

# Female, Recreational



All 10  
Parts

**Badger Therese**

**Female, Recreational**

**©2017 Badger Therese**

**Cover Illustration by 2Loose2Trek**

**12/19/2020**

## **Female, Recreational Contents**

[Female, Recreational, Part1: The Taking of Hannah](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 2: Hannah to the Stacks](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 3: Hannah For Sale](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 4: The Assessment of Hannah](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 5: The Sale of Hannah](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 6: Hannah to the Petrosyans](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 7: Hannah in a Strange World](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 8: Hannah Imperiled](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 9: Confessions of a Slave Girl](#)

[Female, Recreational, Part 10: Survival](#)

## **Female, Recreational, Part1: The Taking of Hannah**

### **The Bowl and the Bible**

With a click and a jangle of keys, Mrs. Alvarez unlocked the door to the storage area and stepped through the darkness to Hannah's cage, still on the table where it had been set three days ago.

Hannah had no way to tell what time it was – there were no windows in storage, no clocks on the wall – but she guessed it was early morning. Indeed, she'd been dozing lightly, opening her eyes off and on as she often did in the hour before the day began.

"Are you awake, Honey?" Mrs. Alvarez whispered, her voice, as always, a mix of sympathy and determined practicality.

Hannah rose up, propping her elbow on her pillow, and she stared into the eyes of Mrs. Alvarez's dark silhouette. Or, at least, stared where the eyes would be, if there were enough light in the room to see them. The only illumination now was the small "Exit" sign over the door, always on, and making mere gloom when all the other lights had been turned off.

"Yes," Hannah replied, and she sat up, folded her blanket by feel, set it under her pillow and wound her long blonde hair into a bun at the back of her head.

"Do you need to use the bowl?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"How much time do you need?"

"10 minutes."

Mrs. Alvarez fumbled with the padlock at the little door at the end of the cage. There was no reason to lock it, Hannah thought. The opening was far too small for her to slip through. She wondered if she could even get one leg through much past her thigh.

Metal clanking against metal in the darkness, Mrs. Alvarez slid the bowl and a handful of tissue through the opening, locked the little door and left the storage room.

Hannah raised her skirt, took off her panties and, looping her fingers through the bars on either side of her cage, braced herself upright over the bowl, her head pressed lightly against the bars above. She thought, as she often used to when she had a proper toilet to sit on, of touching herself. Her mother wasn't here to ask through the door why she was taking so long or even, as she had on several mortifying occasions, to accuse her of being unchaste.

Would Mrs. Alvarez care? She doubted it. Mrs. Alvarez seemed to respect her privacy in a way Mother hadn't. Or maybe she didn't see it as her place to question Hannah about such a thing.

In some ways, Hannah liked Mrs. Alvarez better than her mother. Regardless, she wished desperately that all this would end.

She finished, pulled her panties back on and slid to the other end of her cage, sitting on her pillow, wrapping her arms around her legs, tucking her face between her knees and willing Mrs. Alvarez to return and take the bowl away.

The thought that things were just about to change for the better was still sustaining her, and she went there in her head, to a few of the countless possible improvements. Just a new change of clothes would be wonderful. But she didn't dare ask. She didn't want to give Mrs. Alvarez any excuse to ask her to undress. Her shoes had been taken from her, but her socks, her knee-length skirt, her bra, blouse, sweater and panties were left, her only possessions now, her only protection from whatever this was about.

Lost in dreams and the dimness of the storage room, she didn't know Mrs. Alvarez had returned until she heard the rattle of the padlock. Wordlessly, the woman removed the bowl and left the storage area to empty it, presumably in a toilet in another part of the building. Hannah could hear the

deep rumbles of the building's plumbing, the footsteps, the things being moved here and there.

Yesterday, after Mrs. Alvarez had taken the bowl, she was gone for what felt like an hour, and then she returned with breakfast, a plate of wonders Hannah devoured gratefully. Eggs, bacon, pancakes, fruit. The woman liked to cook. And she liked, it seemed, particularly to cook for Hannah.

At least, Hannah reminded herself, she was eating better than she had in years. Or ever.

Mrs. Alvarez returned this time in little more than five minutes, flipping on the light. Hannah, arms still wrapped around her legs, raised her head and blinked in the brightness, disappointed when she squinted at Mrs. Alvarez and saw that her hands were empty.

The woman stepped up to the table and smiled weakly.

"We'll be having someone in today," she said, "to look at you."

"Yes Ma'am," Hannah replied.

"To look at all of you."

Hannah looked quizzically but said nothing. She wasn't sure what Mrs. Alvarez meant but she suspected by the way it was said that something was going to happen that Mrs. Alvarez didn't think she would like.

In the belief that if something were spoken out loud, it became more likely, she let the statement go unquestioned beyond one raised eyebrow.

"Okay?" Mrs. Alvarez inquired.

"Okay."

"Do you want me to leave the light on?"

"Yes, please."

"Would you like something to read?"

"May I have the Bible?"

Mrs. Alvarez turned, grabbed the heavy, lavishly illustrated book off the counter and – because it was too thick to pass through the bars – unlocked the little door and slid it through.

Receiving the Good Book through the same hole that her bowl passed through a half dozen times a day seemed as much an indignity as any other. Perhaps worse, for it might be an affront not just to her, but to God. But she took the Bible gratefully and sat cross-legged, her back against the bars, opening it to her favorite part of the Gospels.

“I’ll have breakfast for you as quick as I can get it together,” Mrs. Alvarez promised. “Before they show up.”

Hannah looked up from the page and nodded, and the woman turned to leave.

“Mrs. Alvarez?”

“Yes, Hannah?”

“Thank you,” the girl said sincerely. “For the Bible.”

Mrs. Alvarez smiled in a pained way, left the room, closed the door and jangled the keys.

As soon as the lock clicked shut, Hannah heard voices from the other side of the door: Mrs. Alvarez and two men’s voices, probably Mr. Alvarez and one of their employees. She couldn’t hear any of the words, except one: “She’s,” spoken by Mrs. Alvarez. They were probably talking about her, and Mrs. Alvarez was saying something about her.

There had been a lot of talking about her on the other side of that door since she’d arrived on Tuesday, three days ago. Usually it was too hushed for her to make out, but there was sometimes anger, and shouting.

She hated the shouting, because she knew it was about her, and it reminded her of the worst days of her life. She covered her ears and hummed when it happened. Still, she heard things.

“No, we’re going to do this by the book!” Mrs. Alvarez had yelled at someone once. “And we’ll make plenty.”

On another occasion, there was just a single statement, not to be questioned by anyone, it seemed, including Mr. Alvarez: “No one goes in there but me,” Mrs. Alvarez had insisted.

Hannah’s presence seemed to have disrupted things, made people tense and edgy and required the locking of the storage area, something that wasn’t otherwise done, Hannah had come to conclude. That she was the source of it – even though she sat in a cage on a table in the middle of the room – made her feel, in a way, special.

The usual contents of this room did not include living things, Hannah knew, human or otherwise. There were shelves of books, random furniture, a stack of computers and appliances, racks of clothing on hangers and in piles on the floor. There were TVs, newspapers, and a mound of tools – hammers, power drills, screwdrivers in sets or lying free.

Nothing out of the ordinary here, all common refuse of estate sales, evictions, foreclosures, creditor settlements.

Except for her.

Three days ago, on a sweltering August Tuesday, she’d had her freedom. But it was all she had.

### **“We’re Here to Collect”**

When Hannah was 15 – three years before – her mother had made a desperate, brave gamble, fleeing Four Pillars Tabernacle of Jesus to save Hannah from an arranged marriage to Elias Johnson, a shriveled old man who already had three wives, with whom Hannah wished to have no dealings, as she’d made clear to her mother in terms bordering on the apocalyptic.

Ultimately, despite her heroism, Mother failed.

Raised in a primitive, highly patriarchal precursor to Four Pillars, taught to read only so she could recite the Bible, given no further education, forbidden from using computers or

watching TV, allowed no friends outside the compound, Mother was functionally illiterate, with no marketable skills other than stitchery, embroidery, the passing of thread through fabric.

Leaving Four Pillars was a capital crime, at least figuratively, and Mother upon her departure became dead to everyone – her parents, siblings, friends, more distant relations.

She found a tiny apartment and pulled in some work, but she had no awareness of fashion and sewed everything by hand, earning far too little to support herself and Hannah. So mostly, she borrowed. When the bills came due, she borrowed again.

Over and over again, she promised Hannah that God would provide.

But three days ago, God grew weary of providing, apparently, and instead turned to judgment. Early that morning, two trucks and a sheriff's car rolled up. The man Hannah came to know as Mr. Alvarez and three other men got out of the trucks and banged on the door of their ground-floor, efficiency apartment.

"We're here to collect," Mr. Alvarez told Mother when she opened the door a crack.

Hannah, buttoning her shirt, shuffling into a sweater she wore for modesty whenever strangers visited, even in summer, withdrew to the far wall to watch, not particularly alarmed. The sound of banging fists had become a theme of late, and Mother seemed always to know what to say to make them go away, speaking softly and calmly of hope and short-term plans to make everything right.

Not today, though. This time, they had the law with them, a tall sheriff's deputy with an impressive hat who told Mother she had to let them in by court order.

Mother paused only long enough to compose herself. Tall and willowy, like Hannah, she bent herself, making an arc of her legs, her spine, her neck, like a bow being drawn tight.



Then she straightened and complied, turning to smile reassuringly at Hannah, clearly not understanding what was about to happen.

The men entered, their bodies moving slowly but their eyes darting as they sized up the meager possession of another failing household.

One of them, stepping around the thin mat on the floor where Hannah slept, noticed the girl, standing in the corner.

“Who are you?”

“Hannah.”

“She’s my daughter,” Mother said.

“How old are you?”

“18.”

“Do you have sole possession of her?” one of the men asked Mother.

Mother hesitated, not sure perhaps what the question meant. “Yes,” she said at last. “I’m divorced. And her father’s disowned her.”

The man who was talking, who wasn’t Mr. Alvarez but worked for him, spoke to the other men. “We need to huddle.”

All five of them, including the sheriff’s deputy, stepped outside to talk. Mother shut the door and smiled at Hannah.

“I think you’ve saved us.”

“How?” Hannah inquired.

“They can’t put a girl on the street,” she explained. “A woman, yes. I can take care of myself, with God’s help. But not you.”

“They were going to put us on the street?”

“I think so. But not now. Don’t worry.”

The men didn’t leave though. They stood by their trucks for half an hour, squinting at each other through the

August morning sun, waving their hands, holding cell phones to their jaws while Hannah and her mother sat at the kitchen table, sewing. Mother had set their last apple between them, and they took turns biting from it, a meager breakfast that Hannah silently cursed before she caught herself and remembered to be grateful in all things. Now and then, they both glanced through the window. Often enough, the men were looking back at them.

A third truck kicked up a cloud of dust as it pulled up, driven by the woman Hannah came to know as Mrs. Alvarez. As soon as she stopped, the men returned as one to the front door, and Mr. Alvarez banged again.

Mother smiled at Hannah, rose and opened the door.

Only the sheriff's deputy entered, however. He stepped over to Hannah, who stood respectfully.

"Turn around, Miss, and put your hands behind your back."

Hannah turned immediately, heard clicks and realized, after a brief fog of incomprehension, that she had been handcuffed.

"Why are you arresting her?" Mother demanded, her voice rising. "The loans are all in my name!"

"I'm not arresting her," the deputy said. "I'm assisting in the collection."

"She's my daughter!"

"Yes, Ma'am, she is a legal part of your estate."

"She's my daughter!" Mother screamed again.

Things blurred together at that point. While Mother's protests grew increasingly hysterical, Mr. Alvarez and another man appeared at Hannah's sides, grabbed her arms and hustled her out of the apartment and into the front yard.

Mrs. Alvarez was waiting, standing in the middle of the dust and weeds that passed for grass in this neighborhood. She was in her late 20's or early 30's, dark hair to her shoulders, in jeans and a t-shirt, dressed for casual work.

The men marched Hannah up to Mrs. Alvarez, who was smiling, as she continued to do all the time that Hannah was with her.

“Hello, Sweetheart,” Mrs. Alvarez said. She looked like she was going to say something else or ask a question, but Mother screamed, Hannah looked back and saw she was trying to get past the men who were blocking her at the door, and Mrs. Alvarez looked at her husband and nodded, and they moved her to the truck.

The truck’s back door had been rolled up, and Mr. Alvarez leapt up while the other man held Hannah from behind, by her elbows. Then he lifted her by her upper arms to Mr. Alvarez, who fumbled against her breasts – the first time anyone besides herself had touched them – grabbed her under her armpits and hoisted her up.

The truck was empty except for what looked like a large dog kennel, about six feet long and three feet high and wide. Its sides and top were made of bars, the bottom of solid metal. The top had been opened, and Mr. Alvarez walked Hannah to it.

“Step in,” he said.

Hannah blinked and obeyed. She had never said no to a man.

“Get on your knees so I can get the top closed.”

Hannah, her hands still cuffed behind her, dropped and crouched as the top of the cage creaked on its hinges and clanged shut. Mr. Alvarez secured the latches on either end with a pair of padlocks.

Hannah’s mother was still screaming, unintelligible now, just “aaah, aaah, aaah!” and Hannah guessed that she had been caged so they could do something terrible to Mother without interference. Were they going to kill her? What was the penalty for racking up debt and never paying it back?

“Mother?” Hannah cried, heart racing.

“No, Ma’am, you need to stay right here!” Hannah heard the sheriff’s deputy protest, before he wailed, “Ah!

Gottdamn!”

Mother screamed again, “Hannah! Hannah!” and Hannah screamed back, “I’m in here! Mother!”

“Ma’am, you are under arrest,” the deputy announced. Then, “Ow!” and, “Oh no you don’t!”

“I’m in here!” Hannah screamed again, hunching over on her thigh and her elbow to the edge of the cage, pressing her face against the bars.

Mother appeared at the back of the truck, her face twisted in terror, her hair a wild mess, a thick, blonde band of it plastered across her eye and nose by tears and sweat. The woman was trying to climb into the truck, her hands scratching for something to hold onto. One of her wrists had been handcuffed, the other cuff flying wildly.

“Oh, sweet Jesus!” she cried when she saw Hannah, and she clawed at the truck’s rough floor. “Sweet Jesus help us!”

The deputy appeared behind Mother, hatless now, bleeding profusely from his nose. He looked down at Mother’s lower back and did something that made her shriek, a piercing animal cry of pain, and she fell and disappeared.

The deputy bent and disappeared as well, and then he stood, raising Mother with him, her eyes glassy and distant. She looked at Hannah blankly, made one more sound, a sort of sigh, like a ghost: “Aaah.” And the deputy led her off.

## **A Ride in the Dark**

Mrs. Alvarez appeared, threw her foot up first and angled the rest of her body after it, clambering into the truck and moving to the cage, kneeling beside it.

“Oh, God, I’m so sorry, Baby,” she said.

Hannah rose awkwardly to sit, cross-legged, feeling each link in the short chain holding her wrists together.

There was nothing she could think of saying, so she stared, numbly, into the darkness of the truck's recesses.

The voice of the sheriff's deputy echoed from the open end of the truck.

"I'm going to need those handcuffs back," he said, and Hannah, not turning toward him, heard him climb inside.

"Miss?" he said. "Miss?"

"Yes, Sir?" Hannah replied in a tiny whisper.

"If you can sit with your back to the bars, I'll take your cuffs off."

Hannah scooted against the side of the cage and felt the deputy's hands, heard clicks and felt the cuffs come off, first the left wrist, then the right. As he folded the cuffs and put them away, she put her hands in her lap and rubbed her wrists.

"Is she okay?" Mrs. Alvarez asked.

"She's fine. I just tased her. She damn near broke my nose."

"There really wasn't another way to handle this?"

"If you want to take the girl, no," the deputy replied. "The mommas always fight. They will fight you to the damn death once they figure out what's going on."

The deputy sniffed and coughed, and Hannah, who could not bring herself to look at him, kept staring at her hands and imagined he was still wiping blood off his face.

"What are you going to do to her?" Hannah whispered.

"What's that, Honey?" Mrs. Alvarez asked.

"What's going to happen to my mother?" Hannah repeated, loud enough so he could hear.

"I'm going to file charges against her. Not sure what yet. But something that'll keep her in jail for a few days, or a few weeks, or maybe longer. And that's the best thing for her,

probably, since she's homeless otherwise. But I'm sorry for your trouble. I surely am."

Hannah looked up at him at last with her gray eyes. His hat was back on, and he returned her gaze with a look she recognized. He was studying her, not just looking at her. Boys did it, anytime she went out with her mother. Men did it too. And Hannah sensed instinctively that they wanted something with her. They wanted something from her. Sometimes, she would stare back, if she didn't think her mother would notice, and she'd wonder what they were looking at. Like any girl after she's stared at, she would peer at herself in the bathroom mirror later and think sometimes that she was beautiful. Long blonde hair, dark eyebrows, high cheekbones; firm, medium-sized breasts, and ribs that tapered down to a wide pelvis and long thighs.

After meeting the deputy's eyes for a long five seconds, she stared at her hands again, her heart just beginning to break, as hearts do, slowly, in response to complex and staggering upheaval.

The deputy stepped to the back of the truck and jumped off. Mrs. Alvarez, still kneeling, leaned forward.

"Doing okay, Sweetheart?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied.

"Are you afraid of the dark?"

"No, Ma'am."

"You are a sweet child."

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you."

"I'm Dorothy Alvarez."

"Yes."

"What should I call you?"

"Hannah."

"Alright, Hannah, I'm going to close the back door, and it's going to be dark for about 30 minutes while we get you to the shop. And we'll take care of you there, okay?"

“Are we going to Mother’s jail?”

“No, to the shop.”

“Where’s Mother going?”

“To jail, I guess. I’m so sorr-“

“Oh!” Hannah blurted, loud enough to stop Mrs. Alvarez in mid-sentence. She was just beginning to process the reality of forcible separation.

“When will I see Mother again?”

“Oh,” Mrs. Alvarez said this time, without elaboration. The answer terrified Hannah, but she looked down, studying the pattern in her skirt.

“See you in 30 minutes, Baby. I’ll try to drive fast.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Mrs. Alvarez rolled the door closed, latched it and, with a small, final sound of metal against metal, padlocked the latch.

It was not until Hannah was plunged into the sweltering darkness that she began to work through the horror of the last 15 minutes. She had been handcuffed and put in a cage, and the reason for it was a complete mystery to her. Then, her mother had hurt the sheriff’s deputy, and he had hurt her back, so bad she screamed. So bad, when she stood again, she could barely look at Hannah. So bad, she didn’t seem to care anymore that Hannah had been taken like this.

For a brief, excruciating moment, Hannah saw the world through Mother’s eyes: her only child taken, the pain and humiliation of her arrest and, perhaps worse, the three years of failure, the spiral down, the sewing and embroidery jobs that were never enough, that often as not were given not out of need but only out of pity by the women at the church where they never quite belonged.

As the truck roared toward its destination, Hannah wept, her tears mixed with sweat, and she wiped her nose and her eyes on her sleeve, full of sorrow for her mother, and a little anger as well, toward impatient creditors, a system that

did not care about the hungry, the weak, the naked, and a God who was otherwise occupied. She begged forgiveness for the last thought, dried her eyes and prayed in the darkness.

