THE YIELD

by Brent Clark Palmer

THE CHARIOT, BOOK 9 • VULPES PARVAES, BOOK 40

Chapter 1: The Bait

The morning light in the apartment was the particular shade Penelope Stephens preferred—soft enough not to strain the eyes, bright enough to reveal every clean, expensive line of the space she had curated.

She stood before the bathroom mirror in a thin silk robe the color of fresh cream, the belt tied loosely at her waist. As she lifted her arms to pin up her golden-brown hair, the silk parted down her sternum, and she watched the reflection of her own body with the cool, detached approval she gave to any instrument that performed to specification. Her breasts were small, high, and firm, the nipples a pale, aristocratic rose that tightened briefly in the conditioned air before settling. Her abdomen was flat and taut from years of disciplined sculling and Pilates; her hips curved just enough to balance the narrowness of her waist without a gram of excess. She turned once in profile, studying the long, patrician line of her throat and the way her shoulder blades shifted beneath smooth, unblemished skin. Everything about her was as it had always been: efficient, symmetrical, superior.

She let the robe hang open a breath longer, admiring the sheer economy of her frame, then drew the silk shut and tied the belt with a precise knot. The hem whispered against her bare thighs as she walked into the kitchen.

Sora was already at the counter with her back to the room, pouring dark roast into two ceramic mugs with a steady, unhurried hand. Pippy crossed the heated slate floor without a sound, took the mug Sora offered without thanking her, and inhaled the bitter steam before taking her first sip.

"You left the reading lamp on in the living room again," Pippy said, her consonants crisp and effortlessly carrying. "I turned it off when I came in at midnight. Some of us actually notice when resources are being bled into an empty room."

Sora set the carafe down and turned. She was half a head shorter than Pippy, her dark hair twisted into an unremarkable knot at the nape of her neck, her figure hidden beneath a plain charcoal sweater and loose dark trousers. Her eyes were dark and still—the kind of eyes that seemed to absorb light rather than reflect it.

"I was still using it," Sora said, her voice level and unbothered. "I came back for my spreadsheets."

Pippy took another sip and let her gaze drift with mild distaste over the stack of bound monographs and endocrine journals Sora had left at the far end of the marble island. The spines were cracked, the margins bristling with color-coded tabs and cramped, relentless annotations. *Applied Lactation Kinetics in Transgenic Stock. Neuro-Endocrine Compliance Curves. Commercial Bio-Asset Depreciation.*

"You know, if you spent half as much time synthesizing a thesis as you do hoarding agricultural manuals, you might actually defend before the decade ends," Pippy said, leaning one hip against the cool marble. The cream silk shifted pleasantly against her skin. "Honestly, Sora, I don't know how you stand wading through all that utilitarian plumbing. Feed-to-output ratios. Mammalian yield curves. Some of us have deadlines that actually shape policy rather than calculating how much protein a barn can squeeze out of a heifer."

Sora's mouth moved in the smallest suggestion of a smile. It did not reach her eyes. "The plumbing is where the value lives," she said quietly. "And I finish what matters."

Pippy gave a short, bright laugh that held no warmth at all. "Of course you do." She reached for the morning paper, snapping it open with a flick of her wrists, and scanned the op-ed page. There was a dreary column on bio-ethical guardrails in private clinical trials; she was already composing the three sentences she would use to eviscerate its premise in Thursday's honors seminar.

Sora moved around the island and began sliding her heavy volumes into a worn canvas tote, the soft rasp of paper against duck cloth filling the pause between them. Pippy did not bother looking up until Sora spoke again.

"There was something for you yesterday," Sora said. She reached into the side pocket of her tote and laid a thick, cream-colored envelope on the marble between them. "It looked important. I left it by your tray last night, but you must have missed it."

Pippy glanced down. The paper was heavy, cotton-rag stock that did not bend easily. There was no return address, no adhesive stamp, no postal cancellation mark—only Pippy's full name calligraphed in dark ink on the front, and on the rear flap, a small silver-embossed circle enclosing a stylized *A*.

"Probably another recruitment packet from one of those second-tier think tanks hoping to buy pedigree by association," Pippy murmured, though her fingers were already reaching for it. She slit the heavy flap with a manicured thumbnail and drew out the charcoal-and-silver dossier inside.

AETHERIS
Institute for Advanced Genetic & Endocrine Research
Confidential Participant Recruitment

She opened the heavy cardstock. Inside, the layout was a study in patrician restraint: architectural photography of a sunlit limestone estate surrounded by private parkland, a researcher in a bespoke white coat reviewing holographic genome cascades, and a private residential suite that looked more like a Zurich private bank than a clinic.

> *The Aetheris Institute selects a strictly limited cohort of exceptional women for a landmark residential study in targeted genetic expression and neuro-hormonal optimization. Candidates are identified exclusively through nomination and superior baseline screening across cognitive architecture, metabolic efficiency, and physical symmetry. Participation entails a twelve-week residential immersion under continuous biometric telemetry. Base honorarium for the initial phase is $275,000, with tiered performance royalties tied directly to expressive biological yield.*
>
> *This is a closed-cohort invitation. Your profile has been pre-cleared under File #AE-09-PS.*

Pippy read the final paragraph twice, her thumb resting on the $275,000 figure. In an ordinary person, a number like that would have triggered a vulgar spike in pulse. In Pippy, it produced only the warm, seamless click of the universe aligning with her own estimation of her worth.

She had always known her bloodline was different. Her mother's people carried effortless metabolic grace and bone-deep poise like heirloom pearls; her father's line produced appellate judges and mathematical physicists who thought in clean, pitiless proofs. At twenty-two, she had never once encountered a room, a fellowship, or a mind she could not effortlessly dominate. *Of course* Aetheris had found her.

Across the island, Sora stood with her tote strap over one shoulder, watching Pippy's face over the rim of her coffee mug.

"Well?" Sora asked softly.

"Well what?" Pippy opened the brochure again, her eyes skimming the phrase *superior baseline screening* like a mirror. "It's an invitation-only cohort at Aetheris. They obviously pulled the university's top-decile genomic and fellowship registries. My cognitive sequencing alone puts me three standard deviations above the graduate pool; the physical baseline is merely confirmation."

She glanced up and caught that tiny, unreadable curve at the corner of Sora's mouth again.

"You should call them," Sora said. "It suits you."

A familiar prickle of condescension warmed Pippy's chest. She closed the charcoal cover and set it precisely parallel to the edge of the marble. "Of course it suits me. Some of us were built for more than sitting in a corner tabulating barn statistics." She tilted her head, offering a brittle little smile. "You could always inquire if they need lab techs, Sora. Though I doubt they'd find your baseline particularly compelling. You're very… steady. That has its uses."

Sora’s dark eyes didn't flicker. She adjusted the heavy canvas strap on her shoulder.

"I’m not interested in being optimized, Pippy," Sora said evenly. "I prefer the management side. But you should go. It would be a terrible waste of your biology not to."

She turned and walked down the hall, her bedroom door clicking shut with its usual quiet precision.

Pippy remained at the island, her palm resting flat on the charcoal dossier, inhaling the faint, expensive trace of bergamot rising from her own skin beneath the silk robe. Then she carried the brochure to her desk by the tall living-room windows, opened her laptop, and dialed the private intake line embossed on the back cover.

It rang once before a woman’s voice answered—crisp, hushed, and unhurried.

"Aetheris Institute, Cohort Intake."

"This is Penelope Stephens," Pippy said, pitching her voice in her cleanest seminar register. "I received pre-cleared invitation file AE-09-PS for the genetic and endocrine optimization study. I’m calling to schedule my consultation."

There was the briefest whisper of keystrokes. "Ah—Ms. Stephens," the receptionist said, and the immediate, deferential recognition in her voice sent a delicious shiver of vanity down Pippy’s spine. "Your sponsor flagged your file for priority intake yesterday afternoon. Dr. Daria Stone has held ten o'clock tomorrow morning open specifically for you. Shall I dispatch a car to your residence at nine-fifteen?"

"Yes," Pippy said, looking out over the sunlit city skyline far below her window. "Confirm the car. And please inform Dr. Stone that I look forward to reviewing how my markers can advance the Institute’s work."

When she hung up, the faint sound of the shower running behind Sora’s closed door drifted into the living room. Pippy didn't give it a second thought. She slid the brochure into her top drawer, opened the journal article she intended to dismantle on Thursday, and uncapped her fountain pen. People like Penelope Stephens did not need to wonder why doors opened for them; they simply walked through.

Chapter 2: The Clinical Intake

The town car that collected her at nine-fifteen was obsidian-black and whisper-quiet, its cabin smelling of saddle leather and lemon oil. Pippy sat with her spine straight against the seat, dressed to signal effortless peerage with whoever ran the Institute: a tailored camel wool coat over a bone-colored silk blouse, pleated charcoal trousers, and low Italian heels that clicked with crisp authority as she stepped out beneath the porte-cochère.

The Aetheris estate rose out of manicured boxwood and misted lawns in clean slabs of pale limestone and smoked glass. There were no vulgar signage boards, no waiting rooms cluttered with the sick—only hushed travertine corridors scented with white cedar and bitter orange.

Dr. Daria Stone rose from behind a wide walnut desk the moment Pippy was shown into the consultation suite. She was a tall, silver-templed woman in her late forties wearing a charcoal suit of immaculate cut, her dark hair drawn into a severe low knot. Her handshake was dry, cool, and brief.

"Ms. Stephens," Dr. Stone said, gesturing toward a pair of low leather armchairs flanking a glass table that held a crystal carafe of water. "Thank you for coming in at short notice."

Pippy took the chair facing the floor-to-ceiling windows, crossing her long legs at the ankle and resting one wrist on the armrest.

