.

A guide only. Not medical advice. For consenting adults, 18 and over. Nothing is administered to, or by, an impaired person. Her halt word outranks every stage and every total. Nothing strikes the genitals, at any count. Where drink or illness is the pattern rather than the exception, this Rite does not apply and a doctor does.