She was not angry at her mother, poor woman, but she was disappointed.

Hannah lay back in the blackness and closed her eyes, but every bounce of the truck hurt her head and she sat back up and, almost without thinking, tested her cage, pulling at the bars, pushing the top, confirming quickly that there was no way out. And even if she escaped the cage, the truck door was locked, and when it was opened, they'd be waiting for her. The thought of leaping from the truck, trying to run and being tackled terrified her, as much because of the indignity as the violence.

Why, exactly, did they want her? Possibly this was the way girls were brought to a special jail when their mothers had gotten into trouble. Or maybe they were taking her to a place that would help her. Maybe she'd even be fed there.

As things had grown more difficult over the last six months, Hannah counted, privately, in her own mind, the number of solid meals she received each week, from Sunday to Sunday. Last week, it had been three, based on some meat from one of her mother's customers, prepared in three dishes of thin but satisfying soup. The rest of the week, it was white bread, castoff fruits and vegetables, a small bag of cookies.

The truck stopped, the door opened and Hannah blinked at the light, seeing five lumps that quickly resolved into the heads of everyone who had come to her apartment, except the sheriff's deputy.

The air stirred and a little relief came Hannah's way, hot air that wasn't as hot as the air in the truck when it was closed, cooling her wet face and her damp shirt and sweater.

"How was the trip, Hannah?" Mrs. Alvarez asked.

"Fine."



Mr. Alvarez and another man crawled into the truck and Hannah rose to her knees, ready to be released.

They didn't open her cage, however. Instead, they slid it to the edge of the truck with a terrible, metallic scraping sound, where the other two men grabbed it and set it down on the asphalt. Steadying herself with the bars, fighting a sense of utter humiliation, she looked about, seeing a plain, one-story building of aluminum siding, and a pair of doors. Immediately, all four men gathered around her and lifted her cage while Mrs. Alvarez led the way, guiding them into the welcome coolness of the building, then to the storage room, and to the heavy wooden table where she had been ever since.

Then men left, Mrs. Alvarez locked the storage door and stepped over to the cage.

"When will I get out?" Hannah asked.

"As soon as we can find a, a ... someone to, to, take you."

"Who will it be?" Hannah asked, knowing the question was illogical as soon as she'd asked it.

"We don't know. But it should be soon, we think. We'll get someone in to look at you as soon as we can. Tomorrow or the next day."

"Can you let me out?"

"I'm sorry, Darling. I can't."

### **In a Cage on a Table**

Hannah stared at her hands, profoundly disappointed.

"I know, this is new for you, and it's going to take some getting used to. It's new for us too. But I'm going to take good care of you until we, um, we get you to the next place. Are you hungry?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

“Do you need to go to the bathroom?”

“Oh,” Hannah blurted. “You won’t let me out for that?”

“No, you’ll have to do it in there. I’ll bring you a bowl.”

Hannah hunched in silence, too stunned to continue talking.

“I’ll bring you some lunch,” Mrs. Alvarez said, stepping out, locking the storage room door behind her.

The lunch came through the little door at the bottom of the cage. Hannah’s waste went out the same way. She also passed out her shoes, because she didn’t need them. In exchange, she received a blanket and a pillow, the latter scrunched between the bars. And Mrs. Alvarez found an illustrated Bible, and Hannah spent hours over the next three days trying to lose herself in the pages, trying to find solace, to use its words to understand what had happened.

She didn’t ask Mrs. Alvarez about everything because she didn’t think she wanted to hear the answers spoken aloud.

She ate well, and she didn’t miss her mother as much as she’d thought she would. Mrs. Alvarez was very nice, feeding her better than her mother ever had.

For the first time in her life, thanks to solitude and boredom, Hannah was able to ruminate on things that she had rarely questioned before. Should her mother have taken sewing work only from those who believed about God the way they did? Were her mother’s single-minded efforts to find a husband for Hannah – again, limited only to those of their faith – really best for her daughter? Why wouldn’t Mother allow Hannah to find a job, something the girl asked permission to do almost weekly? Did it matter what Hannah did with her body, or thought about it? Was thinking about a husband, and the things he would surely do to her, and enjoying those thoughts, really so terrible?

On Wednesday morning, the second day in the cage, Mrs. Alvarez passed to Hannah two pieces of paper, one black

and shiny, one normal with official words at the top and a large rectangle below. At Mrs. Alvarez' instruction, Hannah took off her sock and pressed her right foot against the black paper, then put it within the rectangle on the white paper, making a black footprint there. If the print matched the footprint on her birth certificate, the government would let them continue to hold Hannah. If they didn't match, she would be free to leave, and they would drive her to the jail to try to see her mother, or wherever else in the city she wanted to go. Just one trip, though, and then she would have to take care of herself. The prospect terrified Hannah. The cage was humiliating and boring, but life on the streets, among the heathen her mother had always protected her from, was an unknown she wasn't prepared to face.

Word came back later that day that the prints matched, and Hannah and Mrs. Alvarez settled into a routine. Three times a day, there was a wonderful meal. Five or six times a day, there was the embarrassment of the bowl. Then there was the Bible. And, often enough, Mrs. Alvarez came to Hannah, to talk to her.

Normally, the conversation started with an update on Hannah's status. Someone would be coming soon to look at her, she was told, and then she would probably go to the next place, wherever that might be.

Along with updates, Mrs. Alvarez asked a lot of questions, learning that Hannah lived from birth until she was 15 within the confines of Four Pillars, almost exclusively except for the occasional visit to the doctor. She went to lessons, church and Bible class at Four Pillars. All her friends lived there, and all her adventures were within its 400 acres on the rural outskirts of Fort Worth. Only the men left the compound, to work and make money, something her father was not especially good at, so he had only two wives, Mother and Momma Burthen, who had two sons Hannah cared for and loved until she was 15, when her father tried to marry her off to a terrible man who already had three wives, and she and Mother fled.

Father was something of a schemer, but his schemes rarely worked out. He had not, it seemed, found God's full favor yet, but Hannah wasn't clear on why.

At one point, about a year after Hannah and her mother had fled the home, her father resurfaced, his car idling outside their apartment. He stared at Hannah when she parted the curtain, and she thought he seemed to want something from her, perhaps to reconcile, but Mother went out and screamed at him to go away, and he did. Hannah, knowing what happened could never be discussed, cried herself to sleep that night.

Mrs. Alvarez was particularly interested in the hardship Hannah had suffered over the last three years, and in her medical history. The difficulties of Hannah's life, the lack of food and the way her mother controlled her, seemed almost to gratify Mrs. Alvarez, Hannah thought, as if easing her guilt about what she was doing to the girl now. Hannah's virtually spotless medical history also seemed to be a source of reassurance for the woman.

Mrs. Alvarez wanted to know other things, personal things, and she wrote Hannah's answers down for some reason. When did Hannah have her first period? Were her periods regular? Had she ever been pregnant? Had she ever had sex?

Hannah knew she was blushing, a deeper crimson as the questions got more invasive, but she answered them, quickly and softly:

"When I was 13."

"Yes."

"No."

"No."

When Mrs. Alvarez asked if Hannah was interested in sex, however, Hannah's reply was silence.

When she was comfortable with the conversation and questions, Hannah sat cross-legged, modestly punching down the lap of her knee-length skirt. When she grew

uncomfortable, she would draw her legs up, hugging her thighs.

Hannah asked questions as well, about her mother mostly. There was a website Mrs. Alvarez consulted on her tablet where she could type in Mother's name and it would provide basic information. Mother had been charged with two relatively minor crimes, disorderly conduct and resisting arrest, and would get out once she posted bail, Mrs. Alvarez said. But the fact she was penniless might mean she would be there awhile, and then she'd have a trial and might go back to jail to serve her sentence. Mrs. Alvarez held the tablet up to the bars so Hannah could look. The report included Mother's mug shot. It didn't look like Mother at all. There was a hardness in the eyes, a bitterness or anger Hannah had never seen there before. When Hannah wept, at night and when she was left alone, this is what she saw. This face. And she heard her mother scream, over and over again.

Hannah and Mrs. Alvarez talked regularly over the next three days. Sometimes, Mrs. Alvarez would be gone for hours, and when she returned she would carry into the storage room the smell of female sweat, like the odor of a peculiar kind of dirt, and Hannah would ask where she had been, what she had done, what else she had gathered. But the most important question went unasked, about what specifically might happen to Hannah.

Until that Friday.

That morning, as was the custom, Mrs. Alvarez came in early to check on Hannah.

She emptied her bowl, gave her the Bible and told her that this was the day she'd be inspected.

Hannah was at first silent, but after Mrs. Alvarez came to retrieve Hannah's empty breakfast plate, the girl looked up at her.

"Why is that person coming?" she asked.

Mrs. Alvarez took a deep breath and answered. "To list you."

Hannah replied by staring, as she often did when uncertain of something, so Mrs. Alvarez added quietly, “for sale.”

“Sale?” Hannah echoed.

“Yes. They’re going to try to sell you.”

“Why would anyone want to buy me?”

“I will answer any question you have, as far as I know the answer,” Mrs. Alvarez began, and she leaned against Hannah’s cage and grabbed one of the bars. “But some of this may be hard for you to hear. And it will be hard for me to say. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“You know that people can buy people, right? That people can own slaves, right?”

“Not really.”

“It’s not put that way. They’re called subjects usually, or servants. But that’s what it is. And you’re not supposed to talk about it. They have laws and all, so your mother and you probably wouldn’t know much about it. I didn’t know much about it either, before we found you. But there have been some changes in the laws that make it possible. So now, people can buy people, and own them, and have them do what they need.”

Hannah continued to sit on her pillow, cross-legged. There was slavery in the Bible, and the slaves were part of the household, and were fed and taken care of, and could be set free. It was, in her mind, simply another state of being, a state that could be good or bad, just like living with one’s mother could be good or bad, or being married could be good or bad.

It still didn’t make sense, though.

“Why would someone want to buy me?”

“Because ...” Mrs. Alvarez stammered. “Well, it could be for any reason. But you’re a young girl ...”

“Will they want me to sew?”

## Preparing for the Broker

“That could be,” Mrs. Alvarez said, and her smile, and the pain in it, seemed deeper and harder. She pursed her lips and plunged ahead. “They’ll probably want more than that.”

Hannah just stared, suspecting that Mrs. Alvarez was having trouble saying something, and it was the same thing that put the pain in her smile, and made her kind to Hannah in some ways even while she kept her in a cage.

“You know, Hannah,” Mrs. Alvarez began, pausing for a deep breath. “I will answer any question. I was always ready to answer any question. You just have to ask.”

“What else will they want?” Hannah blurted.

“They’ll want ... they might want you to do certain things. For them. Private things.”

“Oh.”

Hannah drew up her legs and wrapped her arms around her thighs. This was not anything that had crossed her mind, at least not consciously, and it took her a moment to fit this new information into her understanding of the world.

“They could just marry me,” she said at last.

“They might not want a wife,” Mrs. Alvarez said, smiling so hard it looked like a grimace. “They might want someone who has to do what they say.”

“I have to do that?”

“If they say you do. Yes.”

Hannah looked at her knees as she pondered. “Is the person coming to look at me nice?”

“I don’t know. But it doesn’t matter. They’re just brokers. They’ll be selling you for us, to someone else.”

Deep in Hannah’s insides, Mrs. Alvarez’s words were making things stir, a sort of quivering that she recognized as nerves, or butterflies, something she felt when a boy looked at

her, or when she had to recite a verse in front of the class, long ago. But this was another thing altogether, a terrible thing, strange and stimulating and frightening at the same time, in a way she had never been frightened before.

“What is that worth?” Hannah asked, wondering if her mother might be able to get the money together, somehow. If she could just borrow a little more.

“We think we can get at least half a million dollars for you,” Mrs. Alvarez said.

On a good day, Mother earned 50 dollars sewing. So this was an utterly incomprehensible sum. Hannah could only respond by laughing.

“For me?” she asked. Her mind went to the people who could spend that kind of money. The richest people she’d ever met, from church, might be able to. They all had beautiful homes. And pools. They all ate well, she knew. Yes. She would do what they said just to live with them. Gladly.

She would even do that. If she had to.

But it still didn’t make sense.

“I’ve never done it, though.”

“Done what?”

“What you said. My body.”

“Sex?”

“Yes.”

“If your body’s right, that’s mostly what they care about. And then there’s training for the rest of it.”

“Oh.”

“So that’s why the person needs to look at you. To see your body. So they can decide how much you’re— how much to, to sell you for.”

Whoever would spend that much money on her would have to love her. She was certain of that. And they would be wealthier than anyone else she had ever met. She imagined a



lonely, wealthy young man, unable to find a wife for free that was right for him, willing to pay if he found the right girl for sale. He would buy her, she would do everything he said, and then he would marry her and set her free, and she would eat well, and her mother would join her there, in his home.

“When can I go?”

“You’re okay with this?” Mrs. Alvarez asked.

“Yes, Ma’am. Yes.”

For the first time since they’d met, Mrs. Alvarez’ smile was pure and clean, without pain, and she laughed.

“You are a sweet child,” she said.

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

Mrs. Alvarez looked at her watch. “The broker will be here in less than an hour. And they’ve asked us to get you ready for them.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“They’ve asked that the only thing in your cage should be you.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“So, no clothing.”

“Oh.”

“Can you do that for me, Hannah? Can you undress?”

“Who’s going to see me?”

“Just me, and the broker. No one else.”

“Will it be a man?”

“I think so.”

“Oh.”

Hannah paused, sat still and looked down, unblinking, at herself. And then she willed her hands to move, and they did so, unbuttoning her sweater slowly.

If she refused, how could they make her strip? They'd have to open her cage, and that didn't seem likely. But if they did, she'd be forcibly disrobed, a possibility too horrible to consider. Her hands shook as she reached the last button, squirmed out of the sweater and passed it through the bars to Mrs. Alvarez.

Next, she removed her socks, her right sock still black from the ink that had been put on the sole of her foot two days ago.

She passed those to Mrs. Alvarez, took a deep breath and began working at the buttons of her blouse. It was her best garment, white and clean, bought almost new from the thrift store, and there had been a note in the pocket, in a woman's handwriting, that said, "Felicia: Bring this box to Jody's mom when you go to her birthday party." The shirt and the note had been magic to Hannah, a tenuous link to another life, another world, to people who went to parties and brought things to each other. She spent considerable time while she was sewing imagining the four women represented in the note. Two mothers and two daughters, she guessed, the girls perhaps her age. But comfortable. And happy.

Hannah finished unbuttoning her shirt, took it off and passed it to Mrs. Alvarez.

Next came her skirt, knee-length, in a prairie pattern sewn together by her mother. She hated it and was glad to send it through the bars.

In just her bra and panties now, Hannah stopped, unable to proceed. She drew her legs up against her chest and stared over her knees at her toes.

"Hannah," Mrs. Alvarez said. "Hannah."

"Yes, Ma'am?"

"You have to take off everything."

"What are they going to do to me?"

"I'm not sure. But if you're not naked, they won't do the inspection, and you'll have to stay here. In this cage."

Hannah unwrapped her arms, hunched over and undid her bra in the back, slid it off and handed it to Mrs. Alvarez. Staring through the bars at the wall beyond the pile of books, her whole body shaking, she raised herself on her knees, slid her panties down her thighs and over her feet, wadded them up and handed them over. She'd had them on for three days now, and she knew they were filthy. Giving them to anyone was profoundly humiliating, more wretched in that moment than sitting nude in a cage.

"Thank you, Sweetheart," Mrs. Alvarez murmured, rolling Hannah's clothes into a single bundle and setting them next to her shoes by the wall. She unlocked the little door and Hannah slipped the Bible, the blanket and the pillow through.

"Now, I'm going to bring you some warm water and some soap, and a washrag, okay? I want you to get cleaned up. Your hair too."

"In here?"

"Yes. You'll just have to do your best. Can you do that?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

Mrs. Alvarez left, locked the door to the storage area, and Hannah looked down at herself. The idea that she and her mother had been living with a half a million dollars worth of something, in the form of her own body, was hard to comprehend. If her mother had known, could she have sold her herself, and kept all that money? Would she have?

Had someone told Hannah a week ago that, in seven days, she'd be sitting nude in a cage, waiting for a stranger to look at her, she would have wept, she would have run away, accepting a life on the streets, and possible death there, over this. But her mind was adapting to the humiliation and confinement. She understood the larger purpose being served, that many good things came with a price, and she was paying it now.

Her mind was working in ways it never had, pondering possibilities for her existence that had not before

been possible, and wondering how she might act to affect the outcome.

## **Bath and a Trim**

When Mrs. Alvarez returned with a bowl of warm water, soap and a stack of towels, Hannah had a new question.

“Will my mother get any of the money?”

The pain returned to Mrs. Alvarez’ smile as she unlocked the little door and slid in the bowl.

“Yes,” she said simply, pausing before she elaborated. “You understand what we do, right?”

Hannah looked around the room. “You collect junk?”

“You’re not junk,” Mrs. Alvarez retorted quickly.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“We paid your mother’s creditors for the right to take possession of everything she had. We do it all the time and we make a little money, usually. But we’ve never found a girl before. They didn’t know about you. So we’re going to make a lot of money. A lot. But we have to give a share back to the borrower, if there’s any left over. Your mother might get almost fifty thousand dollars. Ten percent, after our costs.”

“Oh!” Hannah said simply. She was unable to fit this new information into her perception of things. She tried to imagine her mother, in jail, with her hard new face, being handed that much money. Would they give it to her in a bag? Would they let her keep it? Would she be glad, or sad, knowing where it had come from? Would she be grateful? Would she cry?

Mrs. Alvarez passed the soap and a towel through the bars into Hannah’s hand, and the girl undid her bun, letting her hair fall to her bare shoulders, and she dipped the towel into the water and pressed it to her face, lost for a moment in the pleasure of warm water, of the beginning of cleanliness. For

the moment, she stopped thinking about Mother. She had missed bathing more than she knew.

“So, the better you do today, the more your mother will get.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“They’re not just looking at your body,” Mrs. Alvarez said. “They’ll also be asking you questions, seeing how obedient you are, how smart you are. That will all be part of how much money we get, how much your mother gets.”

Hannah dropped the soap into the bowl, picked it back up, made a lather and rubbed her face.

“You need to wash everything,” Mrs. Alvarez said. “Between your legs too.”

“Can you leave?” Hannah asked. She’d never asked that of Mrs. Alvarez before. It was always understood between them. But Mrs. Alvarez was just standing there and Hannah didn’t want her there now.

Mrs. Alvarez stepped out wordlessly and Hannah pushed the towel into the water and raised it to her breasts. “Uh,” she said, rubbing the wet warmth over her chest, her shoulders, her belly, under her arms. She used the soap – a girl’s soap, light yellow and fresh-smelling, surely more expensive than anything she had used before – to make a thick cream, rubbing it everywhere she could reach, her legs, the black sole of her right foot, and then her hair, pressing it into her scalp, soaking the blonde strands, letting it drip into the bowl and cupping the water to rinse.

Finally, she placed another handful of soap against her vulva and her anus, rubbing off three days of uncleanness, lingering longer than she needed to among the sensitive places there, imagining, as she had many times before, the things that might happen there. The dream was different now, a husband not from their church but from elsewhere, who saw her and fell in love immediately and paid what they asked, without bargaining.