Dr. Stone opened a thick cream dossier stamped with the silver *A*. "I won't insult your intelligence with salesmanship, Ms. Stephens. Your preliminary dossier is one of the cleanest we have screened this fiscal year. Your cognitive processing indices, baseline endocrine plasticity, and somatotype symmetry place you in the ninety-ninth percentile across every metric our protocol targets. Frankly, most applicants who seek us out are average women hoping chemistry will make them exceptional. You are the inverse: an exceptional baseline whose biology is capable of generating extraordinary yield under targeted hormonal load."

Pippy inclined her chin a fraction of an inch—just enough to accept the tribute as simple statement of fact. "The brochure mentioned an optimization sequence paired with cognitive telemetry."

"Precisely," Dr. Stone said smoothly. "Over a twelve-week residential cycle, we administer a proprietary cascade of neuro-endocrine peptides designed to hyper-express latent mammary and reproductive tissue plasticity while we measure how an elite intellect adapts to intense physiological demand. To prevent confounding environmental noise, the residential phase is strictly enclosed. Your base honorarium of $275,000 vests upon completion of the initial calibration phase, with ongoing performance royalties calculated per liter of expressive biological yield."

She slid a bound forty-page contract across the glass, along with a heavy platinum rollerball pen.

"The language is dense, as our institutional underwriters require," Dr. Stone added, her voice as soothing as chamber music. "Standard clinical waivers in Sections 1 through 8. Strict non-disclosure in Section 9. Section 14 covers title to biological materials generated on-site and authorizes hardware-assisted vocal and postural stabilization if high-output phases strain your baseline. And Schedule C at the back simply designates a local household proxy to manage your external affairs and receive stipend disbursements while you are in isolation. Your intake file already listed Sora Sanders at your current address, so we pre-populated her name to save you the clerical tedium."

Pippy flipped through the crisp pages. She verified the **$275,000.00** figure in bold type on page three. She skimmed past the dense legalese of Section 14—*agricultural and bio-industrial reclassification of high-yield subjects; transfer of custodial title to Designated Sponsor upon crossing threshold output*—registering only the flattering words *high-yield* and *threshold*. On the final page, under *Schedule C: Designated Custodial Sponsor & Payee*, she saw **Sora Sanders** neatly printed above the counter-signature line—and noticed, with a faint pang of amusement, that Sora had already signed it in her neat, cramped hand. *How wonderfully convenient,* Pippy thought; she wouldn't even have to bother setting up automatic bill-pay for her half of the rent while she was inside.

With a practiced, fluid stroke, Penelope Stephens signed her name at the bottom of the contract.

When she set the pen down, Dr. Stone’s smile didn't widen; it simply settled into place like a vault door locking. She touched a discreet button beneath the edge of the table.

The side door opened without a knock, and an attendant in a soft gray uniform stepped in carrying a pale, gossamer garment and a vacuum-seal storage bin.

"To maintain zero thermal or tactile variance across our baseline sensors, personal clothing and outside electronics are surrendered upon contract execution," Dr. Stone said, already closing Pippy’s folder. "We have also transmitted your signed academic leave notice to the university registrar. Your seminar instructors have been informed that you have accepted a closed fellowship and will not be reachable this term."

"Already?" Pippy blinked, then recovered her poise. "Thank you. That is remarkably efficient."

"We dislike loose ends," Dr. Stone replied. "If you'll step behind the partition, Ms. Stephens, the attendant will inventory your garments."

Behind the frosted screen, the air was noticeably cooler. Pippy shrugged out of her camel coat, unbuttoned her bone-colored silk blouse, and stepped out of her tailored trousers and Italian heels, handing each piece over the partition. When she unhooked her French lace bra and slid off her silk briefs, gooseflesh rose across her bare flanks, her pale-rose nipples drawing tight in the draft. The attendant folded every garment into the plastic bin, snapped the lid shut, and affixed a barcode label that read *ARCHIVE / DISPOSE AFTER 14 DAYS*—a detail Pippy could not see from behind the screen.

In exchange, she was handed a thin, floor-length robe of pale, weightless modal that fastened with two fragile side-ties. It had no pockets, no structure, and offered almost no warmth; when she walked back out from behind the screen, the sheer fabric clung to the points of her nipples and parted slightly over her thighs with every stride.

"Before we escort you to Suite 4, you may place one courtesy call to your household proxy so she knows your leave has begun," Dr. Stone said, gesturing to a cordless handset on a silver tray.

Pippy picked it up and dialed from memory. Sora answered on the second ring.

"It's Penelope," Pippy said, standing barefoot on the cool floor in the thin robe, her voice still ringing with patrician self-importance. "I'm at the Aetheris estate. They've finalized my contract and placed me on formal academic leave so I can focus on the residential phase without distractions. They even had your name on the administrative proxy sheet, so you can just sort my mail and water the ferns until I'm back."

On the other end of the line, there was a beat of warm, almost breathless silence.

"That's wonderful news, Pippy," Sora said, and for the first time since they had moved in together, her voice sounded genuinely, brightly happy. "I'm so glad the intake went smoothly. Don't worry about a single thing at the apartment—I'm already reorganizing the space to keep everything tidy while you're away. And Dr. Stone's office mentioned that designated sponsors are allowed observation privileges once your infusions start. I'd love to drop by and see your progress in a couple of days."

Pippy felt an unexpected little glow of magnanimity. Even dull, steady Sora knew how to show proper deference when Pippy ascended into a sphere like this. "I'll have the staff clear a window for you once my baseline schedule is set," Pippy said graciously. "Do make sure the cleaning service doesn't touch my desk."

"Your desk is already taken care of," Sora said softly. "Work hard in there, Pippy. Make every drop count."

Pippy set the handset back on the tray. Five minutes later, she stood alone inside Suite 4—a spacious, soundproofed room with pale wood paneling, a wide bed, a view of the hedged courtyard, and a discreet black dome camera mounted in the upper corner of the ceiling.

On the desk sat a biometric tablet, already chiming softly for her first afternoon log. Pippy sat down, her bare thighs cool beneath the whisper-thin robe, and typed with crisp precision:

> *Entry 1: Baseline intake complete. Zero anxiety. Mild cutaneous sensitivity from removal of personal garments. Cognitive focus 100%. Ready to commence optimization.*

She did not look up at the black glass dome in the corner. She was Penelope Stephens, and she was about to show the Aetheris Institute what a superior mind looked like under load.

Chapter 3: The First Modifications

By six that evening, the word *optimization* had acquired a distinct physical weight.

Pippy returned to Suite 4 after two hours in the downstairs metrology lab, where gloved technicians had mapped her naked frame with cold titanium calipers, laser plethysmographs, and high-resolution thermal cameras while she stood, sat, and lay spread-eagled on an examination table. None of them had spoken to her beyond two-word postural commands: *Chin up. Knees apart. Hold breath.* Far from feeling demeaned, Pippy had treated the clinical scrutiny like a sculptor's model posing for a bronze monument—until she returned to her desk to type her second log entry and realized that the introductory subdermal primer they had injected at four o'clock was already waking up inside her chest.

It began as a slow, spreading heat behind her sternum, as if she had swallowed a shot of warm brandy that refused to travel down to her stomach, pooling instead in the glandular tissue beneath her breasts. Every breath made the thin modal robe brush across her nipples, and each brush sent a tiny, involuntary shiver down her spine.

A soft chime sounded at the corridor door. Before Pippy could say *Come in*, the lock clicked from the outside and two women entered.

The lead nurse wore the soft gray tunic of the clinical wing, pushing a stainless-steel cart loaded with amber glass vials, peristaltic infusion tubing, and dermal leads. Behind her walked a broader-shouldered attendant carrying a low, vinyl-padded quadruped bench with contoured knee wells and a recessed trough at the front.

"Good evening, Ms. Stephens," the nurse said, setting the brakes on the cart. "Dr. Stone has reviewed your four-o'clock primer curves. Your receptor uptake is forty percent faster than cohort average, so we are initiating Phase One active infusion tonight."

The attendant set the low padded bench directly in the center of the floor, right beneath the sightline of the ceiling camera, then turned to Pippy with an open palm.

"The robe, please," the nurse said matter-of-factly. "From this point forward in the residential phase, textiles are discontinued. Even lightweight modal creates static and thermal insulation that distorts real-time mammary vascular mapping and dermal conductivity. You will remain unclothed for the remainder of the twelve-week cycle."

For the first time, Pippy hesitated. Twelve weeks without a stitch of clothing—under twenty-four-hour camera telemetry and staff entry without knocking—crossed a line her imagination hadn't quite pictured at the kitchen island. Yet the nurse stood there with her clipboard held at a polite, expectant angle, as if waiting for a graduate student to hand over a lab coat. To balk now would be to act like an ordinary, squeamish girl who didn't understand rigorous experimental controls.

"Of course," Pippy said coolly, keeping her chin high. "Variables must be controlled."

She untied the side ribbons, shrugged the pale modal from her shoulders, and handed it to the attendant, who took it out into the hall and did not return.

Pippy stood completely naked in the center of the suite. The conditioned air slid over her skin like cool water—across the firm curve of her hips, between her parted thighs, and over the undersides of her breasts, which already felt subtly fuller, warmer, and heavier than they had at breakfast. Her pale-rose nipples stood out in tight, aching buds.

"On the bench now, please—hands and knees," the nurse instructed, tapping the vinyl pads. "Quadruped posture suspends the mammary tissue free of the chest wall so gravity assists vascular engorgement and alveolar expansion during the peptide drip. Knees in the recessed wells, hips elevated, spine swayed."

Pippy stepped onto the mat and lowered herself onto all fours. The contoured knee wells forced her thighs a full eighteen inches apart, tilting her pelvis upward so that the smooth curve of her ass and the delicate, hairless cleft of her sex were completely open to the room behind her. Beneath her ribcage, her breasts hung downward into the open air, the new internal heat pulling at the skin with a strange, pendulous gravity she had never felt in her life.

