

NEURALSPLYCE

**BY HIS
DIVINE
LIGHT**



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851 words

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Zaydius observed in silence as Malchion carved five crimson lines on the young maid's tender back. While she wept, Zaydius methodically wiped her blood and torn flesh from the braided leather whip. He returned the whip to its velvet-lined case and placed the case in the car trunk.

Malchion, menacing in his black secret police uniform, slid into the rear seat. "Unrepentant harlot should appreciate serving a cleric. Kindness breeds weakness. One day he will see the wisdom of consigning her to the Divine Light."

"The Divine One shows mercy through you," Zaydius intoned.

"More servants should emulate you. You were quite rebellious, but my firm hand taught you to be respectful and compliant."

Fire raged behind Zaydius' eyes as he relived his many whippings, yet his face remained impassive as he chauffeured his master through the city.

The day unfolded like every other, an efficiently scheduled itinerary of Malchion's officious cruelty. A merchant still selling goods decreed forbidden two days earlier, received seventeen lashes. A scholar, accused of whispering dissent, was dragged away to face the Tribunal of Truth. At each stop, Zaydius played his part: the quiet aide, the respectful driver. And the silent distributor.

"A gift for your troubles," he'd murmur to the maids, aides-de-camp, and administrative assistants. An almost imperceptible exchange – a vial, small and unassuming, pressed into their hands. They knew what they had to do.

That evening, elites gorged themselves at a banquet on the Tribunal of Truth's manicured lawn, oblivious to the suffering of those who made their feast possible. Nearby, twenty muzzled men and women stood chained to steel posts, the accused awaiting the Ritual of Divine Verdict.

Zaydius brushed phantom specks of dust from the bottom of Malchion's jacket, depositing a subtle dusting of gray nanoparticles detectable by orbiting sensors.

Malchion ascended the dais, malevolent in the red glow of three large signal lights. In front of the cameras, his amplified voice boomed with divine authority. "Blessed be to the Divine One, and his Council of Prophets, who marked the accused for judgment."

A signal light turned from red to green. A hush fell over the crowd. The first satellite had locked onto its targets.

"Remember," Malchion intoned, "the accused are neither guilty nor innocent. That judgment belongs to the Divine One through his Divine Verdict. Those who confessed will die Clean, their souls prepared. The unrepentant...will die Unclean and tempt His wrathful judgment."

The second light turned green.

"The Clean," he declared, "bear His mark on their foreheads, to receive the swift embrace of the Divine Light." A camera zoomed in on a chained man with a gray streaked forehead. "The Unclean are marked upon their midsections for a protracted and agonizing death before eternal torment."

The last light flared green.

"By His Divine Light," Malchion bellowed, eyes blazing with zeal, "I release their souls into His custody for judgment!"

He slammed his fist on the activation button.

Red laser beams danced around the banquet tablets. One-by-one, dignitaries slumped forward, blood spraying from holes in their head and chest. The beams flickered away to find more targets throughout the city.

Seconds later, the beams returned to lance through Malchion's intestines. He fell to his knees, a gurgling sound escaping his lips as he collapsed to the floor.

The chained figures remained untouched.

Zaydius stepped onto the dais and knelt beside Malchion, lifting his head. "In His divine name," Zaydius proclaimed, his voice ringing across the silent field, "you and your government stand accused of intolerable cruelty and subverting His divine will, a blessing meant for all!"

"You..." Malchion gasped, blood bubbling from the corners of his mouth. "are behind this? Get my whip." He gasped for air. "With my dying breath, I shall administer your punishment."

"I am the leader of a silent resistance," Zaydius said while his co-conspirators unchained the accused. "We are the invisible workforce whose whipped and bloodied backs support this regime. Your hubris sowed your destruction when you outsourced management of the tools of our oppression to us."

Zaydius told of the months-long plot. The stolen algorithm for programming the nanoparticles in the marking signal. Fabricating their own nanoparticles in secret to mark the clothing of their masters. His replacement of Malchion's vial with inert nanoparticles before today's laser strike.

Malchion's face contorted, a mask of disbelief and fury. "Simple-minded fools! Without the elites to guide you, the country will descend into chaos, lawlessness. You'll succumb to your animal desires!"

"You treated us as disposable," Zaydius countered, his voice hard as steel. "Yet, we make your lives possible. We cook and clean, dress you, drive you, fix what's broken - because you can't. We toil in your factories and offices - because you can't. We're the beating heart of this country, yet you profit from our sweat and blood. *You* cannot live without *us*. Today, we reclaim what was stolen and restore the country to what it was before your kind usurped it."

Zaydius dropped the whip on Malchion's chest. Watching the light fade from his former master's eyes, he declared, "Keep it. We won't need it."

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