She heard the door unlock, and open a crack and she moved her hands quickly back to the bowl, to rinse herself.

“Can I come in?” Mrs. Alvarez asked.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Mrs. Alvarez slid a fresh towel through the bars, and Hannah, shivering now, dried herself gratefully, slid the bowl and soap through the little door, and dried the floor of her cage before handing both towels back to Mrs. Alvarez. Her wet hair hung in clumps against her face, neck and shoulders, and she shook it loose, leaning over and running her fingers through it to separate the strands.

Mrs. Alvarez used the towel to wipe up the water on the table around Hannah’s cage, and on the floor, and then set everything on the shelf against the wall and turned back to Hannah. Hannah, kneeling, her hands on her thighs, looked at her, surprising herself with how comfortable this already felt. The bath had done wonders. She wouldn’t have wanted to put back on her dirty clothes even if they’d been offered to her.

“There’s one more thing,” Mrs. Alvarez said.

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“I need to trim your hair.”

Hannah raised her hand to her hair and pulled a length of it before her face, to look at it. It seemed like a strange request.

“The hair ... down there,” Mrs. Alvarez said, pointing to her own middle.

Hannah parted her thighs slightly and looked down at her pubic hair, a thick, tangled mass of dirty blonde curls, and saw them for the first time as someone else might, as unattractive, and was mortified.

“I’m sorry,” she said, blushing.

Mrs. Alvarez laughed. “It’s okay, Darling. We just want you at your best. Can I do this?”

Hannah looked at Mrs. Alvarez's hand and saw the shears there, silver and sharp. A half dozen reasons occurred to her immediately for why she didn't want this done by Mrs. Alvarez.

"May I do it please?"

"I need to," Mrs. Alvarez replied.

"Why?" Hannah asked, surprising herself with a tone bordering on defiance.

"I can't give you any sharp things," Mrs. Alvarez said.

"Why?"

"You might cut yourself."

"I know—" Hannah blurted, so affronted she raised her voice. She checked her tone and began again, more calmly. "I know how to use scissors."

"I know you do, Darling," Mrs. Alvarez said. "You might cut yourself on purpose."

"I would never do that."

"It's one of the rules. Sometimes girls do it. The person coming to look at you told me not to allow it."

Hannah stared at her, adapting her mind to this latest indignity, no stranger really than all the others she had accommodated in the last three days.

"How will you do it?"

"Turn toward me, spread your legs and press your knees against the bars, and I'll reach through. I promise I'll be careful."

Slowly, Hannah complied, grabbing the bars to steady herself.

She'd first noticed the hair there, a light, downy spread, the day her mother told her Mr. Johnson wanted to marry her. It was as if he knew she was becoming a woman and decided on that day to take her. For a long time thereafter, she thought of her hair as a curse, but she'd made her peace

with it in the last year. It was always there, a wild mat between her fingers anytime she touched herself, and the feelings had become linked in her mind, of thick pubic hair and soft lips and secret pleasures. She'd certainly never cut it. The idea of cutting it had never occurred to her. Why would she cut anything only she could see?

Mrs. Alvarez passed her hands between the bars, pulling Hannah's fur and snipping it as Hannah looked down, strangely detached, as if she were watching another girl get shorn.

Mrs. Alvarez started at the top and worked her way from there, cutting most carefully and slowly at the bottom, along Hannah's lips.

When she was done, she brushed Hanna's reduced patch and her vulva, and the girl responded by lurching back, sitting down on the cold, damp metal, arms again around her thighs. The hair dusted the black floor of the cage, below where she had knelt, and it looked gold there. Mrs. Alvarez reached in and brushed it out, methodically, between each pair of bars, until all the hair was out of the cage, swept onto the table or the floor.

Without another word, embarrassed perhaps by what she'd had to do, or how Hannah had reacted, she retrieved the bowl of water, the wet towels, the discarded clothes and shoes, and left the room, locking the door as she always had.

## **The Broker**

As soon as the door was closed, Hannah loosened her arms and looked down at her mound again, its thinned covering not hiding her genitals at all, her lips a little pinker and fuller than usual, everything down there tingling, strange.

This was what they wanted. She understood that now. Someone was going to spend half a million dollars for the right to put his penis inside her, inside this place, without having to marry her.



Mrs. Alvarez said she would have to do it. What if she didn't? What if she resisted? What would they do to her?

She planned to comply, however. This was, in a sense, a freedom she had never had, or even imagined. Until now, she expected to have sex for the first time only with the man who had been chosen by or at least approved by her mother, and only upon marriage. At the moment, at least, sex was completely out of Mother's hands.

But what if Mr. Johnson found out she was for sale and scraped together enough money to buy her? She'd had her chance to be his wife. Now she would be merely his slave.

By default cheerful and optimistic, Hannah's mind turned to darkness, to a hundred unpleasant paths her life could take, and she sat, shivering and miserable, forgetting everything else, until she heard the key in the door.

Mrs. Alvarez stepped in, followed by a heavysset, older man.

Immediately, her heart started thumping in her chest, driven by nameless fears. She knew he wasn't going to hurt her, and any humiliation would be only between the two of them. It was the unknown that bothered her most.

"Hannah, this is Bert. He's here to look at you."

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied quietly, staring at the wall.

"Hannah, would you like me to stay?" Mrs. Alvarez asked.

"No," she replied after a short pause. If he touched her, she didn't want Mrs. Alvarez to watch.

"I'll be right outside the door, okay? And you call for me if you need anything, okay?"

"Yes, Ma'am. Thank you, Ma'am."

Mrs. Alvarez left and Bert set a small satchel on the floor and pulled a phone out of his pocket. Hannah glanced at him, but he was looking only at his phone.

“May I call you Hannah?” he asked, still staring at his phone.

The question struck her as strange, but she nodded and uttered a soft “Yes, Sir.”

“I’m gonna need to look at you,” he said. “That’s okay, isn’t it?”

Hannah shrugged, but she didn’t shake her head. It wasn’t okay, but she guessed the question was just a formality. Saying no was not likely a real option.

“Will you let me look into your mouth, Hannah?” he asked. “Just your mouth, for starters?”

Hannah looked at him for the first time, into his eyes. He wasn’t scary at all. He reminded her of her best friend’s uncle, back at Four Pillars, a nice man with only one wife who ran the supply store and usually gave Hannah a sucker when she went in with Mother.

Loosening her arms around her legs a bit, she leaned forward and opened her mouth. He put his phone away, pulled a small tube of hand sanitizer out of his jeans pocket, squeezed some into each palm and rubbed them together.

He reached in, running his fingers along her lower teeth, then her upper, against her gums. She smelled the disinfectant and wondered what would happen if she bit him. How did they punish girls who were for sale? Or after they’d been bought?

“Mrs. Alvarez tells me you’re a virgin,” he said, wiping his hands again. “Is that true?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Have you ever had a boyfriend?”

“No, Sir.”

“Have you ever kissed a boy?”

“No, Sir. Well, once when I was, um, 12, I think. He kissed me.”

“Any lumps in your breasts?”

“No, Sir.”

“No strange pains in your groin?”

“No, Sir. Well, sometimes, a few weeks after my per  
— I have them about once a month.”

“Mrs. Alvarez tells me you’re a good eater, and  
regular?”

“Yes, Sir,” Hannah replied, although she didn’t  
understand the end of the sentence.

“You know how to read?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“What’s 35 plus 21?”

“56.”

“Who was the first president?”

“George Washington.”

“What’s water made of?”

“Hydrogen and oxygen.”

“What’s pi?”

“3.14.”

“If you have a triangle, and you need to find—“

“A squared plus B squared equals C squared.”

“Were you a good student?”

“Yes, Sir.”

Hannah had always been at least the smartest girl in  
her grade, possibly the smartest of all the students her age,  
although she wasn’t encouraged to demonstrate her  
intelligence around the boys, and she was called stupid more  
than once when she asked certain questions about the Bible.  
There were some things in the book that didn’t make sense to  
her.

“Is it okay if I touch you?”

“Yes, Sir,” Hannah replied quietly.

Bert put his phone away, reached through the bars, brushed Hannah's right breast with the back of his fingers, put his hand under it, lifted it and let it fall. Hannah looked down, watching with the same detachment as she had earlier, when Mrs. Alvarez had cut her pubic hair. This is where she would go whenever something like this was being done, she told herself. It was another girl's body. Another Hannah. The other girl would cooperate while the real Hannah withdrew to a private place in her mind, where she would think about Mother, or about the man who would buy her, or she would pray.

Bert pinched Hannah's right nipple, lifted her breast with it, let it fall again, repeated the process with her left breast and nipple while the girl looked off, at the stacks of tools in the far corner. She knew her nipples were hardening, growing sharp and pink, as they always did when she touched them, and she tried not to think about it. She didn't know why they reacted that way, but it was something she liked about them, and how they felt when it happened. It was something only she knew about, until now. She wished it were still her secret.

Bert continued his examination of Hannah's breasts, pressing from the sides and in front. Hannah guessed he was looking for lumps and tried not to pull back when he pushed hard where the flesh was thickest. She clung to the bars, looking down, wanting it to stop.

Bert noticed Hannah's knuckles around the bars and gazed sympathetically at her. "You're doing great, Hannah. I know this isn't easy."

"No, Sir, it's not."

Bert sanitized his hands again.

"I'm going to need to touch you a little more," he said. "Down there. Will you let me do that?"

**"A Little Honey"**

“What are you going to do?” Hannah asked. She had known something was going to be done to that part of her, since at least this morning. Or maybe before. She had guessed days ago, in some portion of her mind that wasn’t fully conscious, that they didn’t just want her for sewing, or so she could go to jail. This was about sex, and what was between her legs was her most important sex part, and they were going to want to know about it.

“I’m going to touch your lips and put my finger up your vagina.”

“Yes, Sir,” Hannah said quietly, rising on her knees and spreading her thighs slightly.

Bert reached through the bars and pressed his fingers against Hannah’s vulva, then pinched her lips, outer and then inner, feeling the thickness of the folds. Hannah looked down, detaching her mind again, watching as Bert placed his index and ring finger against Hannah’s outer lips to part them. She closed her eyes as she felt herself being opened, and breathed out sharply as Bert’s middle finger went inside her, exploring the mouth of her sex organ, slowly and thoroughly. Bert had trimmed his fingernails down to the nubs, and Hannah thought it must be because he did this to girls all the time.

Hannah shifted involuntarily, rising slightly on her knees, and Bert’s finger came out and went back in, a little deeper. He’d found something in there that interested him, and his finger continued to explore.

“You’ve still got your cherry.”

“Pardon?” she whispered, blushing.

“Your hymen. It’s still there. Do you know what that is?”

“No, Sir.”

“It’s tissue that breaks when you’re penetrated the first time.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“Now, last thing I need to do ... can you stay with me?”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I’m gonna tickle you a little. On that little spot at the top of your vulva. Can I do that?”

Hannah said nothing, but she held still, choosing to make that her answer.

“Good girl.”

Bert’s finger touched Hannah’s clitoris, made a slow circle around it, pressed directly on it, slid back up her vagina, then returned to it. He pinched it, circled it again, squeezed it gently.

These were things Hannah had done to herself, but more slowly, more cautiously, with guilt because of her mother, and God.

Hannah blushed and stifled a sigh, and she tightened her grip on the bars and willed herself not to flinch, not to move away from Bert to escape his touch, nor toward him.

“You’ve got a little honey in there,” he said, slipping his finger up Hannah’s sheath again.

Hannah looked away, wanting him to be done, wanting his finger gone. She knew her vagina got wet, sometimes when it was touched, sometimes without any stimulation. The first time it happened, she thought it was urine, leaking out because she had touched too much, and was damaging herself. But it wasn’t like urine, and it felt good when it leaked out onto her vulva and she touched it, and she decided that it was supposed to happen, part of the mysterious workings of her private parts.

“Your clitoris firmed right up,” he observed.

Hannah stared.

“Do you know what your clitoris is?”

“No, Sir,” Hannah replied, blushing because she was lying, and Bert probably knew she was lying.

“The part right here,” he said, touching Hannah’s clitoris again. “It started hardening as soon as I squeezed it. You’ve got a quick trigger. That’s a plus.”

Bert sanitized his hands again and stepped back, retrieving his phone from his pocket and typing something into it.

“When was your last period?”

“Oh,” Hannah replied, the question too embarrassing to be answered.

“Did it end yesterday?”

“No.”

“Three days ago?”

“No.”

“Five days ago?”

“Yes.”

Bert stooped and pulled a tape measure out of his satchel, neatly rolled, and handed it to Hannah.

“I’m sure you know what this is.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“I’m going to need some measurements, and then we’ll be close to finished. Let’s start with your bust.”

Hannah measured her breasts, as she had many times before, more often than necessary when she was 14 and 15 and they started to grow.

“34.”

“Waist?”

“26”

“Hips?”

“I can’t measure unless I can stand,” she said. “But I know I’m 36.”

“Close enough,” Bert agreed. “Neck?”

“13”

“Ankle?”

“10 and a half.”

“Give me the tape,” he said, “and put your hand outside your cage.”

Hannah complied, realizing that she’d already gotten used to being nude in front of a man she’d just met. Her mother had called adaptability a virtue as they’d adjusted through the years to changing (mostly deteriorating) circumstances. She was adapting now, to things she’d never imagined. It helped that she didn’t feel like Bert was ogling her, or lusting for her, or saying anything more than was necessary to get his job done.

He passed the tape around her wrist, adding the size to the others in his phone.

“I wear a size six dress,” Hannah said.

Bert looked up at her but said nothing.

“How long will it take to make my clothes?”

Bert looked up again, a hint of sympathy in his eyes, not too different from Mrs. Alvarez’s most common expression.

“That’s not what you were measured for.”

“Why was I measured?”

“Some of it was things your buyer will want to know. Some was for restraints.”

“Oh.”

This was, in the back of her mind, something else Hannah had known was likely. She’d already been handcuffed once, briefly, before she was put into her cage. Presumably, they’d handcuff her again before they let her out.

That’s all she wanted to know for now.

“Almost done,” Bert told her. “I just need some pictures.”



## Pictures and a Near De-Hymening

Bert lifted his phone, approached the bars and pointed it at her face. She looked at him, waiting for him to tell her to smile, or to frown, or to do something, but he simply snapped the first few shots in silence.

“Now, up on your knees like before, so I can get your breasts,” he said. Hannah obeyed, blushing as she realized Bert was going to share these pictures with total strangers. But one of them might be the man who would buy her.

“Now, on your hands and knees, just two more.”

Bert stepped back, halfway to the wall, his phone raised and pointing at her from the side, and she saw herself the way she knew Bert’s phone was seeing her, on all fours, in a cage, like an animal.

“Don’t lower your head, please. Look up, eyes forward.”



(Illustration by 2Loose2Trek)

She obeyed, holding still, listening to his footstep. He shuffled to the back of her cage, where the little door was that Mrs. Alvarez used to pass things to her.

“Knees apart, please, about a foot.”

She looked down, saw that, without thinking, she’d closed her legs, her thighs pressed together tightly. Parting them so that Bert’s camera could capture the most private parts of her body – her vulva and anus, the backs of her thighs, the soles of her feet – was devastating in a way nothing up to this point had been. Who would want to look at such a picture? What kind of man would choose a wife, or just someone to have sex with, because of how she looked back there?

She spread her knees and then, as she had many times through the years, and many times more in the last three days, Hannah felt her eyes fill with water, felt the lump rise in her throat, and she wept, quietly to herself, trying not to let her shoulders shake.

“I know,” Bert said softly. He was done taking pictures, now standing at the side of her cage, close to her shoulder. She looked at him, saw sympathy in his eyes again and allowed herself a single sound of despair, a short, guttural exclamation. She dropped down on her haunches, wiped her eyes with a quick swipe of the back of her hand and put on the face her mother wore for her jail mug shot: hard, expressionless, empty.

“I’m gonna list you,” Bert said, adding perhaps in the mistaken idea it would make her feel better, “No doubt about that. And if you assess well, you’ll bring top dollar.”

Bert reached into the satchel he’d set on the floor and pulled out a small ring of metal.

“I’m going to put this around your ankle,” he said. “It’ll stay on ‘til you’re sold. Can you slide one of your feet to me?”

Hannah offered her left foot and he reached through the bars and locked the little cuff around her ankle, slipping his fingers in to make sure it wasn't too tight, pulling at the cuff to make sure it wouldn't slip off.

"It's called a broker's cuff," he said. "If anyone but me tries to take it off, you tell them to stop, alright?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Now, spin around, sit with your back toward me."

Hannah obeyed and felt something cool against her upper back, between her shoulder blades, and realized Bert was writing on her with a marker.

"What are you writing?"

"Just my name, and the date. So people will know you're the right girl."

Nothing happened for a moment and Hannah looked back to see Bert taking another picture with his phone, of her back.

"You've done good," he said. "We're all finished."

Bert knocked on the door, she heard it unlock, she heard the voices of Mrs. Alvarez and Bert talking, unintelligibly, for what seemed like a long time. She knew they must be discussing her. She studied her cuff. It said "Bert Sykes, LLC," and there was a phone number and some other letters and numbers. And there was a ring set into it, that something could be hooked to, or looped through. She moved it around her ankle and made a half-hearted attempt at slipping it over her heel. It was too tight to remove, and she didn't want it off anyway. Bert would just put a tighter cuff on her if this one came off, she assumed.

Finishing her inspection of the broker's cuff, she sat, tightly wrapped around herself, afraid, wishing desperately that all this would end.

The door opened and Mrs. Alvarez entered, followed by Bert. Hannah wasn't expecting to see him again.

"Hannah, how are you doing?" Mrs. Alvarez asked.

“Fine.”

“Bert had some things to tell me about you. You’re going to have to make some decisions.”

“Yes, Ma’am?”

Mrs. Alvarez looked at Bert. “Tell her,” she said.

“We talked about your hymen,” he began. “It hasn’t been broken yet. That means you could be worth millions. Five million, possibly. But it could take longer to sell you, because we’ll have to find a buyer who wants that. And we’ll have to harness you so you can’t break yourself. And if you’re broken when you reach the buyer, they can send you back and get a refund.” Bert paused, took a deep breath. “And then, if everything works out and they break you, you might just end up in storage. For years.”

Hannah looked away again, too overwhelmed by Bert’s words to respond.

“Tell her about storage,” Mrs. Alvarez said.

“It’s the nature of the thing,” he said philosophically. “Once you’ve been broken, you’re less interesting, but they might not want to give you to anyone else. That’s the way they think. These are Russians, sometimes, or the Middle East. So they’ll cage you and leave you there, alone, more or less.”

“Do you understand that, Hannah? Do you understand what Bert said?”

“I think so,” Hannah replied, but the room was spinning and Bert’s words were still sinking in.

“If we sell you to be broken,” Mrs. Alvarez said, “that will mean a lot more money, for us and for your mother. But you don’t have to do it.”

“I don’t want to,” Hannah said. She was certain. She looked at Mrs. Alvarez, trying to understand her motives. Why was she being given a choice?

“I wouldn’t feel good about it either,” Mrs. Alvarez said, as if reading her mind. “But I wanted you to decide. It’s fine if you don’t want to, and we can take care of that now.”