Cold hydrogel sensors were pressed along her lumbar spine, on the inner slopes of her thighs, and directly around the outer rings of her areolas. Then the nurse slipped an IV cannula into the back of Pippy's wrist and secured her forearms to the front of the bench with two soft Velcro positioning straps—"Just to prevent unconscious drift during the vascular peak," the nurse explained pleasantly.

The corridor door opened again, and Dr. Stone stepped in holding her tablet.

Because Pippy's forearms were strapped to the low front of the bench, she had to crane her neck upward from all fours just to see the doctor's hemlines and knees.

"Exemplary alignment, Ms. Stephens," Dr. Stone said, walking slowly around the rear of the bench. A cool, nitrile-gloved hand settled flat on the small of Pippy's bare back, just above the flare of her hips, pressing down a fraction of an inch to deepen the arch of her spine. "Look at these baseline posture metrics. Most subjects fight the quadruped suspension for the first forty-eight hours out of residual social conditioning. Your musculoskeletal compliance is immediate."

"If quadruped suspension yields the cleanest telemetry," Pippy said, her voice slightly strained by the angle of her neck, "then it would be irrational to resist it."

"Spoken like a true scientist," Dr. Stone murmured, a dry note of amusement in her voice. "Start the pump at sixty milliliters per hour."

The peristaltic pump began to click—a low, rhythmic *thrum-thrum-thrum*.

Within ninety seconds, the cool trickle in Pippy's vein ignited into a slow, honeyed fire that poured straight into her chest and groin. Pippy's breath caught in her throat. She looked down between her strapped forearms and watched, in hypnotic disbelief, as the skin of her breasts flushed a deep, vascular rose. The tissue inside them wasn't merely warming; it was *blooming*—the lobules and ducts expanding under the peptide flood with a slow, relentless hydraulic pressure that made her small, athletic breasts swell visibly downward toward the mat. Her areolas darkened from pale pink to a rich, velvety coral, puffing outward as her nipples lengthened into thick, throbbing cylinders that ached at the slightest current of air.

And worse—or better, in a way her rational mind scrambled to categorize—every pulse of expansion in her breasts sent a direct, hard-wired nerve signal straight down to her clit.

"Notice the secondary pelvic coupling on Channel 4," Dr. Stone observed calmly to the nurse as they stood beside the bench. "The synthetic oxytocin-prolactin conjugate is already binding to the pudendal nerve pathway. Check her mucosal response."

Before Pippy could brace herself, the nurse's gloved fingers slid casually between her spread thighs from behind, parting her labia with the brisk, unhurried authority of a technician checking a gauge. Pippy gasped, her hips jerking half an inch against the Velcro forearm straps as the cool latex dragged across folds that were already humiliatingly slick.

"Copious lubrication at eighteen minutes," the nurse reported, withdrawing her fingers and showing the glistening latex to Dr. Stone before wiping them on a sterile pad. "Vaginal temperature up one point four degrees."

"Textbook," Dr. Stone said. She stepped up beside Pippy's head, reached down beneath her chest, and cupped both of Pippy's swelling breasts in her gloved palms, lifting and weighing them like ripening fruit on a vine.

The contact tore a soft, involuntarily breathy sound from Pippy's lips. Her breasts already filled Dr. Stone's hands far more completely than they could have that morning—heavy, fever-hot, the stretched skin tingling with a deep, cellular fullness that made her spine arch deeper into the doctor's touch.

"You are outperforming every projection in Sora's preliminary model, Ms. Stephens," Dr. Stone said, her gloved thumbs brushing once, deliberately, across the stiff, aching tips of Pippy's nipples before letting the heavy globes drop back down.

Pippy blinked through the warm, syrupy haze clouding her vision, catching on the name. "Sora's... model?"

"The cohort screening model," Dr. Stone corrected smoothly without missing a beat. "Your metabolic efficiency is converting the precursor peptides into active glandular volume at nearly double the standard rate. By tomorrow evening, upright posture will become mechanically counterproductive for your spine. When the nurse disconnects you in forty minutes, I recommend you remain on all fours when moving to the bed."

When the infusion finally ended and the Velcro straps were unfastened, the two women packed their cart and left Pippy alone in the bright, silent room—without a robe, without a blanket on top of the fitted sheet, and with two heavy, throbbing globes of newly forged flesh pulling at her chest.

Pippy pushed herself up to stand beside the desk, intending to type her evening symptom log with her usual academic detachment.

The moment she stood upright, gravity dragged at her swollen breasts with a sharp, dizzying ache that made her gasp and catch the edge of the desk. In the dark reflection of the window glass, she barely recognized her own silhouette: her narrow waist and flat stomach were still there, but above them projected a fuller, heavier, undeniably lush shelf of flesh, tipped with dark, engorged nipples that pulsed in time with her heartbeat and left a faint, pearlescent bead of clear colostrum glistening at the very tip of the left peak. Between her thighs, a warm thread of arousal crept slowly down her inner leg.

Her fingers trembled over the tablet keyboard. She wanted to write a sharp, analytical paragraph critiquing the neuro-pelvic cross-binding of the conjugate. Instead, the heavy, rhythmic throb in her chest made it hard to hold a multi-clause sentence in her head. She typed a single, clipped line:

> *Phase 1 infusion complete. Rapid volumetric expansion. Upright posture uncomfortable.*

She did not walk to the bed. With no one in the room to perform for except the silent black dome in the corner, Penelope Stephens dropped quietly to her hands and knees on the floor—and felt an immediate, treacherous wave of physical relief as her heavy breasts swung free beneath her ribcage—crawling across the suite on all fours like an animal going to its straw.

Chapter 4: The Swelling

Pippy woke to the ache before she woke to the light.

It was no longer the diffuse, brandy-warm glow of the previous evening. Overnight, the sensation had thickened into a deep, rhythmic throb anchored behind her sternum, radiating outward through her chest in slow, heavy waves that matched the cadence of her pulse. Lying on her side on the bare mattress, she opened her eyes and tried to catalogue her physical state with the clean, clinical detachment she brought to every seminar paper.

Her breasts had doubled in volume while she slept. Even resting against the cool linen sheet, they felt alien in their density—two full, high-tension globes whose skin was stretched so taut it gleamed faintly in the morning light. Her areolas had widened into dark, velvety disks, and her nipples stood out in thick, hypersensitive cylinders that burned at the slightest whisper of the suite's conditioned air. When she pushed herself upright to sit on the edge of the bed, gravity seized the new weight all at once, dragging downward on her chest wall with a sharp, bruising pull that made her catch her breath.

Expected, she told herself firmly, swallowing past the dryness in her throat. *Superior baseline receptors metabolizing the peptide cascade at an accelerated rate. The discomfort is merely telemetry; the volume is proof of my genetic plasticity.*

She stood and walked slowly toward the tall courtyard window. Every step was a negotiation with mass. Her breasts swayed and settled heavily against her upper ribs, each movement sending a slow, syrupy pulse straight down the newly wired pathway to the apex of her thighs. Reaching the glass, she braced both palms on the cool sill and leaned forward, letting her spine sway and her torso tip downward. Immediately, the tearing pull against her chest wall eased as the heavy globes hung free. She stayed like that for several minutes, her forehead nearly touching the glass, breathing through the thick, insistent heat in her groin.

The corridor lock clicked, and a soft chime announced the morning nurse with her stainless-steel cart. Pippy did not reach for a sheet or cross her arms; there was nothing in the suite to cover herself with, and she refused to display the bourgeois modesty of an inferior subject.

"Good morning, Ms. Stephens," the nurse said briskly, glancing from the wall telemetry screen to Pippy's bowed posture at the window. "Your overnight volumetric expansion is at the very top of the projected curve. Most high-response subjects find that bipedal posture places excessive shear stress on the pectoral suspensory ligaments once the tissue crosses the first threshold. Quadruped positioning redistributes the load along the spine. If you'll come down onto the bench now, I'll start your morning titrate."

Pippy didn't argue. The upright walk across the floor was enough to convince her: by the time she reached the center of the suite and lowered herself onto her hands and knees in the contoured wells of the padded bench, the relief of letting her heavy breasts swing freely beneath her ribcage was so immediate that a soft sigh slipped past her lips.

The nurse clipped the dermal leads along her swayed spine, slid the fresh infusion line into her wrist, and started the peristaltic pump. Warmth flooded Pippy's veins—faster and thicker than the night before, sinking straight into the engorged lobules of her chest until she had to drop her head between her shoulders and arch her back just to breathe around the fullness.

She was still holding that deep, swayed arch when the suite door chimed a second time.

An attendant opened the door from the hall, stepping aside with polite deference. "Ms. Sanders. Right on time. She's twenty minutes into the morning drip and responding beautifully."

Pippy stiffened on the mat, lifting her chin with effort.

Sora walked into the suite. She wore a neat camel trench coat over a crisp dark blouse—Wait: it was *Pippy's* camel trench coat, or one cut so identically to it that Pippy's eyes snagged on the lapel before she could process the rest—and carried her familiar canvas tote. Without a trace of hesitation or awkwardness, Sora crossed the floor and stopped directly beside the quadruped bench.

Looking up from all fours, naked, with her hips tilted high in the knee wells and her swollen breasts hanging heavy beneath her chest, Pippy felt the first hot sting of genuine mortification. She opened her mouth to deliver a cool, patrician remark that would re-establish their hierarchy.

Before she could speak, Sora reached down and gave the bare, upturned curve of Pippy's ass a warm, proprietary pat—two firm taps of her palm against the flank—before sliding her fingers up to the nape of Pippy's neck and scratching lightly behind her right ear.

It was the exact, absent-minded gesture a landowner uses to greet a prized mare in a stall.

"Hi, Pippy," Sora said, her voice quiet, level, and completely unhurried. "I hope I'm not interrupting the protocol. Dr. Stone's office said morning infusion was the best window to check in."