“Get up on your hands and knees,” Bert said, “with your backside against the bars.”

Hannah complied and Bert retrieved something from the satchel on the floor and pulled out his phone. “I’m going to need to record this.”

Bert raised the phone to his mouth and spoke into it, deliberately, carefully.

”Okay, this is Hannah, and this is her owner, Dorothy Alvarez, and Mrs. Alvarez has requested that I de-hymen Hannah, and I’m going to do that now, with her approval. Do you agree, Mrs. Alvarez?”

“Yes.”

Bert and Mrs. Alvarez stepped to the end of the cage where Hannah was waiting.

“This might sting a bit,” Bert said, and she felt him parting her lips, and she felt something hard that wasn’t his finger against the mouth of her vagina.

“No!” she screamed, suddenly understanding what was about to be done. She scrambled to the far end of her cage and scrunched up, burying her face in her knees. Lost in humiliation, seeing herself as she almost was, unceremoniously violated by an object, she withdrew completely into herself.

She shut out everything, unaware of time, seeing herself in the blackness of space, alone, lost for what felt like hours, not certain if Bert and Mrs. Alvarez were still there or if they had, as she hoped, gone away, preferably forever.

“Hannah,” Mrs. Alvarez said softly. “Hannah.”

Hannah turned her head to her side and saw that Mrs. Alvarez was crying, her eyes wet, her mouth curled.

“Do you want to do it, Baby?” Mrs. Alvarez asked her. “Do you want us to leave so you can take care of it?”

“No,” Hannah replied. “Go away. Go away.”

How could any man love a girl who'd been treated like this? She was an object. An animal. The idea that she was on a path to a husband who would love her seemed suddenly, laughably hopeless, and she returned her face to the small place between her kneecaps and screamed out a long, mournful wail.

She didn't know how long she cried, or when Mrs. Alvarez and Bert left the storage area, but when she at last closed her mouth, sniffed and looked up, she was alone.

She needed tissue for her face. She needed to urinate. And she no longer saw a need to be quiet, or polite, or discreet. She thought of her mother, with her new, hard jail face, and realized she was turning into the same thing.

"Mrs. Alvarez?" Hannah said, hoping her voice would carry through the door. "Mrs. Alvarez!"

The door clicked and Mrs. Alvarez walked in, her face tear-streaked, eyes red.

"Yes, Sweetheart?" she choked. "I'm so, so sor—"

"I need tissue," Hannah said, looking at the wall. "I need the bowl."

"Are you hungry?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

Mrs. Alvarez was gone so briefly she didn't bother to lock the door, and when she returned with the bowl, tissue, a wet cloth and a plate of food, Hannah knew she must have had it all ready, waiting for the girl's call.

Hannah wiped her face first, and as soon as the bowl had been passed through the little door, she positioned it between her knees and released into it, no longer worried if she spilled, unconcerned that Mrs. Alvarez was still in the room.

She wiped, traded the bowl for the plate and devoured the sandwich, then bit through the apple, down to the core, the memory of her last meal with her mother just another bitter, gray memory.

“I want clothes,” Hannah said.

“I can’t do that,” Mrs. Alvarez replied.

“Why not?”

## **A New Cage**

“I don’t know. It’s just what they told us. They don’t want you to have anything with you when they take you.”

“When—“ Hannah’s voice caught in her throat.  
“When will they take me?”

“Bert thought it would be this afternoon. Maybe in an hour or two.”

“Where will they take me to?”

“To a place where ... where people are kept until they’re sold.”

“Will I have to stay in this cage?”

“No. They’ll have a new cage for you.”

“Oh.”

“I’ll be there when they come for you,” Mrs. Alvarez said flatly.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“They may not be very nice. So please just do everything they say.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Mrs. Alvarez gathered up the dishes and everything else and left the storage room, locking the door this time.

Something had changed in the way they talked together. Probably because of what happened with Bert. Mrs. Alvarez didn’t seem to like her as much, and that – as much as everything else she had to regret and to fear – made her deeply sad.

She thought about calling for Mrs. Alvarez again, in hopes they might be able to talk like they had before, or to request the Bible, but she saw herself talking or reading in the nude and decided it wasn't something she wanted to do, and she stayed silent.

Staring at the door, alert to any sound of steps or locks, she let her right hand drift to her middle, between her legs, to the thin covering of hair and the soft lips. Bert had been able to feel her hymen when he reached in, and now she tried it, probing cautiously, her middle finger exploring slowly until she reached the thin tissue that marked her maidenhood.

She pressed it, wondering if a mere touch could break it. She pushed again, felt a slight sting, remembered that Bert said it would hurt when it broke, and she abandoned the effort.

Bert had made her wet. He'd stroked her clitoris and made it swell, and he'd said she had a quick trigger. Now, under her own attention, it was happening again, the fluid leaking across her knuckle, her member sensitive and firm.

Why, if a girl should get no pleasure from anyone other than her husband, would this feel good? Shouldn't God have designed her body to know when she was being touched the right way and the wrong way?

She wasn't sure about God at this moment, however. Too many things had happened the last three days that God could not possibly be involved in.

Hannah, thinking she heard voices, withdrew her finger and put it into her mouth, partly to hide the evidence of how she had fondled herself, and partly because she liked her taste, especially at this time of the month, in the week or two after her period.

No one came, and for the next 30 minutes, she sat and waited, her mind going from one dark place to the next, to her mother's face, to her own face, to the pictures of both, to what might happen. And then she heard voices and knew they were real, men's and women's voices, and footsteps in the hall, and she wished desperately that she could be invisible, or gone completely. Even being dead would be better than this.



The door opened and Mrs. Alvarez entered first, followed closely by two men and a woman, the woman pushing a cart with another cage on it.

Her heart thumping in her ears, Hannah focused on the new cage, seeing nothing else, hearing nothing – not the people, the voices, the squeak of wheels, the tramp of feet.

This cage had an iron floor, like her current one, tarnished with time, and was about the same size, but the sides and top were made of chain link, like a fence, with various ports and doors in the sides, and hinges along several edges, not just at the top. On the side facing her, a metal plate had been affixed, reading simply “FEMALE.” The men raised the new cage from the cart and set it on the floor.

“Hannah?”

Why would it say FEMALE? Did that mean there were also cages for males? The idea that a man could be caged like this had never crossed her mind, and she tried to imagine that, and found she couldn’t.

Next, she noticed the bucket, at the end of the cage, and knew that must be for waste. It was set into the cage floor, a part of it, and not just something that would be passed in and out. It was always there, she thought, feeling a new sense of despair. The fact it featured a lid that could be closed and clamped shut made no difference.

“Hannah?”

Someone was speaking her name.

“Hannah?”

She looked up. Mrs. Alvarez was on the other side of the bars, just beside her, her eyes still red and wet, her makeup smeared beside her nose.

“Yes, Ma’am?” Hannah said quietly, the words barely leaving her mouth.

“These people are here to take you, and they need you to listen.”

Hannah looked at each of the others there. Her heart was still thumping, but she wasn't as terrified. They looked like normal people, not too different from Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez. She focused on the woman, who seemed to be asking her something.

“We need to see your broker's cuff.”

Hannah processed the request slowly, then unwrapped herself, put her left arm across her breasts at the nipples, her right hand over her genitals, and slid her cuffed foot toward the bars. The woman inspected it while one of the men stepped to the other side of her cage, and she knew he must be looking at the things Bert had written on her back.

The woman held up her phone, staring at it, then looking at Hannah's face. She had the pictures Bert had taken of her on her phone, Hannah concluded. Who else had he sent them to?

“Show us your breasts,” she instructed.

Hannah dropped her arm, the woman looked at her chest and at her phone and put her phone away.

“Alright, we've got the right girl,” she said. “Do you want a modesty pad?”

The girl wasn't much older than Hannah, in her early 20's, shorter and stockier, with blonde hair like Hannah's. She and her two male colleagues were dressed the same, in black pants and gray shirts with their name on one side and a company name on the other.

“Do you want a modesty pad?” the woman asked again.

Hannah continued to stare at the woman. Her face was hard, too, almost like her mother's.

The woman scowled, rolled her eyes and opened her mouth, most likely to say something harsh, but Mrs. Alvarez put her hand on the woman's arm and looked back at Hannah.

“Hannah, do you want a modesty pad?”

Hannah finally heard the words of the question, but they meant nothing to her.

“What is that?” she asked.

The woman held up a small piece of thick paper. “You can wear it during transport if you want. It covers your vulva and anus.”

Hannah immediately blushed deep crimson, thinking about the two men in the storage area, both younger than Bert, both staring at her.

“Here,” the woman said, reaching through the bars to hand the pad to Hannah.

She took it, still unsure what it was.

“Peel the backing off,” the woman said.

Hannah complied, noticing that the exposed side was sticky.

“Now, line up the wide end with the top line of your pubic hair.

Hannah obeyed, sticking it to her mound, spreading her legs to affix it to her vulva, continuing to press until the narrow end had adhered to her anus.

“Take it off any time,” the woman said. “It won’t hurt. It’s not that sticky. But after you’ve taken it off a few times, it probably won’t go on again. And don’t urinate or defecate with it on, or it’ll make a mess.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah whispered, wishing she’d refused the pad. Being nude was less embarrassing than what was being said about the thing she was wearing.

“Now,” the woman said slowly to Hannah, “we need to move you to the cage we’ve brought, and you need to cooperate.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“First, we need to restrain you.”

Hannah said nothing.

“Turn around, back to the bars, hands together behind.”

Hannah obeyed and she felt the woman cuffing her wrists, like the sheriff’s deputy had done. At the same time, one of the men walked to the other side of her cage and reached through the bars for her left foot.

Knowing why he was there, glad at that moment she was wearing the pad, she raised her foot and allowed him to close a cuff around her ankle. When she offered her other foot and looked up at him, into his eyes, he nodded, as if grateful for her cooperation.

Hannah felt herself blush and looked down at her shackles, two silver cuffs joined by 12 inches of chain.

The men stepped to either end of Hannah’s cage, slid it off the table and set it on the floor beside the new cage.

“Open her up,” the woman said.

Mrs. Alvarez knelt and grabbed the first of the two padlocks that had secured Hannah in her cage since Tuesday. She unlocked it, lifted the latch, unlocked and opened the second latch.

The top was thrown open and, before Hannah could begin rising to her feet, she felt hands around her upper arms, lifting her out of the cage and onto the cold concrete floor of the storage area. The hands slid down to her wrists and raised her arms up, high behind her, bending her over, causing sharp pain at both shoulders.

“Ow!” Hannah cried.

“You’re hurting her!” Mrs. Alvarez protested.

“Is there anything in either chamber you want to tell us about?” the woman asked.

“Auhhhh!” Hannah shouted, ignoring the question, because it made no sense. Forced by the twisting of her arms to stare at her feet, she felt the pad over her vulva pulled away, then two fingers were pushed up her sex. Hannah screamed again, afraid they were going to break her violently as

punishment for refusing when Bert tried to do it, but the fingers stopped just inside her sheath, exited, and the pad was readhered. They weren't done, however. She felt the pad being pulled away from her anus, then a finger sliding up there, into a hole that was in some ways much more personal than her vagina.

She grunted, trying to detach herself, but too preoccupied with why this was being done, why she was being violated this way, to separate herself from reality.

The finger explored her insides slowly, deliberately, and then it was done, leaving her body. She heard Mrs. Alvarez crying but had no idea why.

She was raised upright, saw that the men were on either side of her, each holding an upper arm so tight it hurt, and the woman stood before her, with a circle of metal, stainless steel, hinged in the back, opened toward Hannah.

In a quick motion, the woman put it around Hannah's neck, pulled her hair away and closed it with a click. The metal was cold and Hannah knew it had been locked.

Mrs. Alvarez sucked in, quietly sobbing, and Hannah for the first time saw the woman's pain as having to do with her, with what they were doing to her.

The woman slipped two fingers under Hannah's collar, lifted it to her chin, pulled at it. "Good fit," she said. "Put her in." The men lifted her, moved her over the new cage and lowered her.

Someone grabbed her shoulders, forcing her in while the woman angled the top of the cage down, slamming it shut and latching it as soon as Hannah was seated.

Hannah sat up awkwardly, her shackles rattling as she crossed her legs.

"Are you going to take her restraints off?" Mrs. Alvarez asked.

"When we get her to the stacks."

"She has to be cuffed in back?"

“Do you care if she masturbates?”

“It’s okay if she does,” Mrs. Alvarez said.

Hannah had never encountered that word, nor believed such a word could exist for something so private and obscene, but she knew immediately what it meant and prayed that God would make her disappear at this very moment, to end her existence altogether.

She remained on earth, however, and the woman pointed to a small opening in the wires near the floor of the cage and told Hannah to back up to it. She obeyed and one wrist was released. Anticipating the next instruction, Hannah rose to her knees, turned and put her hands at the opening, watching as the woman reached in and returned her free wrist to its cuff.

Masturbating, if that was the word for it, was the last thing on her mind, but being handcuffed in front was far preferable for other reasons, and she was grateful to Mrs. Alvarez, although she didn’t look up at her or acknowledge her kindness.

The men lifted her cage and set it on the cart, and Mrs. Alvarez opened the door so Hannah could be pushed out, into the hallway and toward the door she’d been carried through on Tuesday.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 2: Hannah to the Stacks**

### **Stephanie**

Because God didn't seem interested in eliminating her from existence today, Hannah closed her eyes and wrapped her arms around her legs, making of herself a small, almost-naked, anguished ball of girl. If Mr. Alvarez were there, if the men who worked for them were there, looking at her, staring at her, she did not know it and never would.

Once she passed through the doors and into the warm August afternoon, however, she risked a quick peek, saw before she closed her eyes again that her cage was being pushed toward a small truck with "Dallas Subject Storage and Services" written on the side.

The back of the truck was open and a liftgate had been lowered to the asphalt. The cart was pushed onto it and Hannah was raised slowly, to the sound of a groaning electric motor.

She opened her eyes again, looked back at the building that had been her home since Tuesday.

Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez were standing just outside the door, watching her go. She looked at them for a moment, and then she waved with one manacled hand, mostly at Mrs. Alvarez, who reacted strangely, turning toward her husband and burying her face in his shoulder.

Hannah, whose understanding of things was still evolving, felt nothing at this moment. She knew that the woman had shown her many kindnesses, but due to avarice, or the desperate need that afflicted people sometimes, she had refrained from the greatest kindness, of setting Hannah free. And yet, for some reason, she did not hate Mrs. Alvarez.

She did not hate Mr. Alvarez either, and the fact Mr. Alvarez was seeing her all but naked hardly mattered anymore.

The liftgate stopped and her cage was slid into the truck, and Hannah, now ready to see everything, looked about quickly.

The interior of the truck featured eight spaces for cages, four on the floor, four more atop them. All of the spaces were empty except for one other, where a cage just like hers rested. She looked for the metal plate, saw that it said “FEMALE,” and then saw a girl’s dark eyes within, set into a brown face, framed by thick black hair down to bare brown shoulders.

The girl was wearing a collar like Hannah’s, silver and tight. Her feet were shackled and she had been handcuffed in back. She sat cross-legged, completely nude, not even a modesty pad, her pubic hair a black triangle above her dark vulva. She squinted at Hannah and moved her feet, her chains rattling.

“Oh!” Hannah exclaimed, too startled to smile or say anything more. Her cage was lifted and set in the space above the girl’s cage, and the woman walked up, crouching to take a look at the other girl.

“Everything okay?” she asked.

“Yeah,” said the girl.

“We’ll get to the stacks in about 45 minutes.”

“Okay.”

She stood and looked at Hannah. “That’s your toilet,” she said, pointing to the little bucket set into the cage floor. “After you use it, shut the lid.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“If you masturbate, let yourself dry before you put your modesty pad back on, or it won’t stick.”

Hannah said nothing and the woman rolled the cart to a space against the wall, where she secured it, left the truck, rolled the door closed and locked it.

The space didn’t descend into pitch blackness, however, and cool air was coming from somewhere. This



truck had lights and an air conditioner.

The engine rumbled to life and lurched forward, and Hannah stared into the empty space, reaching up absently to feel her collar.

It was smooth and cool, about an inch wide and close around her neck. She felt all the way around, touching the hinge in back, a small ring set on the side, and the place in front where it joined. There was no place for a key, no hole or any way to unlock it that she could find.

The collar was surprisingly light, and she wondered at first if it were made of something other than metal – a heavy plastic, perhaps – or if it were hollow. But it felt too sturdy to be anything but solid metal, so she decided it must be made of an alloy of some kind, the kind they use in bikes and planes.

There were rough places on both sides of the collar, and after exploring them, she realized she'd found writing, letters or numbers or both stamped into the metal. Trying to read them with her fingertip, she painstakingly identified what she thought might be an N, but the process was too tedious to be continued

She wondered what the ring was for. Would they put a tag there at some point? Or a leash? Either possibility was humiliating, for different reasons. She imagined a metal tag that said "Hannah," that people would take between their fingers and read.

The dark thoughts ended when she remembered she wasn't alone.

"Hello?" she said, pressing her face against the wire of her cage.

"Hey," said the girl beneath her. "Where are you from?"

There was a slight Hispanic lilt to her voice, and Hannah imagined she was raised by Mexican parents in America, speaking Spanish at home but learning English when she went out into the world.

“I used to live in Smoaks, with my mother. In an apartment there.”

“Where is it?” the girl asked.

“East of Fort Worth. Aren’t you from around here?”

“El Paso,” she said. “But not anymore, I guess. My family’s auctioning me off. They picked me up there Wednesday, and I’ve been in this goddam truck ever since.”

“Oh,” Hannah replied. She had heard a girl say “goddam” maybe three times in her life, and it always shocked her. This is not the kind of person her mother would have ever allowed her to associate with.

“How old are you?” Hannah asked.

“23.”

“What’s your name?”

“Stephanie.”

“I’m Hannah. I’m 18.”

“Hi, Hannah.”

“Why is your family selling you?”

“They’re through with me.”

“Oh,” Hannah replied. This sounded like a terrible thing, much worse than being taken from a bankrupt mother.

“Not my real family,” Stephanie clarified. “The people who bought me three years ago.”

As she talked, Stephanie moved restlessly, her chains making a steady rattle. Hannah was embarrassed by the sound of her own chains, but she guessed it was something one got used to.

Hannah, more relieved than she could have imagined to find a peer, and someone who could explain things in a way Mrs. Alvarez couldn’t, peppered her companion with questions, learning that Stephanie had been raised in the US by illegal immigrants, had gone to school here, learned the language and the culture but, when her family’s luck ran out

and they were caught in a federal sweep, she'd gone to a different facility than the rest of her family. There, she was inspected, assessed, trained and put up for sale.

She was bought by a family with two sons and a daughter, and among her chores was submitting to regular intimacy, she said, confiding that she'd partnered with everyone in the family at some point, although the lion's share of her services went to the two boys.

Now that the youngest son was headed to college, they'd decided to dispose of her, expecting enough in proceeds to pay for school for all three children.

"I'm sorry," Hannah said.

"I'm not sorry," she said. "They are but I'm not. They all cried my last day. I only pretended to."

"Did you ever ... did you ever hope you could get married to one of them?"

Stephanie laughed so loud and fiercely it startled Hannah. "Oh, fuck no, they were all pigs!"

"Weren't they rich?"

"What's that got to do with anything?"

"They weren't ... nice?"

"God no."

The idea that the wealthy were not more virtuous than the poor was a new idea to Hannah. Wasn't money a gift God reserved for the blessed elect? But then, the wealthy bought girls, to use them. Is that what God expected them to do with the money He gave them? Was He surprised when they did that? Could anything surprise God? It's a question she'd asked long ago, and was told to stop being stupid so she didn't ask again and forgot the question altogether, until now. Maybe God's plan was just a little more complicated than she understood.

The truck continued to rumble through the unseen streets, racing along a highway at one point, it seemed, then stopping and starting and turning through what was

presumably city traffic. Were they in Dallas now, or somewhere else in Fort Worth?

As the truck rolled on and Stephanie shared her story, Hannah pulled her pad off at the front and crouched over her bucket, wishing God hadn't designed the human body to have to do this, or hadn't designed the human mind to feel such shame when it had to be done. Her urine spilled noisily and she prayed Stephanie couldn't hear her, that the truck engine would drown out the sound of her relief. With nothing to wipe with, she let herself drip, then put the pad back and closed the lid quietly.

"Do you know where we're going?" she asked, not sure she wanted to know the answer.

"To some kind of storage place, probably," Stephanie replied.

"Will we be alone?" Hannah asked, dreading any more days of waiting by herself in a lonely room.

"Not if it's like the last place, God no," Stephanie replied, laughing again. "You'll be anything but alone. But I am so ready to get there, just to get these chains off."

"Have you been handcuffed like that since Wednesday?"

"Almost," she said. "They take them off a few times a day so I can eat and, you know, take care of things."

"Take care of things?"

"Go the bathroom, wash up, masturbate."

With that last obscene word, something in Hannah's middle stirred again. A concept that she had always believed was profoundly private, perhaps something only she knew about, was not only known of, but had its own word and could be mentioned casually, in the same context as food and hygiene, as if it were just another thing one had to do during the day. The idea was both horrifying and arousing to Hannah in ways she couldn't define.

The truck stopped again, and Hannah realized it would be reaching its destination soon and they'd be taken out and probably separated, and there was still a great deal she needed to know.

"Have you seen your mother since they took you?"

"No. She's back in Mexico."

"Does she know where you are?"

"Not now."

"Did she?"

"Yeah, we wrote letters to each other. But just once a month. That's all my family allowed. Because they were pigs."

"How did you know where to send them?"

"I had my aunt's address in Chihuahua."

The sudden, desperate hopelessness of her situation came crashing down on Hannah all at once. She had no address for her mother. How did one write someone in jail? And her mother had no address for her. Even Hannah didn't know where she was, or where she would be.

Sitting cross-legged, staring down at her manacled feet, the collar pressing around her neck, Hannah bent over and closed her eyes, trying to bite down on her sobs before they escaped.

"Hannah?" Stephanie asked from the cage below, apparently surprised by the silence.

"I—" she blurted, "I can't talk right now."

"Your mother will find you," Stephanie said.

"How?"

"There's a whole database. You can find anyone."

"Will we get to talk?"

"Well, letters at least. They have to allow one a month."

The truck moved again, slowly, backwards this time, and then it stopped and the engine shut off.

“We’re home,” Stephanie deadpanned.

### **At the Stacks**

The truck door opened, the warm afternoon air instantly permeating their space like breath, but Hannah shivered.

Moving awkwardly in her restraints, Hannah crawled to the end of her cage and peered through the wire. They had pulled up to a loading dock, three men standing on it, and she wanted only to disappear again. She was glad for her modesty pad even as she cursed its inadequacy.

The men weren’t there to ogle, however. They barely acknowledged her as they rolled the cart up and set her cage on it.

“Bye,” she said to Stephanie, surprised by her sorrow at having to say farewell to a girl she’d just met.

“Good luck,” Stephanie said back, smiling, as if this were all entirely normal. Maybe it was. Maybe Hannah would get used to this too.

She looked back at the man pushing her cage, but he didn’t seem to know she was there. Nor did anyone else on the loading dock. Perhaps she was, in a sense, invisible now, her prayer granted.

She was being rolled toward a pair of large doors that opened on their own as she drew near, revealing a cavernous space full of voices. As her eyes adjusted to the interior darkness, she saw what looked like a large gray wall before her, two or three stories tall. It wasn’t like any wall she’d ever seen before, however. Something was off about it.

“Oh!” she cried when her eyes adjusted to the interior light and she realized what she was looking at. It was cages like hers, each cage secured in its own space, rows and

columns of tiny cages where people sat or lay or moved. She knew, with a visceral horror bordering on nausea, that this was where she was destined, that this would be her next home.

They'd called this the "stacks," she recalled. This is what they meant: stacks of human beings. No privacy. No peace.

A female employee stood on a machine that rolled on thick tires, designed like an elevator to lift her. As Hannah watched, she bent to speak to the girl in a cage set on the floor, then she rose to the next cage up, her mouth open to say a few quick words before she ascended again. A second machine, a forklift, sat idle in the corner, and she knew this must be how the cages were lifted and moved. Like cargo.

As her cart rumbled closer to the stacks, she understood that the sound of voices was coming from the people in the cages. They were talking to each other. She heard a playful argument. She heard laughter. She even heard someone sing, briefly, the chorus of a song her mother would have never allowed her to listen to.

She was being pushed on a path parallel to the wall of cages and she stared at the people there. Most of them were nude, except for the silver collars, all identical to hers. Most were also wearing at least one cuff, like Hannah's broker's cuff. A few were chained by the wrists and ankles. One girl had something around her middle, a sort of belt.

She assumed that everyone here was female, so the sight of a male, his sinewy back turned toward her, startled her.

He was sitting in a cage three rows up, and she stared at him, all her attention focused on him, on the back of his head, the cut of his short, black hair, on his nakedness, on his shoulders and his spine and his bare bottom. She guessed he was in his early 20s, just a little older than she. If he felt her eyes on him, if he turned to look, if he turned his whole body, she would see him, all of him. She would see his penis. She wanted him to turn.

She saw his mouth open and his head bob. She saw him raise his hands. He was talking and gesturing to someone. Who? There was a second stack of cages on the other side of the first stack, but she couldn't see who was in the cage next to his. Could it be a girl? Would they put a girl and a boy beside each other? Would the girl faint with embarrassment? Would they talk, like everything was normal?

Her cage was wheeled through another pair of doors and into a small room where a woman stood behind a counter. She took a handful of things off the shelf behind her and walked over to Hannah's cage. The man pushing her turned and left.

"Let me see your collar."

Hannah pressed against the wire while the woman peered in, reading whatever was stamped into the metal.

"Have you been here before?"

"No, Ma'am."

"This is your food," she said, dropping a metal cylinder marked "FEMALE" into a slot on the inside of Hannah's cage. "Don't take more than you need. We'll refill it every day."

She attached a second cylinder beside the first. "And this is your water."

She pointed to the little bucket. "All waste in the bucket there. Don't spill. And keep the lid closed."

"Yes, Ma'am."

"When will you start your period?"

"Oh. Um, probably not for three weeks."

"This is your tissue. You get 10, so don't waste," she said, lining up a third cylinder.

Hannah studied the three tubes, understanding with a sort of empty sorrow that this is all she had now. What little she'd owned before was gone, replaced by the contents of three metal cylinders. She wouldn't go hungry, she knew, but



this was a new poverty, far worse than anything she had ever known.

“Let’s get your chains off, hands to the port.”

Hannah obeyed, glad at least for this, scrambling so that her bound wrists were just inside the door at the bottom of her cage. The woman unlocked the door and took off the cuffs, and Hannah turned to offer her feet.

“Give me your pad.”

Hannah started in the back, pulling the modesty pad forward, wincing as it tugged slightly at the hair along her lips. She rolled it up self-consciously, into a tiny tube, and handed it through the wire. It had served its purpose, she thought. No one else in the stacks was wearing one, at least that she could see as she was wheeled through.

“You can masturbate whenever you want, but don’t damage yourself, and respect your neighbor’s privacy.”

The morbid shame that Hannah had felt on every previous occurrence of that word was starting to fade. She didn’t blush this time, didn’t feel the knot in her gut.

She would not be masturbating, of course, here or anywhere else, ever, for the rest of her life, she decided. But she was getting used to the idea that other people thought she would, and that they believed it was appropriate to talk about.

“Do you have anything you shouldn’t, in either chamber?”

“No, Ma’am.”

“You aren’t sick? No cold, no fever?”

“No, Ma’am.”

“Up on your knees, bottom against the wire,” the woman said.

Hannah obeyed quickly, felt the finger inside her vagina, then her anus, and she closed her eyes and tried to think of something else. The search done, a thin rod was

pushed up her anus and, she guessed, her temperature was being taken.

“Lights go out at 10, come on at 6. When the lights go out, you don’t talk.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

The thermometer was another humiliation, but a relatively small one, not as bad as having a finger up there, and she waited patiently on her hands and knees for it to come out.

“For minor infractions, we’ll punish you in your cage. Major infractions, you’ll be brought to the discipline room.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, and now she felt that same tingling that churned up her gut every time, since Tuesday, she’d been given terrifying information. She would not, under any circumstances, ever break any rule here.

“You’ll be restrained any time you leave your cage. It’s up to your handlers, but normally shackles or handcuffs or both, and tethers when they want you to stay somewhere. And no one cares how it was done at the last place you were kept, or how your owners did it.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Do you have any questions for me?”

“How long will I be here?”

“That’s up to your owners. Ask them.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

She heard a beep and the thermometer was drawn back out. She sat down, crossed her legs and stared at her toes.

The woman went to the counter, typed something into her computer, stepped back to Hannah and pushed her out of the room, back into the great hall with the cages in stacks.

All Hannah’s attention was back on the cages, looking for the boy she’d seen before, or any other boy.

“Hi, Hannah,” someone said. Stephanie was being wheeled into the room she’d just left, her brown face a foot away, smiling as she passed.

“Hi, Stephanie,” Hannah replied, feeling the same sorrow as before, wondering if she and Stephanie might be put near each other but considering it unlikely.

She heard the forklift before she saw it, and suddenly it was beside her, sticking its two great tusks under her cage, simultaneously moving and lifting her, two rows high, three rows, four. There was an empty space on the sixth row up, and she grabbed the wires and stifled a cry as she was hoisted toward it, slid in, deposited.

## **Neighbors**

Hannah looked quickly toward her neighbors, to the cages at either end of her cage, and the one beside her. She saw with a mix of relief and disappointment that all were female.

The girl whose cage lay parallel to hers, their long sides almost touching, smiled at her but said nothing, and Hannah blushed and turned away, unsure what to say.

Hannah did not consider herself particularly afraid of heights, but when she pressed her forehead against the wire of her cage and peered down, she felt a wave of panic. She didn’t want to be here, 20 feet above the floor, nude and caged with hundreds of others. There was no frame of reference. Nothing that had ever happened in her life had prepared her for this.

What if they forgot her? What if Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez died and no one knew who owned her? What if she were always up here, waiting?

Another cage was being pushed in from the loading dock, and she watched it roll past below her, seeing within it another girl in chains, looking up at her and her neighbors, and she saw herself as she’d been a few minutes ago, and she felt the new girls’ fear and awe, and her eyes filled with tears.

She sniffed, wiped her eyes and sat numbly, looking at her feet, at the faint red marks the cuffs had left above her ankle bones.

“Hey, Honey,” someone said softly.

She wiped her eyes again and turned toward the voice, coming from the woman who had smiled at her, whose cage was alongside hers.

Hannah was immediately struck by the woman’s age, probably late 20s, maybe early 30s. There was not just a physical maturity there, but a weariness, or a sorrow, something that takes years to earn, and Hannah immediately felt the pain there and knew it dwarfed any of her own suffering since Tuesday.

The woman was fair-skinned, but with dark hair cut just above her collar. She sat cross-legged, her hands propping her up from behind, her belly showing the slight extension Hannah recognized as a mark of motherhood. Her breasts were full, nipples large and pink, and Hannah thought there must be a nursing baby, somewhere.

“Hello,” Hannah said, passing her hand beneath her eyes one more time, not wanting to cry in front of this woman.

“I’m Denise.”

“I’m Hannah.”

Hannah raised her right leg and put her chin on it, dropped her left hand to her vulva as if she were just resting it there, but she wasn’t comfortable yet being uncovered in front of strangers, of either gender.

The woman clearly didn’t care about her own nudity, leaning back so her vulva was completely exposed. All her pubic hair had been removed, her outer lips a soft pink, the folds around her opening a brighter pink. Hannah glanced briefly at the woman’s sex organ and returned her eyes to her face.

“How old are you, Hannah?”

“18.”

“How long have you been a slave?”

“Never,” Hannah said.

Denise laughed. “Well, how long have you been in a cage, then?”

“Since Tuesday.”

“Four days, then. Tuesday, August 15. Think of it as a sort of birthday. You’ll want to remember the date.”

“Oh.” The idea that a year would pass and she would still be like this woman, caged and sad and thinking about anniversaries, was too painful to consider.

A hundred questions flooded her mind, and she went there, to the relief of curiosity. She had learned from Stephanie that no question was too personal. The questions were a sort of sisterhood, she thought, a way both to commune and to learn.

“What about you?”

“Fourteen years. Since I was 16.”

“How did they get you?”

“I was driving and texting and I hit a Mercedes. I couldn’t pay so the court sold me.”

“Who bought you?”

“A co-op.”

“A co-op?” Hannah echoed. The word meant nothing to her.

“Five families.”

“You had to be with all of them?”

“Yeah, one at a time. They each got me 73 days a year.”

“Did they . . . ?” Hannah couldn’t finish the sentence, but Denise understood.

“Yeah, that’s what they bought me for. Everyone but two of the moms and one of the boys, who was gay. Everyone thought he was straight, though, so we’d just talk in his bed,

and then he'd masturbate and put some on me in case anyone checked."

Denise laughed, as if all of this were funny. "God, I could tell you stories."

Denise confirmed she had a child, a 9-month old girl who was being kept in a nursery at the facility. Denise was milked three times a day and allowed an hour visit with her every second day. Her pregnancy had been an accident, but the co-op was going to make the best of it until the child was born and something about Denise changed that even she didn't understand. She'd enjoyed the sex, the variety of a life with five wealthy families, and being taken care of, but she saw herself differently when she became a mother. She wasn't getting as wet during sex anymore, she confided to Hannah. She wasn't having orgasms, she was getting moody and rebellious. None of the families who owned her had the heart to try to correct her through punishment, so they decided to put her and her daughter on the market.

There were a great many laws that governed slaves, Hannah learned. Mothers and children couldn't be separated before the child had reached puberty. Denise was already dreading the day her daughter had her first period.

Besides Denise, there were girls at either end of Hannah's cage, and she learned their names and their stories as well, and she shared hers. They had all suffered disaster, and they were all here because of it. Shelia, a 19-year-old black girl whose cage lay at the bucket end of Hannah's cage, had lost her mother a year ago, ended up homeless and, despite her best efforts to stay hidden, was eventually picked up by the police, declared indigent and auctioned off. Her owner rented her to a research institute where things were done to her she didn't want to talk about, and then the grant money ran out and she was brought here to be auctioned again. The other girl beside Hannah, a redhead named Tanya, was going to be a doctor, had finished two years of med school but got agonizing uterine fibroids, missed class for a month, flunked three courses, got kicked out of the program, couldn't pay when her school loans came immediately due, and was taken into

custody. They treated her in a hospital set up like a prison, she said, and she showed Hannah the two little holes at either side of her lower abdomen where the surgery was done. As soon as she was declared fit, she was caged and brought to the stacks for sale. She'd been here a week, spent the first three days crying, realized that tears wouldn't do her any good and had reached acceptance, sustained by the other girls and the same hope that kept Hannah going.

When she didn't think the other girls would notice, Hannah looked at their collars, saw that numbers and letters had been stamped on either side, and one or two metal tags had been affixed to the collars' little rings. The writing on the tags was too small to be read, and Hannah didn't ask what information they bore. That question, at least, seemed too personal.

Like the other girls, Hannah learned to keep moving, to sit, to kneel, to crouch, to change position anytime the steel floor of her cage got unbearable. Pillows and blankets would be brought at night, she was told, taken away in the morning. During the day, the people who ran the stacks wanted to keep everyone in motion, to force their charges to engage in at least a minimum of exercise. Still young, still full of the energy of a developing body, Hannah longed to do more, to stand, to run, just to sit in a chair. She even missed the lonely cage in the storage room; at least Mrs. Alvarez let her keep her pillow and blanket all day.

When the door to the loading dock swung wide, Hannah invariably looked, to see who was being brought in, to see their faces, to see their genders.

The door opened to the west, and the setting sun made a skewed rectangle on the concrete floor beneath her that was almost blinding in its intensity.

It was always girls being brought in today.

A staff member was making rounds, and she saw him coming long before he arrived at her cage, his lift making an intermittent hum as he moved from the floor to the ceiling, row by row, his words strangely benign.

“Everything okay here?” he would ask, again and again, as he drew nearer to Hannah’s column of cages.

“Yes, Sir, I’m fine,” came the answer, again and again, one female voice after another.

Until a boy replied: “Yes, Sir, I’m fine.” Each word spoken perfectly, the tone deep and strong and male. Hannah pressed her face against the wire, saw that the staff member was two columns over and one row down. The boy she had seen when she was wheeled in had been somewhere else, lower down, so she knew now that there were at least two boys here, each caged like her, each a slave like her, with his own sad story. If a boy were put beside her, she would cover herself, but she would not be ashamed. They would talk. She would listen to him. Perhaps she would comfort him. But they would not touch. At least a foot separated each cage from its neighbor, and the wire was set too close to allow more than a few fingers through. She imagined a naked boy in the cage where Denise was. Both captive, they would have no choice in the matter. They would have to look, and to speak.

As the staff member proceeded, Hannah felt her heart begin to pound and knew there was no reason for it. The words they would exchange would be the same as at every other cage. He would not look at her. Or if he did, he would see what he had seen over and over, a naked girl in a cage. He did not know her name. He would not remember her.

Finally, he arrived, and she looked at him with her heart in her throat.

“Everything okay here?” he asked her.

“Yes, Sir, I’m fine,” she said, but her voice came out without volume, just breath, a shallow whisper.

“Everything okay here?” he repeated, staring at her. She stared back, moved her hands reflexively to cover her breasts and vulva and almost shouted the words this time, “Yes, Sir, I’m fine.”

He’d had to repeat himself, she thought. She had failed at this simplest of tasks. Would she be punished? Would



it be reported that she had difficulty talking?

After a moment more of mortification, she reassured herself. It was an honest mistake, a brief loss of her voice due to nerves, and he didn't seem to care that it had happened. Satisfied with her second attempt at answering, he rose to the next girl up, and Hannah stared at his middle, noticed that there was a bulge in his jumpsuit where his penis was, and wondered if he was wearing something there, or if he was erect.

## **Whispers at Night**

As the light outside waned, her neighbors turned to their tubes, dispensing small, gray knots of bread-based nutrition. Hannah followed suit, finding the food to be like a tough biscuit, a mix of flavors she assumed was everything a girl's body needed, baked together somewhere. It was not as good as what Mrs. Alvarez could make, but it was not terrible. There was a little salt in it, a little sugar, and she ate two. They got five a day, Denise told her. They were surprisingly filling.