Pippy's mind stalled on the ear-scratch. Sora had lived across the hall from her for fourteen months and had never once touched her. Even stranger than the audacity of the touch was the treacherous jolt it sent down Pippy's spine: sensitized by the peptide drip, the casual pat on her rear and the rhythmic scratching behind her ear sent a warm, involuntary shiver straight to her groin.

"You aren't… interrupting," Pippy managed, hating the breathless catch that the chest-pressure forced into her voice. "They're calibrating the secondary phase. My receptor efficiency is… substantially ahead of the cohort curve."

"I can see that," Sora murmured. She crouched beside the bench so her dark, still eyes were level with Pippy's flushed face, one hand resting flat and heavy between Pippy's shoulder blades. From that angle, Sora's gaze travelled with calm, clinical appraisal over the full, pendulous swell of Pippy's breasts hanging inches above the vinyl pad, noting the dark, distended nipples and the sheen of stretched skin without a flicker of surprise.

"I brought you an update on the apartment, since I'm listed as your household proxy," Sora continued smoothly. "I sorted your mail—mostly department circulars and a note from the fellowship committee letting you know they've reallocated your seminar slot for the rest of the year. The ferns are watered. And I had the movers clear your desk and bookshelves out of the living room yesterday so I could spread out my yield-modeling terminals. Everything is much more efficient now."

Pippy blinked through the throbbing haze in her chest. "You… cleared my desk? And the fellowship committee reallocated my—"

"Standard academic leave procedure, Dr. Stone said," Sora replied gently, her fingers resuming that slow, hypnotic scratch behind Pippy's ear. "You shouldn't burden your mind with administrative trivia while your body is doing such demanding work." Sora straightened up and glanced over at the nurse by the infusion cart. "Her vascular tone looks remarkable for Day Two. Has she been holding the quadruped suspension without complaint?"

"Almost instinctively, Ms. Sanders," the nurse smiled. "She's an ideal subject. Very docile under load."

Sora's mouth curved into that tiny, subterranean smile from the kitchen island—except for a fraction of a second, as she looked down at Pippy kneeling naked at her feet, the mask slipped and a bright, surgical satisfaction gleamed in her eyes.

"I won't keep you from your cycle," Sora said to Pippy, reaching down to give the bare swell of Pippy's hip one last, lingering pat that made Pippy's heavy breasts sway beneath her. "Just keep leaning into the posture, Pippy. Everything outside is in my hands now."

When the door clicked shut behind Sora, Pippy stayed on her hands and knees, staring down at the vinyl mat between her strapped wrists. For the first time, a cold thread of unease tried to weave through her thoughts—*my desk, my seminar slot, why did the nurse report to her like a supervisor?*—but at that exact moment the pump stepped up its flow rate, and a heavy, molten wave of glandular expansion rolled through her breasts, so intense that her back bowed and a low, involuntary moan vibrated in her throat, washing the question out of her head.

Chapter 5: The Shift in Tone

By the third morning, the ache was no longer a symptom Pippy observed; it was the architecture of the room.

Her breasts had grown so heavy, tight, and pendulous that attempting to stand upright to use the lavatory left her gasping, both hands cradling the fever-hot undersides just to keep the skin from feeling as though it would split. Only on all fours did the crushing pull against her sternum subside into a deep, rhythmic demand. Worse, the internal pressure had begun to produce a slow, pearlescent weeping at the tips of her dark, distended nipples whenever the morning drip peaked.

Yet despite the fog of hormones and the humiliating posture, Penelope Stephens's critical mind was finally fighting its way back to the surface. All morning she had rehearsed the exact legal and clinical questions she intended to put to Dr. Stone.

When the door clicked open at one o'clock and Dr. Stone stepped in with her tablet, Pippy did not wait to be addressed. Bracing her palms firmly on the quadruped mat, she lifted her chin and spoke in the crisp, cutting tone that had intimidated graduate seminars for three years.

"Dr. Stone, we need to review my protocol parameters immediately," Pippy said, keeping her diction razor-sharp despite the heavy sway of her breasts beneath her ribs. "The mammary hypertrophy and prolactin-oxytocin cross-binding are far beyond anything outlined in the recruitment prospectus. Furthermore, my roommate informed me yesterday that my academic fellowship was vacated rather than deferred, and your nursing staff discussed my telemetry with her as though she were a principal investigator. I want to see the full text of Section 14 and Schedule C, and I want the peptide titration halted until my counsel reviews—"

Dr. Stone did not flinch, argue, or even look up from her screen. She simply tapped a checkbox on her tablet.

"Persistent cortical-verbal overlay during Phase Two escalation," Dr. Stone noted aloud in a flat, clinical cadence. "Subject is diverting metabolic bandwidth into defensive linguistic framing, elevating cortisol by twelve percent and impeding let-down conditioning. We'll apply the hardware optimization now."

"Excuse me?" Pippy's voice sharpened with anger. "Did you hear a word I just said? I am a voluntary participant under—"

The corridor door opened. The soft-spoken nurses in tailored gray tunics were gone. In their place walked two stocky, broad-shouldered women wearing ankle-length black vulcanized rubber aprons over rolled-up work shirts, heavy wash-down boots, and thick elbow-length gauntlets. Neither of them looked at Pippy's face.

The lead handler—a solid woman with cropped gray hair and callused hands—set a matte-black polymer case on the cart and popped the latches.

"Hold her head," she said.

Before Pippy could scramble backward off the knee wells, the second handler stepped straddle-legged over the front of the bench, clamped both gloved hands around the sides of Pippy's skull, and locked her head firmly between her rubber-aproned knees.

"Unhand me at once!" Pippy snapped, twisting her shoulders against the grip. "Dr. Stone, this is assault! I revoke my consent under—"

"Time for the vocalizer," the cropped-haired woman said matter-of-factly, lifting a contoured device of black medical-grade elastomer and brushed steel from the foam insert. It was a hybrid between a high-collared posture brace and a sub-glottal acoustic baffle, lined with micro-inductive nerve pads that pressed directly over the laryngeal nerves and the base of the tongue. "Keeps high-cognitive subjects from straining their vocal cords or talking themselves into cortisol spikes during high-output conditioning. Lets us monitor pure limbic and somatic states without conscious verbal overlay."

She slid the collar up around Pippy's throat and lower jaw, snapping the heavy rear buckle shut at the nape of her neck with an irreversible metallic *clack*. A tiny green indicator LED blinked on at the side of the throat piece, and a cool, numb tingling spread instantly through the root of Pippy's tongue and vocal folds.

"Go ahead," the handler said, stepping back and folding her arms across her rubber apron. "Try to speak."

Fury boiling in her chest, Pippy drew in a deep breath and formed the words with every ounce of her patrician precision: *Take this off me this instant or I will ruin every person in this building.*

What came out of her mouth was a soft, wet, consonantless *"Mmh-uhhhn"*—a low, breathy animal whine that vibrated helplessly in her nasal cavity and died in the air.

Pippy's eyes went wide with horror. Her tongue felt thick and unweighted; every time her brain sent a motor command to form a crisp *t*, *k*, or *s*, the inductive pads at her larynx damped the neural signal into a smooth, open-throated vowel. She tried again, shouting with all her lung capacity: *Help! Stop!*

"Uhhh-hnnn..."

The sound was a soft, plaintive heifer's lowing—quiet, submissive, and completely stripped of human syntax. Even worse, the collar's rigid chin-cup angled her head slightly downward so she could no longer lift her skull smoothly, turning her frantic shake of the head into a clumsy, bobbing dip.

"Calibration is clean," Dr. Stone said, signing off on the tablet and turning toward the door for what Pippy dimly realized was the last time. "Basic limbic signaling—discomfort, estrus, let-down readiness—remains audible; cortical speech is suppressed. Prep her for transfer to the lower level."

Dr. Stone walked out. One handler packed the case and followed, while the second stayed behind to strip the delicate clinical hydrogel leads off Pippy's skin, replacing them with a single heavy steel D-ring clipped directly to the front of the vocalizer harness.

As Pippy knelt trembling on the bench, her heavy breasts swaying and aching beneath her while she tested her ruined voice in panicked little whines, the handler walked over to the wall phone and dialed a four-digit extension.

"Yeah, Ms. Sanders, it's Ward Three," the woman said casually into the receiver. "Just giving you the heads-up—Dr. Stone signed off on the vocalizer five minutes ago. Yeah, she tried the whole lawyer speech right on cue, just like your profile predicted. She's still got that haughty little edge trying to push through behind her eyes, but between the collar and the udder pressure, she won't last forty-eight hours once Marlene puts her on the line. We're walking her down to the stalls now."

Pippy froze on her hands and knees. *Ms. Sanders. Just like your profile predicted.*

Her mind was completely intact—every memory of the kitchen island, the unstamped cream envelope, the stack of agricultural yield textbooks, and Sora's quiet *"I finish what matters"* crashing together into a single, blinding revelation. She understood everything. And when she opened her mouth to scream Sora's name, all that escaped the black collar around her throat was a long, quivering whine.

Chapter 6: The Introduction of Marlene

They did not bring a wheelchair or a gurney for the transfer.

Instead, the two handlers in black rubber aprons clipped a braided nylon lead rope to the steel ring beneath Pippy's chin, unfastened her forearm straps, and slapped a heavy, open palm between her shoulder blades.

"Up and forward," the taller woman said. "Stay on all fours. You try to stand on two legs with that weight on your chest, you'll pitch straight onto your face."

When the lead rope tugged downward, Pippy crawled off the low bench onto the floor and followed on her hands and knees.

The service elevator at the back of the wing did not open onto travertine marble or cedar-scented carpet. When the heavy steel doors rumbled apart at Sub-Level 2, the air that rolled over Pippy's naked skin was humid, eighty degrees, and thick with the sweet, fermented aroma of molasses mash, warm-wash disinfectant, and fresh cream. The corridor floor was seamless, non-slip poured concrete, sloped toward a central stainless-steel gutter.

As they walked her down the concrete passage on all fours, the handler behind her kept one broad, gloved hand resting on the sway of Pippy's lower back. Every four or five paces, the woman's hand slid back over the bare, upturned globes of Pippy's ass, giving her flank a rhythmic, guiding slap or a slow, appraising squeeze.

And that was where the true horror of the Aetheris peptide cascade revealed itself.

Pippy's mind was still raging with humiliation—she was Penelope Stephens, being led on a tether on her hands and knees like a prize heifer—yet every time that rough, rubber-gloved hand patted her ass or brushed her inner thigh, the rewired neuro-endocrine pathways in her spine fired a jolt of syrupy, molten pleasure straight into her clit. Within thirty yards, her thighs were glistening with involuntary slickness. Her hips gave an automatic, undulating roll against the handler's palm, and a high, needy whine vibrated through the vocalizer before she could bite it back.

They turned her into an open-fronted holding pen framed in galvanized steel pipe and clipped her tether to a low ring set eighteen inches above the concrete floor—high enough to let her shift her knees, too low to ever let her stand upright.

A heavy steel door at the far end of the barn bay swung open, and heavy boots thudded steadily across the concrete.

The woman who stepped into Pippy's pen was built like a veteran stockman—broad-shouldered, weather-lined, her gray-streaked hair cropped close to her skull, wearing a splashed rubber apron over flannel and carrying a ruggedized barn tablet. Unlike Dr. Stone, she didn't look at the screen first; she looked straight at the animal on the floor.

"So this is Sanders's thoroughbred," the woman muttered in a low, gravelly alto. "Lab said you were blowing past the volume curve."

She stepped inside the pipe rail and squatted beside Pippy without ceremony. Before Pippy could flinch, two large, rough, ungloved hands reached beneath her ribcage and cupped both of her swollen, aching breasts at once, lifting them hard to test their heft.

It was not a doctor's touch, and it was not a lover's touch. It was the practiced, calloused grip of a dairywoman checking a prime udder before first milking. Her rough fingers kneaded deep into the hot, tight glandular tissue, checking for knots, while the calloused pads of her thumbs rolled firmly across Pippy's distended, leaking nipples.

A blinding lightning bolt of pleasure-pain tore from Pippy's nipples straight into her womb. Her elbows buckled; her back swayed deeply, pushing her heavy breasts even fuller into the woman's rough palms as a long, shuddering, open-throated whine poured from the vocalizer. Two thin white streams of early milk jetted across the woman's knuckles and splattered onto the warm concrete.

The woman grunted in approval. "Good God, look at that let-down reflex. Cisterns are filling out wide and even, zero fibrosis, skin elasticity top-tier. Yield potential on this one is ten-plus liters a day once she hits peak."

Without removing her left hand from Pippy's heavy breast, the woman slid her right hand backward between Pippy's trembling thighs. Rough, warm fingers parted her dripping labia and pressed two knuckles deep inside her sopping channel, testing the pelvic floor tone and the slick heat clamping around her digits.

Pippy's eyes rolled back. Inside her skull, Penelope Stephens screamed at her body to hold still, to kick, to refuse—and instead her hips rocked desperately backward onto the calloused fingers, her vaginal walls spasming in a series of hot, involuntary tremors while a high, begging whine echoed off the concrete walls.

"Responsive as hell on the pelvic trigger, too," the woman noted, pulling her wet fingers free and wiping them casually on her rubber apron. "That'll make machine attachment a breeze. Half the academic ones fight the cups for a week. You're already begging to be drained."

She stood up, tapped two entries into her ruggedized tablet, and looked down as Pippy trembled on all fours in a widening puddle of her own milk and arousal.

"I’m Marlene Nelson," she said, her tone as practical as a barn boss talking to a new heifer. "I run the production floor once you girls graduate from Stone’s upstairs parlor. Your sponsor’s coming down this evening to sign off on your first draw and taste-test the colostrum."

Marlene reached down, gave Pippy’s bare flank a solid, proprietary slap that sent another humiliating ripple of heat through her pelvis, and then scratched her rough fingers briefly behind Pippy’s ear—the exact same touch Sora had used the day before.

"Drink from the water bowl when it fills, and don't fight the pressure," Marlene said, turning toward the gate. "The ache gets twice as bad right before first harvest, but keeping your spine swayed on all fours takes the edge off."

The steel gate clanged shut.

Left alone in the humid pen, tethered six inches above the sloped concrete, Pippy stared down at the white droplets pooling between her palms. She tried with everything left in her to hold onto a complete English sentence—*I am Penelope Stephens; Sora forged Schedule C; when someone comes I will write the words on the floor with my finger*.

Then a fresh, scalding wave of milk let-down surged into her ducts, stretching her breasts so tight she whimpered aloud, and the complex clauses in her mind fractured under the sheer physical weight of her chest:

Too full. Hurts. Heavy. Need… hands. Need it out.

Down the concrete corridor, a heavy stainless-steel vacuum pump hummed to life. And though Pippy did not yet know what the machine looked like, her swollen body swayed forward against the tether, already aching for its touch.

Chapter 7: The Stall

The finishing stall was narrower than the holding pen—just wide enough for a woman’s shoulders and hips on all fours, framed by thick galvanized steel bars that prevented her from turning around. The concrete floor was textured with shallow drainage grooves that sloped toward a central grate, and the steel tether ring was bolted only ten inches off the deck.

When the two handlers in rubber aprons led Pippy inside and snapped her vocalizer chain to the floor ring, her neck was forced into a permanent downward bow.

She hardly noticed the chain; the pressure inside her chest had crossed from ache into a blinding, hydraulic agony. Her breasts hung beneath her ribcage like twin boulders of fevered flesh, the skin stretched so tight it shone like glazed porcelain under the industrial fluorescents, mapped with a delicate blue lattice of gorged veins. Every heartbeat sent a scalding throb through the packed milk ducts, and thin, creamy ribbons of white leaked continuously from her distended nipples to spatter onto the concrete between her wrists. When one of the handlers ran a broad, gloved palm down her swayed spine and gave the full curve of her ass a brisk positioning slap, Pippy's pelvis jerked automatically, a high, ragged whine whistling through the baffle at her throat.

"Udders are at max tension," the handler called out, tapping the wall intercom with a wet knuckle. "Get the cluster on her before she blows a duct."

Heavy polyurethane wheels rumbled across the concrete. A stainless-steel portable milking unit was rolled up to the side of the bars—a cylindrical glass receiver jar flanked by a vacuum regulator, trailing two thick, transparent silicone hoses that terminated in heavy, brushed-steel teat shells lined with soft black rubber inflations.

The vacuum pump switched on with a deep, rhythmic *chug-hiss, chug-hiss* that vibrated right through the concrete into Pippy's palms and knees.

One handler straddled Pippy's lower back to keep her hips squared while the second reached underneath her chest, wiped her leaking nipples with a warm antiseptic cloth, and lifted the first suction cup to her left breast.

With a wet, greedy *shuck*, the soft rubber cuff swallowed her entire dark areola and sealed tight. Seconds later, the second shell locked onto her right breast.

Then the pulsator valve opened, and the first mechanical draw pulled hard.

Pippy's eyes flew wide open as a long, broken cry was damped into a trembling nasal low by the collar. The relief was so violent, so immediate, that her elbows nearly gave way beneath her. As the vacuum drew two thick, pressurized jets of hot white milk out of her engorged cisterns and into the sight-glasses, the crushing pressure behind her sternum dissolved into a tidal wave of molten, narcotic pleasure. The synthetic peptide cascade had wired her let-down reflex straight into her pudendal nerve: every rhythmic squeeze-and-pull of the rubber liners around her stretched nipples felt like a skilled, relentless mouth sucking direct current out of her clit. Her hips rocked forward into empty air, slick fluids spilling down her inner thighs as her vaginal walls clenched in helpless, rhythmic syncopation with the pump.

Don't give in to it, Penelope Stephens raged inside the shrinking fortress of her skull, staring down at the twin white rivers pulsing through the clear tubing beneath her chest. *It's a mechanical vacuum pump. It's neuro-chemical conditioning. Keep your mind separate—*

The heavy steel door at the front of the bay clanged open.

Through the steel bars of her stall, Pippy lifted her chin as far as the ten-inch floor chain allowed.

Sora walked down the central concrete aisle between Marlene and a dairy technician. She was not wearing her baggy charcoal sweater today; she wore Pippy's tailored bone-colored silk blouse beneath the camel coat, her dark hair pinned up with the silver clip Pippy had left on the bathroom vanity three mornings ago.

They stopped directly in front of Pippy's bars.

Pippy stared up from all fours, her face crimson, her heavy breasts rhythmic and swaying inside the steel suction shells while the machine chugged away beneath her. Humiliation and fury surged so hot in her chest that she lunged half an inch against the floor ring, trying to spit Sora's name through her teeth—and produced only a pathetic, warbling *"Mmmm-uhhhhn"* as the pump pulled another thick draw from her nipples and forced her spine into a deeper, involuntary sway.

A slow, luminous smile spread across Sora's face. There was nothing hidden or subterranean about it now; she looked utterly, radiantly entertained.

The technician unlatched a sample valve on the glass receiver jar, drew off six ounces of warm, frothy milk into a clean tasting tumbler, and handed it to Sora. "First draw off the primary cistern, Ms. Sanders. Four point eight percent butterfat, high sweet-protein index. Top one percent of the cohort."

Sora took the warm glass in her small hand, held it up to the fluorescent light to admire its rich, creamy opacity, and raised it in a silent toast toward Pippy behind the bars. Then she lifted the rim to her lips and took a slow, appreciative sip, closing her eyes as it slid down her throat.

When she opened her eyes, a faint white crescent clung to her upper lip. She licked it away slowly, looking straight down into Pippy's horrified, wide-awake eyes.