She sipped from a metal straw in the water tube, and then she urinated in front of total strangers, for the first time in her life. All her neighbors emptied their bladders before or after they ate, and she reminded herself that it was what everyone had to do here. But the thought of doing more in the bucket, here, in front of the other girls, filled her with dread.

"Are they just going to leave us in here until we're sold?" Hannah asked Denise. Days more, or weeks more, confined to this tiny space was not something she was sure she could bear.

"No, you'll get out for at least a little bit most days," she said.

"Outside?"

"No, but they'll take you to a training room, or the clinic, or other places."

“For what?”

“Whatever they want,” Denise replied. “Do you know who’s managing you?”

“Managing me?”

“That’s whoever your broker’s hired to work with you while you’re here. They’ll train you, handle your testing, run your mating.”

Hannah looked away, her guts stirring as they had often since this ordeal began.

“Mating?”

Denise looked up, saw the anxiety in Hannah’s face and tried to make light of what she’d said. “I don’t know. It depends on who’s managing you.”

This was something Hannah needed to think about, and her mind quickly called up the snatches of conversation that seemed relevant. Mrs. Alvarez had said she’d be trained. Bert had mentioned being assessed.

She was going to be bought for sex. Maybe other things, but sex was her first function. Would she be trained to have sex? Would her ability to have sex be assessed? The questions, and their practical implications, filled her with a distress that bordered on panic. God meant for her first lover, she truly believed, to be the wealthy young man who bought her, freed her and married her. Who loved her. But if she were trained here, if she were assessed here ...

There was much more she wanted to know, about training and assessing, about what would be done and how things would work. About the boys here. But asking any of her neighbors was out of the question. She didn’t want to be accused of unchaste thoughts, even in jest. She didn’t want them to see her blush.

A large clock hung on the wall over the door, and as evening turned to night, Hannah’s thoughts turned back to her mother. She had not cried for Mother in two days. She had not tried to imagine her mother’s hardships, in jail or wherever she was now. Hannah was, she told herself, a terrible daughter.

And yet, Hannah's suffering was surely greater than her mother's. She knew enough of jail to be certain they did not confine the prisoners to tiny cages, without their clothes. But Hannah knew where Mother was. Mother had no idea of her only child's fate. Surely the uncertainty was a bitter pain.

She turned away from the girls around her, ignored the conversations and the incongruous laughter and set her attention to the floor below. She wanted to cry for her mother, but she could not muster the tears. Thoughts of her mother left her numb, and she wasn't sure why.

The doors opened and another cage was pushed in. She studied its contents as it neared the stacks, saw that it was a boy, drew in her breath and rose up on her knees, staring. He was young, blond, long-haired and so fair he almost looked female, but the metal plate on his cage said "MALE" and when he looked up, his eyes found hers instantly, as if he already knew she was there, and he stared as only a boy would, unblinking, focused. Could he see her breasts? She pulled her hair forward, over her shoulders, knowing it wasn't long enough to cover her, not caring. She had always looked away before, when a boy stared at her. There was no reason for that now, and her gaze remained directed at him, shifting from his eyes to his shoulders to his thighs to between his legs, to his penis to back to his eyes. He smiled and said something, but she couldn't hear it as he was wheeled to the room where he would be given food and water.

Her heart was thumping, her body electric, and she grabbed the wires of her cage and fantasized that she could break them and escape, climb down, run.

He had been sitting, cross-legged. His penis had been erect, sticking up, surprisingly large, pointing at a place above her head.

Overwhelmed with a thwarted desire to move, to be free, to do something, she turned back to Denise and the distraction of conversation. Unable to shake her mind from what she had seen, she half-listened as the topic turned to what might happen tomorrow. Being auctioned meant regularly going on display for potential buyers, and Denise and Sheila

both expected to spend some time in the showroom in coming days. Saturday was one of the busiest days in the showroom, as families free from work and school came to window shop, and sometimes to buy, Denise told Hannah.

Tanya, meanwhile, was in an animated conversation with the girl in the cage beside hers, sharing what she'd learned in med school about the spine and the strange pains it could provoke.

At 9:30, the lift rolled up to the stacks, controlled by a female worker, followed by a male pushing a cart filled with pillows and blankets.

Working each row from bottom to top, as the man had earlier, she progressed with surprising speed. Using a key fastened to her hip by a long chain, she unlocked the little door at the bottom of each cage, passed in a blanket and pillow and locked the door back.

"Doing okay?" she would ask.

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am," came the answer.

As the woman neared the boy's cage, two columns over and one row down, Hannah pressed her face to the wire, straining to hear his voice.

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am," he said, surely unaware that Hannah had hung on to every syllable, allowing his words and the way he spoke them to echo over and over in her mind.

This time, Hanna's voice did not waver, and she did not whisper. "Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am," she said confidently, gratefully, wondering if the boy could hear her.

The blanket was stiff and thick, the pillow soft but smaller than she would have liked. Following the lead of the girls around her, she wrapped the blanket around her body, dropped her head to the pillow and longed for the last normal bed she'd slept in, three years ago at Four Pillars. Or even the soft pallet at the apartment she shared with Mother.

The same thing was happening on Denise's side of the stacks, and in the second set of stacks beyond Denise's side,

and by 9:55, everyone had their bedding.

The lights went out promptly at 10, plunging the room into complete darkness, and Hannah closed her eyes and tried to forget where she was.

“Good night, Hannah,” Denise whispered.

“Good night,” Hannah whispered back, hoping she wasn’t breaking a rule. No talking during lights out was what the woman in the supply room had said.

Denise drew in her breath, and Hannah guessed she had already fallen asleep, but then she spoke in a breathy whisper Hannah assumed was meant only for her.

“Hannah?”

“Yes?” Hannah replied, barely opening her mouth to speak the forbidden words.

Denise sighed, issued a small grunt, fell silent.

“Hannah,” she said again.

“Yes?” Hannah whispered.

“Do you want to know what they did?”

Hannah slid to the edge of her cage, terrified they were both going to get into trouble, wondering if Denise was talking in her sleep. But ignoring her would have been unacceptably rude.

“What who did?”

“The co-op. What they did to me.”

“Yes,” Hannah whispered without considering another answer.

“Some of them left my chains on,” Denise whispered, and then she grunted again. “Some of them didn’t. I didn’t care. I didn’t care. It always felt ... I always ... good.”

Something else was happening in Denise’s cage, a rhythmic rustling against the blanket, and Hannah suddenly understood. Denise was masturbating, and she wanted not just to think of the things, but to speak the words about the things,

to say them out loud, to have them heard by another soul. Hannah lifted herself to her elbow, surprised that she was willing to be that soul, to listen to this.

“Robert had the biggest cock in the co-op,” Denise continued, pausing to issue a long, furtive sigh. “I asked him to measure it. I sucked him until he was as hard as he ever got, and we got a ruler and measured it.” Denise laughed. “Six and a half inches. Then he put it up my pussy. We were in his bed. I was on my back. He put it up me and moved it in and out, and I was just moaning. So was he. Oh, God. Oh, God.”

Denise fell silent, and Hannah held perfectly still. There were other hushed voices, she noticed, other girls talking in the darkness, whispering to each other, or to themselves. Someone grunted, and there was a small cry of what seemed to be pain, or unbearable pleasure.

“I told him,” Denise said, her whisper growing louder, more urgent. “I told him, ‘Oh, God, just pound me, don’t worry if it hurts me, oh God, just shove it all up me, I want your cum so bad.’”

Hannah saw Denise’s bare vulva in her mind, imagined Robert’s penis inside it and felt the tingle between her own legs, the liquid, and she slid her hand down and touched, one finger between her lips, then up to her swelling clitoris. She gripped herself, wrapping her hand around her sex in an act of profound pleasure and deep, strange longing.

“Stretch me,” Denise whispered. “Oh, God, make it hurt, make it hurt, oh god oh god oh god.”

More silence, and then soft, urgent grunts, “uh-uh-uh-uh-uh,” and a final “uuuuuuhhhhhh.”

Denise drew in her breath and sighed it back out in a long, breathy gasp. Something had happened, Hannah knew. Denise was just panting now, done with her story, with her rubbing. She, and the other girls who had groaned, seemed to be getting more pleasure out of touching than Hannah ever had, at least for a final moment. Perhaps they were touching a different way. Or maybe they were pretending, because they’d been trained to pretend, and they couldn’t do otherwise.

When Hannah was 11, she heard her mother and father having sex when she got sick and came home from school early. Her mother's grunts of pleasure, which Hannah found both deeply embarrassing and strangely compelling, were obviously fake, and her final cry of joy was clearly issued only to please her father, because God would never allow such relief to attach to such an obscene act. When it was over, Hannah slipped outside, sat under a tree and tried to forget what she'd heard, and to not forget.

Denise sighed, sniffed and issued a low, guttural moan, and Hannah knew immediately she was crying now, the differences between pleasure and pain surprisingly obscure.

Hannah imagined the many things Denise would have reason to cry over, wished she could help in some way, closed her eyes and began to pray, immediately falling into a deep sleep.

## **The Managers**

When Hannah opened her eyes again, the room was black and all but silent, the only noise the soft breathing of the girls nearest her. She felt around, touched the wires of her cage and confirmed that she was still here, that this wasn't a dream. It must be early morning, she thought, and she unwrapped herself and slid to the bucket end of her cage. She raised the lid, disgusted by the smell of yesterday's urine, and lowered herself to empty bladder and bowels, terrified that at any moment the lights would come on and her neighbors would see what she was doing. But her nose told her she was not the only one in the stacks relieving herself, and when she finished, wiped herself and closed the lid, she felt a sense of relief bordering on euphoria.

New things would happen today, she thought. She should be getting out of her cage, at least for a few minutes. Perhaps she'd meet her new owner today, the man of her dreams, the husband that would rescue her and Mother. She

returned to her blanket and prayed with all her strength that this would be her day.

Less than a minute into her devotions, the lights came on, the speakers on the opposite wall issued a strangely beautiful chime, and the room began to awaken.

Hannah sat up, watched her neighbors stir. Denise was the first to rise, squirming out of her blanket and squatting at her bucket.

“Good morning,” she said shamelessly, as she emptied herself.

“Hey,” Hannah replied, looking away, wondering when the cages would begin rolling in with their newcomers from the loading dock. Would she see another boy? Would he look up at her, like the last one had?

Hannah and her neighbors dispensed biscuits, splashed water on their faces, talked about their sleep and their dreams. If Denise felt awkward about what she had said and done after lights out last night, she didn’t show it.

“Don’t be afraid of your managers,” Denise advised. “Tell them if you want something, or don’t like something. Once you’re sold, they’ll be out of your life forever, so don’t worry if you piss one of them off.”

A girl made the first rounds of the morning, quickly checking with each subject, retrieving the blankets and pillows. Soon thereafter, the forklifts began humming. Denise was the first to go.

“Well, bye,” she said as her cage was eased out of its space. Hannah watched her wordlessly, realizing with a start that this might be the last time they saw each other. She stifled a sob, bit her thumb and turned to watch the floor below. Soon enough, the forklift came for her, and she gripped the wires of her cage and balanced on her toes as she was lowered and raced to the back of the room, too quickly to do more than glance briefly at the rows and columns of cages, some with boys, most with girls.



A pair of doors swung open before her and the truck carrying her rolled through, down a hall and into a large, empty room lined with what looked like short garage doors. Heart thumping, she was propelled toward one of the doors and it opened as she neared it. Her cage was pushed through and deposited there, in a small room that looked, at first, like a classroom, with a whiteboard and markers. After dropping her on the floor, the forklift withdrew and the door closed, the rumbles of the lift fading to silence.

She was alone in here, fighting with her nerves by focusing on this new space. Besides the whiteboard, there were a jumble of things that didn't go together: a rectangular table with five chairs around it, a mattress on the floor, a sink, toilet, shower and, in the corner, a medical examination table.

There was a second little door, where a second cage could be slid in. There was a clock on the wall and, she noticed with a growing sense of dread, heavy rings set into the floor and walls.

A normal door led into this room as well, opposite the little slot where she had been deposited, and she directed all her attention to that, guessing that someone, or several someones, were going to walk through it soon, possibly to do more cruel things to her, to put their fingers in her, maybe to finally break her.

By the time it opened, Hannah was in a state of sheer terror, her arms wrapped around her legs, her thumb in her mouth as she swayed back and forth.

Three people walked in, two males and one female, all in their 20's – not much older than her, but a million miles away in terms of stature, or freedom, or many of the other things that mattered.

One of the men was dressed like all the workers here, in black pants and gray shirt, but the other man and the woman were dressed casually, the man in jeans and a golf shirt, the woman in a navy skirt and pink blouse, a black bag over her shoulder.

These latter two, she guessed, were the managers, the people Bert had hired to handle and train her. Like everyone else she'd met since her ordeal began, they looked entirely normal, and she watched them warily while her nerves settled down.

The woman put her bag on the table, stepped over and knelt before Hannah's cage. "You're Hannah?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied.

"Let's see your cuff, okay?"

Hannah unfolded herself enough to slide her cuffed ankle to the side of her cage, and the woman looked at it and nodded to the man in the gray shirt, who approached and unlocked her little door.

"Feet to the port, please," he said.

Hannah obeyed, he reached through to shackle her ankles, unlocked her cage and opened it at the side. "C'mon out," he said.

Hannah crabwalked out awkwardly on hands and knees until she was free of the cage. She stood, looking at each of them, forgetting until now that she was nude. Her heart fluttered for a moment, but it really didn't matter, she realized with surprise. She no longer cared who of either gender saw her naked, and she marveled at the ability of her mind to adapt, once again, to something so unthinkable less than a week ago. She held her hands at her sides, the idea of covering herself ridiculous now. She'd welcome normal clothes, she thought, but she'd never accept a modesty pad again.

Still nervous, but not heart-thumpingly so, she looked at the floor and waited for one of them to speak. The woman approached first, holding out her hand. "I'm Sam, and this is John."

Hannah took each of their hands weakly, looking briefly into their eyes.

"We work with Bert, and we're going to be taking care of you until the sale," Sam said. "How was your first night in the stacks?"

“Fine. I slept okay.”

“Everyone nice?”

“Yes.”

The man in the gray shirt left, locking the door behind him.

“Okay, let’s get you washed up,” Sam said, and she retrieved soap and shampoo from her bag, handed them to Hannah and nodded toward the shower.

“Are you going to stay?” Hannah asked.

“Yes.”

Hannah saw herself as she was about to be seen, a nude girl with her ankles chained together, taking a shower in front of a man and woman she’d just met, but she obeyed, taking short steps to the shower space, setting the soap and shampoo on the little shelf, turning on the water and waiting for it to warm up.

The water came out in a rush, far more pressure than she and her mother had ever allowed themselves, and she set it hotter than she ever had at home and tried to lose herself in the joy of the first real washing she’d had in four days. She shampooed her hair, rinsed it and shampooed again, then passed the soap across her body, everywhere. Glancing back at Sam and John, relieved to see they were both tapping on their phones, she washed quickly between her legs, then rinsed herself, standing under the warm jets far longer than she needed.

She turned off the water and Sam grabbed a towel from her bag and stepped over with it. The towel was thick and white, another unexpected luxury, and after Hannah had rubbed the water off, she buried her face in it and breathed in.

When she looked up, Sam was there, holding up a toothbrush and toothpaste. Hannah traded the towel for them and walked over to the sink, luxuriating in another small pleasure she hadn’t been allowed for days.

As soon as she’d shut off the tap, Sam was beside her.

“Sit down at the table and we’ll get started,” she said. She spread a fresh towel on one of the chairs and took the toothpaste and toothbrush back.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, hobbling over to sit.

Sam laughed. “I’m not going to be Ma’am, okay?” she said. “And John’s not Sir. We’re just here to work together with you until you’re sold. We all have jobs here, and yours is the hardest. Okay?”

“Yes, Ma-,” Hannah replied automatically before catching herself. “Okay. Okay, Sam.”

Sam pulled several more things out of her bag. “Have you ever had your blood drawn?”

“No.”

“Are you afraid of needles?”

“No. I don’t think so.”

Sam sat on the edge of the table and wrapped a rubber cord around Hannah’s forearm. “Squeeze this,” she said, handing Hannah a foam ball, and she swabbed Hannah’s skin with alcohol and pushed a needle into her vein. It stung and Hannah looked up at Sam, wondering why this was necessary.

Sam wore her strawberry blonde hair short, cut at the neck. She was thickly-built but not overweight, and pretty. As Hannah’s blood rushed into a small glass tube on the table, she distracted herself by wondering how much Sam would sell for, if she were a slave.

She seemed to be in charge here. John just leaned against the wall, studying his phone. He was short, dark-skinned, probably Hispanic, and Hannah guessed his given name was Juan. She looked at him and imagined him nude, something she had never done before when staring at a boy.

Sam pulled the needle out, taped gauze over the wound and looked at John. “Your turn,” she said.

He reached into the bag, pulled out something small and stepped behind Hannah.

“I’m going to put a chip in your back,” he said. “Can you lean over the table?”

“Oh!” Hannah blurted. “What do you mean?”

“You’ll feel a pinch, and then we’ll be done,” he said. “It’s an ID that goes in your back, under your skin.” John tapped a spot over her spine, between her shoulder blades.

“Like they put in pets?”

“Yes,” said Sam.

“How big is it?”

“About the size of a grain of rice.”

Hannah leaned forward, her elbows on the table, her hands clasped, her eyes on her thumbnails. She would ask whoever bought her for nail polish, she thought. Bright red nail polish. Her mother wouldn’t allow it, for moral reasons as well as financial, but that rule would be broken. Many rules had already been. More would be soon, she imagined.

The chip hurt about as much as she expected, and she bit her lip and stifled a cry as John drove it into her flesh.

It continued to burn as she felt him touching another place, on her shoulder. “This is birth control,” he said, and she winced as he slipped something under her skin there, smaller than the chip and not as painful.

“Is it permanent?” she asked.

“No,” John said, “six months.”

“Why do I need birth control?” Hannah asked, looking up at Sam.

“So you won’t get pregnant.”

“I know what it’s for,” Hannah blurted. “I want to know ... why ... who?”

## **An Education**

“We’re not sure yet,” said Sam. “Probably a boy Bert’s brokering here.”

Hannah felt her throat closing, her heart pounding again with that same mix of fear, revulsion and stimulation that had been her recurrent companion all week. She would not accept this. No.

She felt hands on her neck, her collar being turned.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Tagging you.”

“Let me see it first.”

Sam held the tag out and Hannah inspected it. Blue metal, in an oval shape, with words and letters stamped into it. As she had expected, the tag said “Hannah” at the top, and then “Female, Recreational.” At the bottom, a series of random letters and numbers had been stamped into it.

“What does this mean?” she asked.

“It’s your federal ID number,” Sam said. “The same number’s on your collar.”

Hannah studied the characters: N8114P165

It was meaningless. She liked to find clues and messages in random numbers – the date on a penny, her social security number, the ISBN on the Biblical concordance her mother gave her – but she couldn’t find anything here – no Bible verse, date of significance, address, anything, and that disappointed her. She handed the tag back to Sam and John used a pair of pliers to bend a thick loop of metal, securing the tag to the ring in her collar.