"Sweet," Sora murmured, loud enough for the entire bay to hear over the pumps. "Rich, clean, and not a trace of bitterness. Look at her, Marlene. Two days ago she stood at my kitchen island in a cream silk robe and asked me how I could stand wading through utilitarian plumbing to calculate how much protein a barn could squeeze out of a heifer."

Marlene let out a dry, gravelly chuckle beside her. "Well, she's answering your research question firsthand now."

Sora crouched just outside the steel bars, resting one forearm on her knee while holding the half-full glass of Pippy's milk in the other. Her dark eyes locked onto Pippy's face with intimate, surgical clarity.

"You didn't read Section 14, did you, Pippy?" Sora asked softly. "Because people like Penelope Stephens don't need to read the fine print when the universe is busy validating their genetic superiority. Do you want to know what my dissertation was actually about? *Cognitive Hubris as a Predictive Marker for High-Yield Endocrine Conversion*. Aetheris pays a fifty-thousand-dollar recruitment bounty for ninety-ninth-percentile females who will sign a voluntary reclassification waiver out of sheer vanity—plus thirty percent of ongoing dairy royalties to the Custodial Sponsor on Schedule C."

Inside her skull, Pippy's mind shrieked. She tried to wrench her body backward to tear the suction cups off her chest, to claw through the bars at Sora's smiling face.

Instead, the backward pull tugged the heavy steel teat shells taut against her engorged nipples at the exact moment the pulsator shifted into its high-frequency stripping phase.

A blinding, catastrophic wave of pleasure detonated at the core of Pippy's pelvis. Her knees slid wider on the wet concrete; her lower back dipped into a shameless lordosis; and right there, three feet from Sora's face, Pippy's body betrayed her with a violent, shattering orgasm. Her thighs shuddered uncontrollably, clear fluids pattering onto the sloped concrete drain as a long, high, trembling animal keen poured out of the vocalizer.

"Look at her back arch when the vacuum steps up," Sora said, her voice warm with genuine delight as she watched Pippy convulse on the machine. "That isn't resistance. That's her body finally discovering what all those superior genetics were actually built for. How does it feel, Pippy? No more seminar notes. No more pretending you care about ethics policy. Just a warm stall and a machine that doesn't care how smart you used to be as long as the jar fills up."

Sora tipped the glass back, drained the last warm swallow of Pippy's milk, and handed the empty tumbler back to the technician.

"Keep her on the extended draw until the cisterns are completely stripped," Sora said, rising and smoothing the lapels of Pippy's camel coat. "She looks like she's finally where she belongs."

As Sora's Italian heels clicked away down the concrete corridor, Pippy hung sagging in the floor chain, sobbing in voiceless, broken whines as aftershock after aftershock rippled from her rhythmically tugged nipples to her clenching womb. The humiliation was total—and yet, as the last ounces were drawn from her aching chest, the warm, narcotic wash of endorphins flooded over her rage like heavy cream poured over a fire, leaving her mind terrifyingly quiet.

Emptying, a small, drugged voice whispered in the ruins of her thoughts. *Hurts gone. Machine… feels good.*

Chapter 8: The Ego Death

When the suction cups were finally unsealed and wheeled away, a bruised, trembling shard of Penelope Stephens crawled out from beneath the endorphin fog and made one last calculation.

She could not unfasten the steel buckle of the vocalizer with numb, shaking fingers. She could not break the galvanized floor chain. And she could not stop her rewired nervous system from climaxing when the rubber liners squeezed her nipples.

But she still understood thermodynamics. A mammalian gland could not synthesize four liters of high-fat milk out of nothing. If she refused to take in calories, the production curve would collapse, Sora's royalty stream would dry up, and Dr. Stone would be forced to pull her off the line.

Ten minutes later, a handler slid a low, wide stainless-steel trough through the bottom slot of the front bars and bolted it to the floor right beneath Pippy's nose. From a galvanized bucket, the woman ladled two gallons of thick, steaming mash into the pan.

The aroma filled the stall instantly—warm malted barley, sweet clover honey, vanilla lipid cream, and a sharp, pheromonal trace of synthetic fenugreek.

Pippy's stomach contracted with a sudden, violent cramp of hunger, saliva flooding her mouth before she could stop it. Deliberately, stubbornly, she locked her jaw shut, turned her head ninety degrees to the left against the chin-cup of the vocalizer, and stared at the blank concrete wall.

I will not eat from a trough, she swore silently. *I will starve the machine.*

For three hours, she held the line.

What Pippy had not accounted for was that the Aetheris peptide implants did not wait for dietary intake to initiate the next lactation cycle. If the bloodstream lacked free glucose and lipids, the endocrine cascade simply cannibalized her own glycogen reserves while spiking her hypothalamic ghrelin and prolactin receptors to emergency levels.

By hour four, her breasts had swollen back to an even tighter, more monstrous fullness than before—heavy, rock-hard globes that dragged at her chest while her blood sugar plummeted into a cold, trembling abyss. Worse, the aroma of the warm, honeyed mash sitting six inches beneath her chin no longer smelled merely like food; to her hijacked limbic brain, it smelled like oxygen to a drowning swimmer.

At hour five, the handlers wheeled the milking machine back to her stall.

When the cups sealed to her nipples this time, the draw was excruciating. Because she was dehydrated and calorie-depleted, the thick, concentrated milk pulled through her parched ducts like molten glass, triggering violent uterine and pectoral cramps alongside the ruthless mechanical suction. Pippy writhed on all fours, whining in high, ragged gasps as the machine wrung her dry without the cushioning endorphin flood that required blood glucose to synthesize.

When the cups were pulled off her raw, throbbing nipples, one of the rubber-aproned workers glanced down at the untouched trough.

"Look at this one—still thinks she's at a faculty dinner," the worker muttered, unbolting the cold pan and swapping in a fresh, steaming trough of sweet cream-mash that smelled so intensely of warm vanilla and malt that tears sprang straight into Pippy's eyes.

The worker reached through the bars, gripped a handful of Pippy's golden-brown hair, and pushed her face down until her nose was half an inch above the steaming surface.

"Nobody force-feeds you down here, princess," the woman said flatly, letting go of her hair. "The implants will pull four liters out of your bones every six hours whether you eat or not. You don't eat, the draw hurts like hell and your brain fries on ketosis. You eat the mash, the beta-endorphins kick in and you float. Up to you."

The handler walked away.

Pippy knelt over the steaming trough, her whole body shaking with hypoglycemic tremors, her empty breasts cramping, her nostrils filled with the rich, dizzying sweetness of the mash. She tried to summon the face of Penelope Stephens in the bathroom mirror—the cream silk robe, the seminar room, the proud spine.

The image flickered and went dark. She had no spoon. Her wrists were raw from bracing her weight, and the ten-inch chain wouldn't let her sit back to use her hands.

With a low, broken whimper of total surrender, Pippy dropped her mouth into the warm trough.

The first mouthful hit her tongue like liquid heaven—thick, velvety, impossibly sweet, and laced with fast-acting neuro-relaxants that bloomed across her palate and rushed straight to the base of her skull. All dignity evaporated in a single heartbeat. She did not eat; she gorged, thrusting her face deep into the pan, lapping and gulping the warm, creamy gruel with loud, wet, rhythmic sweeps of her tongue while white mash smeared across her chin and cheeks.

Within three minutes, as the sugars and lactogenic lipids hit her bloodstream, the cramping pain in her chest melted into a lush, heavy, golden warmth. She felt her breasts immediately begin to swell and fill again—not with sharp agony now, but with a rich, sensual tightness that made her clit throb and her hips sway lazily from side to side while she licked the steel corners of the trough spotless.

When the worker came back to collect the empty pan, she reached in, ran a rough hand underneath Pippy's rapidly refilling left breast to test its warm pliability, and gave Pippy's bare flank a firm, approving slap.

Instead of flinching, Pippy's slick thighs parted wider, her hips pushing back into the worker's palm with a soft, grateful whine.

"There she goes," the worker chuckled. "She's learning. Good subject."

Good subject, echoed through the warm, syrupy quiet of Pippy's mind. The complex grammar of resistance—*if, because, therefore, tomorrow*—had dissolved into the sweet mash and the rising tide in her chest. When the machine rolled up to her bars four hours later and the soft black cups sealed around her aching nipples, there was no inner voice left to fight the pull.

There was only the trough. The fullness. The machine. And the warm, white river leaving her body while she rocked her hips and whined for more.

Chapter 9: The Herd

On the sixth morning, the front gate of her solitary stall swung open.

A handler clipped a short lead to her vocalizer ring and tugged once. Pippy did not need a slap on the flank to move; she crawled forward on her hands and knees with a smooth, practiced four-beat gait, her heavy, milk-swollen breasts swinging rhythmically beneath her ribcage with every stride.

They led her out of the isolation corridor and through a pair of wide PVC strip-curtains into the Main Production Floor.

The space was vast, humid, and humming like a cathedral of industry. Two long, parallel herringbone platforms of grooved concrete stretched down the length of the hall, divided into forty open-sided steel stanchions. Above the stalls ran a gleaming overhead network of Pyrex glass pipelines through which thick, foaming white rivers pulsed in continuous waves toward the bulk chilling tanks at the far end of the bay. The air was heavy with the mingled scents of warm sweet-mash, ozone, lanolin, and the musky, unmistakable perfume of forty hyper-ovulating female bodies.

Every single stanchion save one was occupied.

Down both rows, naked women knelt on all fours on the rubberized deck pads, their necks fitted with identical black vocalizer collars, their swayed backs rising and falling as their heavy breasts hung down into the four-hose stainless-steel milking clusters suspended beneath the platforms. There were no human words anywhere in the hall—only the hypnotic, collective *chug-hiss, chug-hiss* of the master vacuum line and a chorus of soft, breathy whines and low, rhythmic grunts drifting through the steam.