“Keep that turned toward the front,” Sam instructed, sliding the collar around so the tag hung under Hannah’s chin.

“What does ‘recreational’ mean?”

“I just means you aren’t being bought for standard labor,” Sam explained.

Hannah squinted at Sam, understanding her real meaning.

“Would you like an apple?” Sam asked, turning toward her bag.

“No,” Hannah replied instantly.

“A protein bar?”

“Yes.”

“Soda?”

“Yes.”

Hannah devoured the protein bar, full of chocolate and nuts, and she savored the Coca-Cola, the first she’d ever been allowed, a harsh, bitter, sweet drink that filled her senses. And for the next hour, as she marveled to herself at the incongruity of everything, Sam and John took turns explaining the law and public policy relating to subjects.

Because of the monetary value involved, she was told, any attempt to steal a subject, to help a subject escape, or just to ignore a theft or escape attempt, was a felony punishable by considerable prison time. The laws applied to the subject herself, John noted. Attempting to escape, or cooperating with anyone else’s efforts to free her, would expose her to both federal prosecution and those penalties reserved for subjects. Covering up her collar, she was warned, could be considered an escape attempt.

“What if my mother tried to keep them from taking me?” Hannah asked.

“Were you anyone’s property yet?”

“I don’t think so.”

“No, she wouldn’t be charged for that, I don’t think.”

Talking about subjects, their treatment or the institution itself was generally discouraged by law, ostensibly to protect the privacy of subjects and their owners. Subjects were rarely allowed to talk to strangers other than to carry out their duties. Questions and unsolicited comments were best completely ignored.

From there, the conversation turned to what Hannah could expect after her purchase. Sam started with what Hannah found most frightening.

She could not be killed, injured or severely abused by her owners. These were considered serious crimes, and owners who broke these laws typically lost their subjects without compensation and, often enough, were fined or even went to jail. These were laws most owners strongly favored, Hannah was assured. Stories about mistreated subjects upset the general public and fed the anti-ownership movement.

But owners had a great deal of leeway in how they controlled and punished their subjects. Cages, chains and leashes were all legal forms of restraint, and in fact required in some cases. Restraints, John added, served many purposes: to prevent the theft of the subject, to keep her where she was supposed to be, to punish her.

Consequences for disobedience could be virtually anything within the law, John noted.

“What will they do?” Hannah asked, staring at her hands, doubtful she could ever love or marry a man who punished her.

Sam, standing at the whiteboard with a marker in her hand, looked at first like she was going to start a list, but she capped the marker and turned toward Hannah, a strange, empty expression on her face.

“Anything,” she said. “Anything you can imagine, that would hurt but wouldn’t send you to the hospital.”

Hannah closed her eyes, trying not to imagine, and Sam noticed her distress and tried to reassure.

“Just do what they say,” she said. “Learn their rules. Don’t make them tell you something twice. Do a little more than they ask for. Be creative. Make them appreciate you every day.”

“Can I be punished,” Hannah began haltingly, “for not, for not doing, doing, um . . . ?”

“For not complying with a sexual request?”



Hannah nodded.

“Yes.” Sam paused. “But you need to understand. You’ll be a part of the family. They’re going to care about you, and adore you. You’ll be precious to them. They’ll ask you what you want, and they’ll give it to you when they can. Most owners don’t want a miserable subject. Performance is best when you’re at your best.”

“Worst case, you’ll get sent to a punishment shop,” John said.

Sam shot him a glance that Hannah knew meant “shut up,” and she continued talking.

“So,” she said, “Bert told us you haven’t been, um, broken yet.”

“Yes,” Hannah agreed quietly.

“You still want to be, right? I mean, before you go on sale?”

“I guess so.”

“You guess so?” Sam laughed and looked at John. “You really need to be sure about this.”

“You guess you don’t want to sell for five million dollars?” John asked.

Hannah blushed and curled her toes, desperately embarrassed.

“You might be able to do it with your fingers, if you can reach in far enough,” Sam said, “but we have something you can use that will make it easier.”

“I don’t want to do that.”

Sam seemed to be trying not to sound too exasperated as she spoke her next words:

“But you do want to do be broken before your sale, right? If they find out about your hymen in the showroom, they might buy you, harness you on the spot, and you’ll end up waiting here or somewhere else for months while they find a buyer who wants a virgin.”

Hannah blinked as her eyes filled with tears, unable to weigh what might be a terrible fate against the humiliation of putting something up herself while strangers watched.

“Would you like it done with a penis?” Sam asked quietly.

“You mean, a boy?”

“Yes, a male’s penis.”

“Who?”

“We shouldn’t have any trouble getting someone. One of the boys here.”

“A slave?”

“A subject, yes,” Sam said.

“I don’t want to,” Hannah blurted.

“Fine,” said Sam, and she leaned against the wall and crossed her arms. John looked down at his phone, tapping it absently.

“Is that done here, then?” Hannah asked to break the awkward silence, not really wanting an answer.

“Yes,” said Sam. “It’s done for training. It’s done for assessment. Or sometimes as a reward.”

“I don’t want to,” Hannah repeated.

“Fine,” Sam said again.

“I don’t have to?” Hannah asked, not expecting this response.

“No,” Sam replied. “We’re not going to have you raped. But if you won’t do it, you can’t be assessed or trained, and you’ll sell for a lot less, probably for general labor.”

Hannah looked at Sam and raised her eyebrow, wanting to know more but too afraid to ask.

“That means you’ll be put in a factory, or sent to a lab, or whatever. You won’t be with a family. And they won’t care about you. Not as much. But at least you won’t have to have sex.”

Overwhelmed at last, by a terrible new life and horrible choices she could not make, Hannah drew in her breath, closed her eyes and cried, balling her hands into fists, her tears dropping onto the table, her wails echoing off the bare walls of the room.

She was sure Sam and John would immediately escort her back to her cage and she'd be brought to the stacks and forgotten, but they just stood, silently, waiting for her to finish.

Once her sobs ended and she was merely sniffling, Sam spoke softly, gently.

“Hannah?”

“What?”

“Could we get a boy? Just have him brought here? You could talk to him, maybe. And then if you still don't want to, we'll send you both back, and you can do whatever you want.”

“Yes,” Hannah said, her insides churning, her heart pounding in her throat. If Sam were true to her word, there was nothing to fear. She would say no and send the boy back, and she'd go back too, and then she'd have time to consider. She was adjusting to the likelihood that sex was inevitable here, in this building, among the other slaves – with another slave. Her first lover would not be a wealthy young man who would marry her and free her; her first lover would come to her from a cage, and go back into it when they were done.

She needed time for this. She wasn't ready.

## **A Boy Named Taylor**

“Hey, Bert,” Sam said.

Hannah looked up and saw that Sam had her phone to her ear.

“No, she's good,” Sam said, “she's doing fine. No. Uh-uh. She's not sure she's ready to be penetrated. But she'll

let us bring her a boy. And then we'll see. Can we get Taylor? He's the only male you have here now, right? Can we get him? Okay, and you can call Mrs. Alvarez?"

At the mention of Mrs. Alvarez' name, Hannah's heart leapt again. She stared at Sam, wanting to know what was going on, but Sam's attention was directed toward her phone. She punched another number.

"Hey," she said, "we need a boy brought to training room 18. His name's Taylor and he's being listed by Bert Sykes. Thanks."

"Okay," Sam said, "a boy's on his way, should be here in about 10 minutes."

"Okay," Hannah whispered.

"Once he gets here, we can leave, and you can talk to him, and decide then."

"Alone?" Hannah blurted.

"Yes," Sam said. "But he'll be in his cage, and we'll put you on a tether."

"What do you mean?"

"If anything happens between you, we need to be here. So the tether just keeps you from getting too close until we're back in the room."

"But he'll be in his cage."

"Things could still happen," Sam said vaguely, leaving Hannah to imagine having sex with a caged boy. The picture in her mind was so outlandish she blushed and looked down. "I would never do that," she said quietly, mostly to herself.

"Probably not, but it's a requirement," Sam said.

"Why did you mention Mrs. Alvarez?"

"She needs to know what's going on. That we're breaking you. And that it's okay with her."

"I'm not going to have sex. With that boy."

“Of course,” Sam agreed. “But we’re still going to tether you for him, okay?”

“Yes.”

Sam reached into her bag and pulled out a length of chain and a pair of padlocks. “Stand here.”

Hannah obeyed, looking down as Sam passed the chain through a ring in the floor, locked it to itself and locked the other end to her shackles.

“What am I supposed to talk to him about?” Hannah blurted. This would never work, in a million years, she thought. She’ll be on a chain, the boy will be in a cage, and they’re expected to have a conversation that will lead to sex. Could something like this ever succeed?

“It’s okay if you don’t want to talk,” Sam replied tersely.

Hannah sat down on the floor, hugged her legs and waited. Sam and John looked at their phones, oblivious to Hannah’s distress.

As soon as she heard the rumble of the forklift, her heart began to pound, her breath came sharp and fast and her eyes focused, tunnel-like, on the short door that would open for the boy’s cage.

When it began rolling up with a sharp creak, she nearly jumped.

She saw the bottom of his cage first, then his feet, then his penis, not erect, then his legs and arms and torso, and finally his face.

When she looked into his dark eyes, her hands went with a mind of their own to her breasts and vulva. She was as ashamed as she’d ever been, of anything. The fact he was naked and caged made no difference.

He was not any of the boys she had seen, as far as she could tell. How many boys were being kept here?

The forklift slid him into the room, set him on the floor and retreated, the door closing automatically.

He smiled at her, a little awkwardly. "Hello," he said.

She could feel her heart thumping with the hand cupped around her left breast. She said nothing, certain if she tried to speak, her voice would crack on the first syllable. So she just stared at him. He was muscular and lean but not gaunt, his hair cut short, one arm resting on his knee, the other behind him, propping him so he could sit up.

"Hey, Taylor," Sam said.

"Hey, Sam, hey, John," Taylor said.

"Been good?"

"Yeah," he said.

"We're going to let you talk to her alone, okay? And then we'll come back."

"Sure," Taylor agreed.

Sam and John filed out and locked the door behind them. Hannah watched them go, and then turned back to the boy.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Hannah."

"I'm Taylor."

"I know. And that's a girl's name."

"It's my name, and I'm a boy."

"How old are you?" she asked. Her heartbeat was slowing. As always, the terrifying things she imagined were never as bad as the reality. Taylor was pleasant looking, he had a beautiful smile, his eyes were dark and she liked them. That they were both naked made things easier, in a way. There was no reason anymore for the stiff formality she'd used to address all adult males prior to this moment in her life.

"I'm 23," he said.

"You're not a boy anymore."

He shrugged. "How old are you?"

“18.”

“How did you end up here?”

“My mother borrowed a bunch of money she couldn’t pay back, and they took me.”

“How’s it been?”

“Terrible. The worst thing that’s ever happened to me.”

“Why?”

Hannah was sitting with her legs tucked to the side, so he couldn’t see her chains, but now she didn’t care, about that or letting him see her parts. She dropped her hands, pulled her feet forward and showed him her ankles. “Things like this.”

“When did they take you?”

“Tuesday.”

“Do you know why they brought me?”

Hannah just scowled at him. Surely he knew.

“Well, I know what we’re supposed to do,” Taylor said, looking down, “but what’s it for? No one told me. Training, assessment, something else?”

Hannah tried to keep staring into his eyes, but her gaze dropped and she looked at his penis. It was fully erect now, angled up, his testicles visible beneath. She drew in her breath and looked back at his face.

“I’m a virgin,” she said. “So they wanted you to, to, to do it. But I’m not going to.”

“Why not?”

Hannah stared at him. The question seemed incredibly rude, even under the present circumstances.

He seemed to be able to sense her thoughts, which surprised her: He shrugged apologetically and elaborated, “I mean, are you in pain, are you having your period, is it something religious?”

“I’m just, I’m just nervous,” she stammered. “I’m just, I don’t know.”

“Do you think it will hurt?”

“They keep talking about breaking me.”

“You still have your hymen?”

“Yes.”

“Wow. They could get a lot for—“

“I told them no. They asked me if that was okay, to sell me for that, and I said no.”

“Okay,” he said, leaning back, making no attempt to hide his erection as it swayed. “So you could just have them do it with a rod or whatever. Or you could do it.”

“I can’t,” she said. “I can’t do that.”

“So they got me to do it,” he said, adding with a feeble attempt at concealing his disappointment, “but, if you don’t want to, that’s okay.”

“Do you want to?”

“Does that matter?”

“Maybe,” Hannah replied, not sure if it did or not.

“Yes,” he said, and he looked down at his penis for the first time, then he looked back up at her. “Yes.”

“Why?”

“Why do I want to have sex with you?”

“Yes.”

“Have you looked in the mirror? Ever?”

Hannah smiled. She knew he was appealing to her vanity, and vanity was a sin, but still, the words were sweet to hear. Sweet, and stirring. She looked down, studying her toes, and then she raised her eyes to his.

“How would you do it?”

“However you wanted me to.”



“That doesn’t make any sense,” Hannah retorted.

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t know anything.”

“Well, I could describe things now,” he said, and Hannah looked at his penis again, trying to imagine it going inside her. It seemed far too big for her, much thicker and longer than a tampon, with a tip that looked like the end of a spear. And yet, despite her fear and uncertainty, she felt her vulva warming, the fluid leaking onto her lips.

“How would you want to do it?” she asked.

“I would just be on top of you,” he said. “You’d be on your back.”

“Would it hurt?”

“It might, when your hymen broke. But if you were wet enough, it should feel good after that.”

“How would you break it?” she asked.

He looked puzzled, so she blushed and quickly elaborated. “I know what you’d use ... but what if it hurt too much? What if I said stop?”

“You could get on top,” he said.

“What do you mean?”

“I would be on my back. And you would get over me. And put yourself down on me.”

This was a new idea for Hannah, something she’d never imagined happening.

“You would let me do that?”

“Of course,” he replied, and he shifted in his cage again and his penis swung.

Hannah, her heart pounding in her ears, her vulva wetting itself, let her mind wander in ways she rarely allowed as she imagined in explicit detail what could happen with Taylor, how he would feel, how she would move.

But they wouldn't be alone, she remembered. Sam had said she and John needed to be there.

"They're going to watch us," Hannah said.

"I know."

"Doesn't that bother you?"

"Not really. They've seen it a million times. They'll probably just be on their phones. They're not going to be staring."

Hannah heard a key in the door of the training room, looked back and watched Sam and John reenter. She immediately met Sam's eyes. Hannah knew what she was thinking and, now that she'd made her decision, she wanted things carried out with a minimum of discussion or time.

"Do you want us to send him back now?" Sam asked.

"No."

"Should we let him out?"

"Yes," Hannah replied, trying desperately not to blush. She wasn't sure if she was succeeding.

## **The Breaking**

Sam tapped her phone and spoke quickly into it. "We're in Training Room 18. We need a boy shackled and let out of his cage."

It took what felt like an eternity for a worker to show up. As she waited, Hannah looked at Taylor briefly once or twice. He was studying her, looking at her like boys and men had many times before, and she looked away quickly.

The female worker at last showed up, moving with the staff's customary efficiency to open the little door, chain Taylor's ankles and open his cage at the side. He rolled out and stood.

“Do you want to do this on the mattress?” Sam asked Hannah.

“Yes,” Hannah said, trying to keep her voice steady, trying to hear over the roar of blood in her ears.

Sam released Hannah’s tether from the ring in the floor. “Step over to the mattress.”

Hannah obeyed, the long chain trailing behind her, and Sam knelt to padlock it to a ring in the floor, at the foot of the mattress.

Hannah bit her lip and tried to swallow her disappointment. She was about to lose her virginity, and she was going to do it while chained to the floor. Had she not spent the last 15 minutes talking to a nude boy, looking at his erection and wetting herself, this latest unexpected humiliation probably would have ended any thoughts of sex, but along with her arousal came the knowledge that if she didn’t get this done now, it would continue to lie before her.

“I need one of her cuffs moved too,” Sam said. The worker turned to Hannah. “Both cuffs on your right ankle?”

“Yeah.”

The staff girl unlocked the cuff from its place next to the broker’s cuff on Hannah’s left ankle and moved it to her right side.

As the worker left the room, Sam stepped over and wrapped her fingers around Taylor’s penis.

Confronted by another image that didn’t conform to anything Hannah had ever known or thought, she gasped. Was Sam trying to hurt Taylor, or embarrass him in front of Hannah? But he pulled back slightly, then pushed his penis forward through her hand, and Hannah looked at his face and saw he was smiling.

“Been getting plenty of use?” Sam asked him.

“Did one training yesterday,” he replied. “Could’ve done a second.”

“You’re good now?”

“Yes, definitely,” he said. “Isn’t it obvious?”

Taylor glanced at Hannah once more as he moved to the mattress and lay on his back, his penis pointing up toward his belly button.

He smiled up at her, still standing at the foot of the mattress, and she did her best to smile back but she knew it wasn’t convincing.

As she’d learned to do in the last five days, she tried to see her body as that of another girl’s. She dropped, knelt beside his feet, noticed that his broker’s cuff was like hers, and then she walked on her knees until she was straddling him, her tether coiled at the foot of the mattress.

Trembling so fiercely she could hardly move her arms, she reached down between her legs and touched the end of his penis with two fingertips, handling it as if it were a bomb, or a wild animal.

She knew it was supposed to go up her vagina, but she had no idea about the mechanics. She looked down at Taylor with a wordless plea for help.

He understood, as he seemed to every time she was lost, and he grabbed his penis and pointed it up toward her while, with his other hand, he used two fingers to spread her vaginal lips.

“Okay,” he whispered, “just drop straight down. Slowly.”

She put her hands on his chest and did as she was told, feeling for the first time something besides her finger or a tampon entering her sex.

She rose up and dropped again, finding him surprisingly smooth and slippery, and she realized the pleasant sensation was courtesy of her fluids, that this was what her syrup was for, to allow a boy up her comfortably. Pleasurably.

She dropped again, stopping when she felt the pressure of his tip against her maidenhead.

“I’m there,” he said. “I can feel it.”

“What should I do?” she whispered.

“Keep going, if you you’re ready to be broken. Keep going.”

Taylor was squirming under her, his penis moving in and out slightly, and Hannah realized that there was nothing keeping him from raising his hips and driving into her, all the way up, and breaking her that way. It would have been okay if he had, but he was leaving her in charge, and she was grateful for that.

She lifted again, dropped until the tip was against her hymen, raised and lowered again, a little further this time.

This was what she had been longing to feel, she knew, the penetration, the sweet moving in and out, and she continued to milk the first three inches of Taylor’s shaft, increasing her speed until a sharp pain ripped through her loins.

“Uh!” she cried, adding with a whisper, “Oh, sweet Lord.”

It was done. The pain subsided quickly and she slid all the way down Taylor’s penis, her vaginal walls screaming with a sensation she’d never known or imagined.

Now Taylor was moving too, raising up as the hole between her legs devoured him, over and over. After a half dozen thrusts, they settled into a quick rhythm, she rising as he dropped, her sliding back down as he pushed up hard, almost violently, filling her to the depths of her sheath.

The sound of his shackles and her chain rang mutely together, like a sort of music, and she grunted quietly every time the base of his penis struck her vulva.

She was going to do this until her vagina grew sore, she thought to herself, or Taylor’s penis stopped filling her, or Sam and John pulled her away.