Pippy was guided up the ramp into Stanchion 14, right in the center of the left row. The steel neck-yoke closed gently around her shoulders and the vocalizer ring clicked onto the low bar.

As she settled her knees into the warm rubber depressions and arched her back to ease the heavy pull on her chest, she turned her head slightly and looked two feet to her left, into Stanchion 13.

The woman kneeling on all fours beside her had high, aristocratic cheekbones, dark auburn hair cropped short at the nape so it wouldn't foul the neck-yoke, and a tiny, crescent-shaped fencing scar just above her left eyebrow.

A dim, phantom spark flared in the back of Pippy's snowed-under cortex.

Clara.

Clara Vance. The twenty-four-year-old bio-law prodigy who had taken first prize in the National Fellows Colloquium the previous spring—the only woman on campus whose intellect Pippy had ever secretly envied, and who had abruptly "withdrawn to accept a private research post in Geneva" back in October.

Clara was kneeling with her forehead resting blissfully on her crossed forearms, her eyes half-lidded and glassy. Beneath her ribcage, her breasts were even larger and fuller than Pippy's, swaying heavily in the harness as two transparent hoses ran thick and white into the overhead Pyrex line. With every pulse of the vacuum pump, Clara's hips rocked backward in a slow, automatic circle, a trickle of clear arousal glistening down her inner thighs while a soft, contented *"Mmh-hnnn"* vibrated from her throat collar.

Clara's half-shut eyes drifted sideways and met Pippy's.

There was no shock in Clara's gaze. No shame. No flicker of legal theory or competitive fire. There was only the warm, placid, bovine recognition of one herd animal acknowledging another settling into the stanchion beside her before Clara's eyelids fluttered shut again on the next strong pull of her pump.

Any last, microscopic ghost of Penelope Stephens's resistance looked into Clara Vance's blissed-out eyes and simply ceased to exist. *If Clara is here,* the fading spark registered, *then this is what we were all for.*

A handler stepped between their stalls, wiped Pippy's dripping nipples, and lifted the central cluster.

Shuck. Shuck.

The two heavy cups sealed onto Pippy's breasts, and because the entire herringbone row shared a single master pulsator line, the vacuum draw hit Pippy's nipples on the exact same beat as Clara's.

Pippy let out a long, shuddering whine that harmonized seamlessly with the sound coming from Stanchion 13. Being milked in isolation had been overwhelming; being milked in synchronized lockstep with thirty-nine other women was oceanic. When the master valve clicked open, forty backs arched in unison; forty pairs of heavy breasts surged white into the overhead glass river; forty pairs of slick thighs trembled and rocked to the same mechanical heartbeat.

A worker walking the rear gutter paused behind Stanchions 13 and 14, running one rough hand across Clara's flank and the other across Pippy's upturned ass before lifting Pippy's left breast to check the draw. Both women pushed their hips back into the worker's palms simultaneously, whining in stereo.

"Look at Fourteen," the worker called down the line. "Good integration. She's matching Thirteen's rhythm on her very first pull."

When the stainless-steel feed troughs slid open along the front rail an hour later, Pippy did not wait a single second. Side by side with Clara Vance, she lowered her mouth into the warm, honeyed mash and lapped greedily until the steel was clean, feeling her breasts immediately begin to tighten and fill for the afternoon draw.

She no longer knew her surname. She no longer knew what a university was. Looking down the steam-lit row of swaying backs and pulsing white hoses, her mind held only the warm, rhythmic safety of the barn:

Full. Machine. Pull. Empty. Herd. Good.

Chapter 10: Peak Yield

Time no longer divided itself into mornings, afternoons, or calendar days. On the Main Production Floor, time existed only as the pendulum swing between hydraulic pressure and mechanical release.

Every four hours, the stainless-steel trough along the front rail slid open with a pneumatic *hiss*, filling with steaming, vanilla-malted mash. Pippy did not wait for a handler's palm on her spine. Side by side with Clara Vance in Stanchion 13, she plunged her mouth into the warm gruel the instant the gate lifted, lapping and gulping with rhythmic, greedy sweeps of her tongue until the steel pan shone.

Within ninety minutes of feeding, the metabolic furnace in her chest ignited. Her breasts swelled beneath her ribcage into massive, vein-marbled globes of high-tension flesh, the skin stretched so taut and glossy that the slightest brush of warm barn air across her distended nipples sent a scalding ache straight into her groin. She would widen her knees in the rubber depressions, sway her lower back into a deep, waiting arch, and press her dripping nipples downward toward the floor grate, whining softly through the black collar until the handlers arrived with the clusters.

Yet even after her surname and her syntax had dissolved into the steam of the barn, one deep, structural vestige of Penelope Stephens remained intact: the bone-deep compulsion to outperform everyone around her.

Above each stanchion hung a digital flow-meter displaying the producer's real-time liter volume and butterfat percentage in glowing amber numerals. For her first week on the herringbone line, Stanchion 13—Clara Vance—had held the top mark on the center row at 11.2 liters per cycle. Pippy could not read the technical labels anymore, but she understood the glowing numbers above their heads, and she understood the warm, lingering approval in Marlene's rough hands whenever a producer's meter flashed green.

On her tenth day on the line, Marlene walked down the central aisle carrying a secondary hardware module trailed by braided pneumatic leads. She stopped behind Stanchion 14, resting a heavy boot on the concrete curb while Pippy knelt swollen and trembling, milk already pattering from her nipples onto the grate.

"Fourteen's within point-two liters of taking the row lead from Thirteen," Marlene told the technician beside her, running a calloused palm down Pippy's slick flank and giving her upturned ass a solid, appraising slap that made Pippy's hips buck and a wet whine whistle from her collar. "She's ready for the closed-loop coupling saddle. Let's see what she puts out when her pelvic floor drives the pulsator."

While Pippy's heavy breasts were sealed into the twin stainless-steel teat shells beneath her chest, the technician reached between her spread thighs from behind and fitted a contoured silicone saddle directly over her swollen clit and perineum, anchoring a warm, ribbed internal probe deep inside her dripping channel.

When the master pump kicked on with its deep *chug-hiss*, the two systems locked into a feedback loop.

Every ounce of warm milk drawn through the sight-glasses stepped up the micro-vibration against her clit; and every time her vaginal walls clenched around the internal probe, her hypothalamus flooded her bloodstream with a fresh spike of oxytocin that blew open her upper milk cisterns.

Pippy's eyes rolled back in her head as the first coupled draw tore through her. It was no longer merely relief mixed with pleasure; it was a relentless, self-amplifying engine that turned her entire nervous system into a single white-hot conduit of output. She braced her palms flat against the rubber deck, bowed her spine as deep as her ligaments would allow, and pushed her heavy breasts down into the sucking cups with desperate, animal focus. Beside her in Stanchion 13, Clara Vance was moaning in low, steady waves, her overhead meter climbing through *3.4… 3.5… 3.6*.

More, pulsed through the narrow, feverish corridor of Pippy's brain. *Full. Push. More.*

She rocked her hips backward onto the thick internal sensor in time with the vacuum strokes, surrendering every nerve ending in her body to the pump. Her first orgasm hit at minute four, driving a thick, foaming surge of cream through the Pyrex risers; her second hit at minute nine, stronger and deeper, her thighs quivering uncontrollably as the amber digits above Stanchion 14 ticked past Clara's mark—*3.8… 3.9… 4.1*—and flashed bright emerald green.

Marlene crouched beside her head, her rough fingers sliding underneath Pippy's heaving chest to squeeze the base of her left breast even as the cup worked.

"Look at that flow rate," Marlene said, her gravelly voice rich with the exact pride a stockman reserves for a grand-champion heifer at peak season. "Prime producer. Twelve point four liters across the cycle, five-point-one butterfat. You just took top spot on the whole north line, girl."

Marlene scratched her calloused knuckles firmly behind Pippy's ear.

Inside Pippy's snowed-under mind, a hot, intoxicating bloom of triumph burst open and merged with the rolling aftershocks of her climax. *Prime producer. Top spot. Best.* It was the only ambition she had left, and it felt cleaner, warmer, and more absolute than any academic prize she had ever chased. She leaned her cheek into Marlene's rough knuckles, whining in shameless, trembling gratitude as the machine stripped the last rich drops from her chest.

Chapter 11: The Investor

Three weeks later, the overhead fluorescents along the central herringbone aisle were raised to full inspection brightness during the midday draw.

Pippy knelt in Stanchion 14, deep in the narcotic trance of peak production. Her body had finished reshaping itself around the work: her shoulders and thighs were soft and curved from the high-lipid mash, her spine held a permanent, supple sway, and her breasts hung beneath her ribcage in magnificent, heavy abundance, sealed tightly into the polished steel cups while the pelvic saddle hummed between her dripping thighs. Her mind drifted on a warm white sea of four-word rhythms: *Pull. Empty. Prime. Good.*

Then the heavy double doors at the head of the bay swung open, and the sound of crisp leather soles echoed over the rhythmic *chug-hiss* of the forty pumps.

It was not just Marlene and Sora this time.

Walking beside them down the raised concrete catwalk were Dr. Daria Stone and two older men in bespoke dark overcoats carrying leather portfolios—the exact kind of patrician foundation directors Pippy had once spent her life preparing to impress at university colloquia.

And at the center of the group walked Sora.

She wore a tailored charcoal suit of unmistakable luxury, a gold Aetheris Senior Fellow lapel pin gleaming on her breast pocket. In her hands she carried a slim presentation tablet. They stopped directly in front of Stanchions 13 and 14.

"Here is the empirical core of the paper, gentlemen," Sora said, her clear, even voice carrying effortlessly over the hum of the vacuum lines. "When I first proposed in my dissertation that ninety-ninth-percentile cognitive arrogance correlates directly with rapid hypothalamic submission under prolactin-oxytocin coupling, the department ethics committee called it theoretical. Dr. Stone gave me the resources to prove it in the field."

Dr. Stone inclined her silver-templed head with genuine professional respect. "Sora's screening matrix has reduced our subject conditioning time by sixty-two percent. Look at the two units in front of you."

Sora gestured with her stylus toward Stanchion 13, then toward Stanchion 14.

"In Stanchion 13, you have Clara Vance—former national fellow in bio-law," Sora explained with the calm, bloodless precision of an economist reading a quarterly chart. "And here in Stanchion 14 is my primary case study, Subject AE-09-PS—formerly Penelope Stephens. Eight weeks ago, Subject 14 was my roommate. She spent twenty minutes every morning lecturing me on her genetic superiority while I logged her psychometric baseline across the breakfast counter."

Pippy lifted her heavy head two inches against the steel neck-yoke, her glassy, half-lidded eyes fixing on the dark-haired woman standing outside her bars.

Somewhere deep beneath the layers of endorphins and sweet-mash, a phantom nerve twitched at the sound of the two words *Penelope Stephens* and the sight of the two university board members staring down at her naked, swayed body. For three seconds, a ghost of the old horror tried to surface—she was on all fours in a steel stanchion, her heavy breasts pumping white milk into glass pipes while her roommate presented her to a committee like a prized lab rat.

"Watch her biometric trace when I trigger the verbal recognition cue," Sora told the two investors, tapping a command on her screen. She stepped right up to the galvanized bars and looked straight down into Pippy's eyes. "Penelope. Tell the committee what you think of my thesis now."

The phantom spark in Pippy's brain flared—and collided head-on with the closed-loop pelvic saddle and the vacuum pump.

Because the Aetheris protocol had rewired every spike of autonomic arousal directly into her let-down reflex, the sudden rush of adrenaline from being stared at by the committee didn't make her fight; it triggered an immediate, massive surge of milk ejection and clitoral vibration.

Right in front of the two board members, Dr. Stone, and Sora, Pippy's elbows trembled, her back arched deeper, and her hips rocked helplessly backward onto the pelvic probe as a thick, frothing surge of milk flooded the sight-glass. A long, quivering, open-throated whine of pure physical surrender poured from her collar while her overhead meter blinked green: *12.8 LITERS—COHORT RECORD.*

One of the older men let out a low, impressed breath, adjusting his glasses as he studied the glowing telemetry board. "Good Lord. Her cortisol didn't even blip. The intellectual ego has been completely re-channeled into production drive."

"That is the beauty of the model," Sora said calmly, not a flicker of pity or malice in her dark eyes—only the clean satisfaction of an architect whose bridge has held double its rated load. "You don't destroy their need to be exceptional. You simply redefine *exceptional* as liters per day. She works harder to beat Stanchion 13 on the milk meter than she ever worked in a seminar room."

Through the haze of her climax, Pippy heard Sora's voice and saw the glowing green numerals above her stall. The fleeting ghost of her name vanished back into the warm white dark. All she knew was that Sora was watching her numbers, the men in coats were nodding at her meter, and she had beaten Thirteen again. She whined softly, arching her chest harder into the rubber cups so Sora would see how well she emptied.

"Remarkable work, Fellow Sanders," the senior investor said, closing his portfolio. "The board is prepared to fund the commercial expansion across all four regional campuses, with you as Director of Candidate Acquisition."

"Thank you," Sora said smoothly. She glanced down at Marlene. "Her initial twelve-week residential window closes on Friday. Have the final reclassification paperwork ready at Stanchion 14 for the morning draw."

"Will do, Ms. Sanders," Marlene nodded.

As their footsteps receded down the catwalk toward the next bank of stalls, Pippy's head drooped back down between her forearms, her heavy breasts pulsing in time with the pump, her mind washed clean of everything except the rhythm and the warm, desperate pride of her green light.

Chapter 12: The Payout

On Friday morning—the eighty-fourth day since Penelope Stephens had stepped out of the black town car in her camel coat and Italian heels—the handlers did not attach the milking cluster to Stanchion 14 when the morning mash troughs were cleared.

All down the herringbone line, thirty-nine other machines chugged to life, filling the humid hall with the familiar chorus of suction, flowing milk, and soft, rhythmic whines. Only Stanchion 14 remained unhooked.

Within twenty minutes, Pippy was out of her mind with pressure.

Because she had gorged on a double ration of high-calorie mash at dawn, her breasts hung beneath her ribcage like two scalding, over-inflated weights, stretched so tight that continuous white streams hissed from her dark, aching nipples onto the concrete grate below. She shifted her knees restlessly in the rubber wells, swaying her back, nudging her chin against the low steel bar, and letting out high, frantic whines as she stared down at the idle stainless-steel teat cups hanging on their hook beside her stall.

Two sets of footsteps approached down the concrete aisle: Marlene's heavy wash-down boots and the crisp click of Sora's heels.

They stopped outside Stanchion 14. Marlene held the two heavy steel suction cups in one rough hand and a yellow polymer ear-tag applicator in the other. Sora held a single legal clipboard stamped with the silver *A* of the Aetheris Institute.

"Twelve-week initial residential phase concludes at nine o'clock," Marlene said in her flat, practical barn voice, glancing at the wall clock. "Per Section 14 of the underwriting code, any subject exceeding ten liters daily transitions automatically to Permanent Class-A Agricultural Livestock under the Sponsor of Record—unless the subject verbally asserts her legal surname and requests discharge during the statutory sixty-second unbaffled window."

Sora looked down through the galvanized bars at the trembling, milk-dripping figure kneeling on all fours on the concrete.

"How many years do you estimate she'll hold peak yield before she tapers, Marlene?" Sora asked conversationally.

Marlene squinted at Pippy's deep chest and swayed hips with a veteran stockman's eye. "With genetics like hers and a twelve-liter baseline? Five, maybe six years of prime grade-A output if we keep the mash rich, and another three on the secondary breeding-and-wet-nurse line after that. At thirty percent sponsor royalty plus the base $275,000 conversion payout that vests in your account this morning, she's easily worth a hundred and eighty grand a year to you on the hoof."

"Clean return," Sora murmured, uncapping Pippy's old fountain pen over the clipboard. "Open the baffle for the statutory minute, Marlene."

Marlene reached through the bars and flipped the small steel toggle switch on the side of Pippy's black vocalizer collar.

The green LED turned amber. Instantly, the micro-inductive nerve block at Pippy's larynx and tongue switched off.

For the first time in eleven weeks, Pippy's vocal cords and tongue were completely free.

Sora crouched outside the bars, holding out the clipboard and looking straight into Pippy's flushed, sweat-sheened face. Beneath Pippy's chest, Marlene held the two warm, soft-rimmed suction cups just two inches below her swollen, leaking nipples—close enough that Pippy could hear the greedy *hiss* of the open vacuum valves waiting to drain her agony and flood her pelvis with bliss.

"The vocalizer is off, Penelope," Sora said clearly, her voice calm and recorded by the overhead microphone. "Your twelve-week study is over. All you have to do is speak your full legal name and say *I wish to leave*, and Marlene will unclip the yoke and return you to the upstairs ward. Or you can stay on the line as my permanent agricultural property. You have sixty seconds."

The words drifted across the humid air and landed inside Pippy's skull.

Penelope. Leave. Property.

With the inductive current off her throat, a dim, ancient muscle memory stirred in her tongue. She knew there was a sound she used to make with her lips—a sharp, proud word beginning with a *P* that belonged to a tall girl in a cream silk robe standing by a high window.

Then a fresh, scalding wave of let-down pressure surged through her engorged breasts, so heavy and sharp that twin jets of hot milk sprayed across Marlene's waiting knuckles, and between Pippy's thighs her empty, aching sex clenched around nothing.

That girl in the silk robe was cold, far away, and alone.

Here, the concrete was warm. Here, the sweet mash filled her belly. Here, the green numerals above Stanchion 14 said she was the best on the row, and two inches beneath her throbbing nipples waited the only thing in the universe that mattered.

Pippy did not shape a consonant. She did not lift her chin.

With her throat completely unblocked and her tongue completely free, she dropped her head between her shoulders, bowed her back deep, pushed her heavy, dripping breasts straight down into the mouths of the waiting steel cups, and let out a long, raw, open-throated animal low—begging to be milked.

Shuck. Shuck.

Marlene's calloused hands guided the cuffs home, sealing both engorged peaks into the rhythmic vacuum while the rear saddle locked against her clit. The first massive draw pulled the agony out of her chest in a thick white torrent and replaced it with a blinding, oceanic wave of narcotic pleasure that made her knees slide wide and her voice break into a high, rhythmic chorus of grateful whines.

"Sixty seconds elapsed," Marlene said for the recording, flipping the collar toggle back to permanent lock and snapping a yellow plastic livestock tag—**AE-09-PRIME**—through the side ring of the harness. "Zero verbal assertion recorded. Subject actively self-presented to the cluster."

"Sign here as Owner of Record, Ms. Sanders," Marlene added, tapping the bottom line of the deed.

Sora signed her name with Pippy's fountain pen, the dark ink smooth and final on the page. She watched for one last moment as the hoses beneath Stanchion 14 ran thick and white into the overhead glass pipeline, and as the creature who had once been Penelope Stephens rocked her hips and whined in mindless, ecstatic synchronization with the herd.

"Keep her on the peak-yield ration, Marlene," Sora said, tucking the deed into her coat pocket and turning toward the sunlit world waiting upstairs. "She's paying for my new apartment."

When their footsteps faded down the concrete aisle, nothing remained in Stanchion 14 except the warm steam, the smell of sweet mash, and the steady, relentless *chug-hiss* of the pump.

Pippy lowered her forehead to the rubber mat between her wrists and let her eyes drift shut. Her old name was gone. Her mind was snowed under by the warm, white tide leaving her chest. Above her head, the emerald numbers glowed bright in the steam, and as the machine pulled again, she arched her back and leaned into the only life she had left.