But something was happening inside she didn’t understand, something in her core, a tension, like the feeling of having to go to the bathroom. Grinding against Taylor seemed to be the only way to resolve it, but the tension kept building

as she moved. She thought of what he was doing to her insides, how it looked in there if she could see, and suddenly, she began to die, to have what seemed like a heart attack, an overwhelming sense of something starting at her groin and bursting from there to every other place in her body.

“Oh!” she cried, wondering if this was the end. “Oh!” The sensation was too good to be death, though, and she allowed it to follow its course through her body, yielding to it, groaning as the feeling turned to pure, impossible pleasure.

“Oh, sweet Jesus, oh, sweet Jesus,” she gasped, continuing to grind on Taylor. She looked down at him, into his eyes, but they were sightless and wild, then he closed them and issued a long, agonized “aaauuuu!” and his rhythm changed. He was going faster, driving in and out of her too quickly for her to keep up, so she held still over him and allowed him to plumb her depths over and over again as he moaned.

Finally, he was finished with whatever he was doing, and he lay still, breathing deeply, with Hannah splayed obscenely over him, her legs spread, her genitals still pressed against his wet, softening member.

She held still there, panting, eyes closed, for more than a minute before she looked down at him.

“What happened?” she gasped.

“I broke you,” Taylor said, his eyes still closed.

“No, what was the thing you did to me after that? I felt something.”

“You mean when you came?”

“Came?”

“You had an orgasm. You’ve never had an orgasm?”

Hannah looked down, as if she might find a clue to what had happened there, and screamed.

“You’re bleeding!” she cried.

“That’s your blood,” Taylor said, opening his eyes and angling his body up to have a look.

“I’m not supposed to have, to have,” Hannah stammered, “to have my period for another three weeks.”

“You’re supposed to bleed when it breaks.”

Hannah clambered off him and over his legs to sit on the edge of the mattress. The sheet was white, but when she leaned back and looked down, she saw that she was still bleeding, staining it, and that something else was coming out with the blood, a white fluid.

“Did something come out of you?” she asked, fighting another wave of panic.

“Yeah, I came,” Taylor said. “I put semen inside you.”

“It’s white, right?”

“Yeah.”

Hannah looked up. She’d completely forgotten about Sam and John, but they were still there. John was looking into his phone; Sam had her phone at her mouth, whispering into it.

When Sam saw that Hannah was staring at her, she beamed, walked over and dropped to one knee.

“How are you feeling?” she asked.

“I’m okay,” Hannah replied, knowing her real answer would have taken far too long to share.

“You got it done.”

“I guess so,” Hannah agreed.

“Mrs. Alvarez wants to talk to you.”

“Oh.”

Sam handed her phone to Hannah, and she brought it to her ear.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Hannah, how are you doing?”

“I’m okay,” Hannah said, but she felt a lump in her throat and her eyes were tearing up for some reason.

“You did great, Hannah. I’m so proud of you.”

“What?”

“I know it wasn’t easy.”

Hannah looked at the phone, spotted the little lens and realized Mrs. Alvarez had been watching everything through it. Feeling physically ill, she handed the phone back to Sam.

“Were you done talking to her?” Sam said into her phone. She paused, then continued, “No, she just handed me the phone. I think she’s done talking, then.”

Hannah turned back to look at Taylor. He was still, his eyes closed, and Hannah realized he must be asleep, and she felt achingly alone.

Sam said a few more things into her phone and put it back into her pocket.

“Can I go back now?” Hannah asked, staring at the floor.

“She had to watch, Hannah,” Sam said quietly. “She just lost millions of dollars. We needed a record that she was okay with it.”

“Okay.”

Sam got on her phone again, said a few things into it and the female staffer returned, waking Taylor to return him to his cage, escorting Hannah to hers.

As soon as her shackles were off, Hannah grabbed a wipe from the tube, passed it between her legs and turned to Taylor, awake now and sitting a few feet from her, looking at her with an unreadable expression.

Humiliation, arousal, unspeakable pleasure were all just memories now, replaced by a sense something had been forever lost, coupled with something akin to love for the boy who had taken it. She got on her hands and knees and simply returned Taylor’s gaze.



“Hey,” he said. “Good luck.”

“For what?” she said, glad for something to respond to, no matter how banal.

“Good luck on being sold. I hope you go to good people.”

“Where will you be?”

He laughed. “No idea. Got a few bids, but nothing definite yet.”

“Do you think ...” Hannah choked before regaining her composure, “do you think I’ll ever see you again?”

He laughed again, but he frowned for the first time since Hannah had met him.

“I don’t know. You could write me, though. Maybe it’ll get through.”

Hannah assumed he was joking and fought despair by resorting to more banality.

“Thanks,” she said quietly. “It was nice.”

“What?”

“What you did. Everything. It was nice.”

“I might get to do it again with you,” he said.

“I would like that,” she said, wondering if he was joking again.

Taylor’s door opened first and he waved and smiled as his cage was lifted and taken away. She watched until the door closed, turned and saw that Sam was sitting on the floor, cross-legged, beside her.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 3: Hannah For Sale**

### **To the Salon**

“How are you doing, Hannah?” Sam asked, sitting cross-legged next to Hannah’s cage. John was seated at the table, his back turned to them.

“I can’t ...” Hannah began, unable to form a coherent thought at first. “There’s just too much happening right now.”

She glanced at John, turned to her bucket and raised the lid, urinating in front of Sam with almost no self-consciousness.

“Did you like it?”

“With Taylor?”

“Yes. It seemed like you liked it.”

“I took the Lord’s name in vain.”

Sam laughed. “It happens.”

In the silence that followed, Hannah could hear her own breathing, slow and shallow.

“Can you do a little more with us today?” Sam asked.

“What?”

“We want to take you to the showroom. For just an hour.”

“What happens there?”

“Buyers will look at you.”

“Who?”

“Buyers. People who want to buy a girl.”

“Oh,” Hannah said, and she wiped herself, closed the bucket, drew up her legs and wrapped her arms around them. “Will I be nude?”

“Yes.”

“Will I be ... will I have chains on?”

“Yes. Just one ankle tether.”

“What will they do to me?”

“Just look at you,” Sam said. “Talk to you. Read your chip.”

“The chip in my back?” Hannah asked, and she felt it again, a slight sting between her shoulder blades.

“Yes.”

“Will they touch me?”

“They might shake your hand, and they can touch your breasts and behind or anywhere else except your holes, and they can’t put anything in them, or in your mouth, or ask you to.”

“Will you be there?”

“Yes,” Sam promised, “at the start.”

“I can go,” Hannah said, and she turned her mind entirely toward the man she was about to meet, the lonely, wealthy man who just needed to be loved by the right woman, even if he had to buy her first.

But as her cage was picked up, she thought of Taylor, if she’d seen the last of him, and how she would send a letter to someone she knew only by his first name, and what she would write, and if he would ever write back.

Her cage was moved down another hall, through another large door and into a room where several dozen empty cages sat, presided over by a male staffer behind a desk. He stood and approached with a set of chains in his hand, and she slid her feet to the little door to be shackled, and she crawled out when the side of her cage was unlocked and lowered.

“Over there,” he said, pointing to a door with a small window, and she walked toward it, more curious than afraid for the moment.

She saw a girl's face in the window, heard the click of a lock being turned, the door opened and she passed through.

"Is someone meeting you?" the girl asked.

"Yes, Sam. Sam and John."

"Did they tell you to ask for a holding pen?"

"No, I don't think so."

"Yes or no?" she asked sharply.

"No."

"Okay, wait here."

Hannah took in the room quickly. It was long and narrow, well-lit and full of commotion. Closest to her, lining both walls, stood 10 small cages, four with toilets, four with showers and two with neither that were apparently just meant to hold people. A boy and a girl were showering next to each other, a girl was on one of the toilets, a girl was in a holding pen, and she smiled at Hannah and Hannah smiled back.

Beyond the cages, the room looked for all the world like a beauty parlor, Hannah thought, except that all the customers were naked and chained. Two rows of seats faced each other, about a dozen in all, half occupied by girls being tended by someone, either staff in black and gray or, to Hannah's surprise, collared slave girls in shorts and t-shirts.

At the far end of the room, another row of holding cages lined the wall, three girls and a boy waiting in them.

As in the stacks, it seemed that everyone was talking here, even the girl and the boy in the showers, and Hannah picked up enough of their conversation to guess they'd come from a training room where they'd had sex.

"You're still coming out," the girl complained, bending to look at her vulva.

The boy laughed. "Some of that's probably from the last guy," he said.

"That was yesterday," she protested.

This was something else Hannah needed to adapt to, she told herself, sex as simply another thing people did, sex being scheduled and watched, sex for training, for breaking, for fun. No embarrassment, no awkwardness, no privacy.

She felt a stirring between her legs, an urgency in her mind, and knew that if she and Taylor were put together again, she would want him again, now. She would do it and not be ashamed, regardless who was watching.

What would Mother say? Hannah didn't care. What would Jesus say? He put me here, she thought, so he had no room to speak.

A door opened at the other end of the room, John walked in and waved to her, but he did not make his way to her immediately. Instead, he stopped to talk to one of the slave girls who was having her hair curled at the ends, and from there he joined three more conversations. He seemed perfectly at ease in a world that was still deeply strange to Hannah. And yet, she was becoming a part of it.

When he finally reached her, he handed her a small tube with a sort of balloon on the end.

"Sam's updating your record, but she'll be here soon," he said. "In the meantime, let's get you douched." He turned to one of the shower cages and the girl at the door unlocked it and motioned Hannah to step in.

"What do you mean?" Hannah asked once she was confined.

"Fill it with water from the faucet," he said pointing, "then squeeze it up your vagina a couple of times."

She obeyed, surprised at how little this latest indignity bothered her. She flushed her sex twice, the water and semen spilling out of her opening, down her legs and onto her shackles. She dried off with a small towel, was released from the cage and escorted by John to one of the chairs.

"Hello, Baby," said a tall slave girl with a husky voice. "Can you put your ankle through the ring?"

Hannah obeyed and the girl closed the cuff around Hannah's ankle, securing her to the foot of the chair with a short chain.

"I'm Delilah," she said. "What shall I call you?"

"Hannah."

"Now, Hannah, what are we gonna do with you?" she asked, standing in front of the chair and bowing until her eyes were level with Hannah's. Her own makeup had been applied liberally and with remarkable creativity, eyeliner and lipstick and blushes and shadows intermingled with something new Hannah had heard about and longed to wear, blue and yellow sparkles around the eyes and down her nose that lit up of their own accord, powered by the electricity in and under the skin.

"Oh, Sweetheart," Delilah announced, smiling at John, "we've got a lot to work with here!"

Hannah, not knowing what Delilah meant, looked away, toward the steady progression of people through the room. Two new girls were showering, several girls were done in their chairs and had gone to the holding cages to wait, and those who had been caged at the far end of the room when Hannah walked in were gone now, escorted to what Hannah guessed was the showroom.

"What do you usually do to yourself?" Delilah asked.

Hannah turned back to the girl. "What do you mean?"

"How do you usually make yourself up?"

"I don't wear makeup."

"So I get to do whatever I want?"

"I guess so."

"Oh," Delilah gushed, "you're not going to recognize yourself by the time I'm done with you!"

## **A New Girl**

Delilah looked down and raised her eyebrows. “Who mowed your pubic hair?”

“Mrs. Alvarez,” Hannah replied.

“Was she drunk?”

“No,” Hannah said, and she felt the sting of everything that had happened the day before. “She had to do it while, while I was in a cage.”

“Still,” Delilah protested. “Well, slide up in the chair a little, lean back and spread your legs, and we’ll start with that.”

Hannah obeyed, John excused himself and Delilah pulled up a stool and went to work, snipping with a tiny pair of shears, passing a razor carefully along the edges of Hannah’s fur, concentrating on the girl’s light brown muff one hair at a time. Like an artist, Hannah thought. She tried not to squirm when the scissors and razor brushed her lips and clitoris, even though she found the sensation maddening.

Done there, Delilah turned her attention to Hannah’s face, treating it like a canvas. She started with her eyes, drawing around them, painting her lids, passing a brush over her lashes. Then rouge on her cheeks, bright red lipstick, and a little shadow, to bring out her cheekbones, she explained. Done there, she snipped judiciously at Hannah’s hair and applied a curling iron, giving it what she called a gentle wave, nothing too dramatic.

Finally, Delilah painted Hannah’s nails, bright blue for her fingernails, darker blue for her toes. Hannah watched her toes take on their new faces, one by one.

“Why haven’t you ever made yourself up?” Delilah asked.

“Mother wouldn’t allow it.”

“Money?”

“Yes, partly.”

“Religion?”

“Yes.”

“Oh, Honey, I’m so sorry,” Delilah lamented, and she held up a mirror. “What do you think?”

Hannah looked, blinked, looked, stared, looked away and looked back, into the face of another girl, someone strange, mysterious, wealthy.

Someone beautiful.

Hannah blinked again and felt the tear run from her left eye and down her cheek.

“Oh, Baby, don’t you go crying on me!” Delilah exclaimed, grabbing a tissue. “You’re going to spoil all my work!”

As Delilah dabbed at her eyes, Hannah set the mirror down and looked up at the light above her head, trying to forget what she had just seen.

What if a man bought her for how she looked now? He would be buying a lie. This wasn’t her.

And yet, the idea of standing in the showroom with this face gave her a sense of power, of status she’d never felt before. She looked like the girls who stared out from billboards and magazine covers, whose faces were used to sell everything: beer, liquor, travel, makeup, clothing, fun.

Happiness.

If she could have looked like this just once before she’d been taken, she thought ruefully, just once, at church or shopping with her mother ... the boys and men would have done more than stare, and she might have done more than look away. Yes, it was a lie, but not a terrible lie.

“You’ve outdone yourself this time, Delilah,” a voice announced. It was Sam, standing beside her, beaming.

“Oh, I’ve had fun today! Why can’t they all be as easy as Hannah?”

Sam smiled and nodded at Hannah.

“Hi,” Hannah said quietly.



“We’ve upped your price,” Sam said.

“Oh,” Hannah replied, not sure this was good news. What if the right man could no longer afford her?

“Why?” Hannah asked.

“Because of, uh, how you did. With Taylor.”

“Oh.”

“Are you ready to go to the showroom?”

“Yes,” Hannah said, her heart jumping now that the time had almost come. “I guess so.”

Delilah released Hannah’s ankle and Sam escorted her to a holding pen, staying with her after she was locked in.

“How long will I be in here?” Hannah asked. The pen was no larger than a tiny closet, too small even to sit down in.

“As long as it takes to get your station reserved,” Sam replied. “It shouldn’t be long, and I’ll be with you until you’re tethered.”

“What do I have to do? In the showroom?”

“Just be yourself. Answer their questions. Let them look at you. Smile. Some won’t want to talk, so just hold still while they read your chip. Don’t speak unless spoken to.”

“I’ve never looked like this,” Hannah confessed.

“No one Delilah makes up has ever looked like this.”

“She’s a slave,” Hannah observed.

“A subject,” Sam corrected. “She used to be a boy. Still got her junk, in fact.”

“Oh!”

“She told her parents she was a girl when she was 17, and they sold her a week later.”

“Oh!” Hannah echoed. “She has to live in the stacks?”

“No, she’s got an apartment not far from here.”

“She’s free?”

“Not completely. But as long as she follows the rules and comes to work on time, they’ll let her have a little money, let her go into town. Transes are hard to sell for recreation, but she’s got a knack for making girls beautiful.”

A female staffer walked up, said hi to Sam, unlocked the holding pen and motioned Hannah to follow her.

With Sam close behind, Hannah hobbled through two doors and into a large room, about the size of a gymnasium.

This room was as inviting and luxurious as the stacks and training room were sparse. The floors were tiled in an abstract mosaic of brown, black and light blue. The walls were painted in yellow and navy hues, and the ceiling featured crown molding and recessed lights. There was a coffee bar and soda machine, and desks and couches lined the far wall, ornate light fixtures illuminating whatever was done there. Hannah saw a nude girl seated on a couch, one ankle chained to the floor, while two men and a woman conversed across the desk nearest her. Hannah imagined they must be finalizing her sale.

Music was playing from hidden speakers, something classical. A violin piece by Bach, Hannah guessed.

As she was walked to the back of the hall, Hannah studied the room, estimating there were close to 40 subjects here, mostly female, tethered about 10 feet apart. Once at her station, she looked down to watch as the chain was fixed around her right ankle and her shackles were removed. The girl who restrained her, like all the staff here, were better dressed than workers in the rest of the facility, the men in black pants, the girls in black skirts, all in white shirts and gray blazers.

Some of the staff stood at the coffee bar, one was in a meeting, but most hovered near the dozen customers making their way through the room. Hannah studied each customer in turn: Several couples, in their 30s or older. An older man. A family with two teen boys. A girl by herself, two more girls together, all in their 20s. Hannah remembered it was Saturday and wondered if this was the biggest sales day of the week, if this is how people enjoyed spending their free days.

Tanya, the medical student who couldn't pay her bills, was chained at the station next to Hannah's, and Tanya glanced over and gave a quick wave before resuming an energetic conversation with a middle-aged couple.

"No, I was in my third year," she said, gesturing and smiling. "So I learned just enough to be dangerous."

The couple laughed. If any of them thought it strange that Tanya was naked and restrained, it didn't show in their voices or the way they talked to each other.

Sam touched Hannah's arm and whispered, "Are you ready for this?"

"I think so," Hannah replied, disappointed that the young man whom God had chosen for her didn't seem to be shopping today.

"Good luck," Sam said, giving Hannah's arm a squeeze. "I'll be back in an hour."

"Okay," Hannah whispered back. "Thanks."

With Sam gone, a new fear overtook Hannah, that she might stand here alone until Sam returned, that people would know her makeup was a lie, that her formative years spent with a functionally illiterate woman in efficiency apartments made her boring, if not pathetic. She had no medical knowledge, like Tanya. She had virtually no other experiences anyone might find interesting.

She looked around the space again, her eyes lingering on a half-dozen male slaves, all clustered in one area at the opposite corner of the hall. Some were visibly aroused, their penises sticking out at various angles as they waited or talked to buyers.

Hannah turned her attention back to Tanya and the couple, jealous of Tanya's easy manner, certain the boy of her dreams would choose Tanya, or any girl like Tanya, over herself.

Their conversation moved to clothing, another topic Tanya seemed to be passionate about, and the man's interest waned. He turned to Hannah, noticed her staring and smiled.

Hannah smiled back, and then looked down, self-conscious again. He looked completely normal, a man in his late 30's, dressed for the office, slender and obviously wealthy. He reminded her of one of the elders at the church she and her mother attended, a man she liked looking at. The idea of being seen like this by such a man, nude and chained and made up, reminded her of what she was, a slave girl being sold for sex. The room spun, and she stared at the floor and tried not to fall.

She glanced up again in time to see the man tap his wife's arm. The woman turned away from Tanya, nodded at him, then looked at Hannah, her piercing blue eyes taking in everything about the girl.

She seemed to give the approval he was asking for, and he stepped over to Hannah and put out his hand.

### **Customers in the Showroom**

"Hello," he said softly. "I'm Albert."

"Very nice to meet you, Albert," she said, taking his hand and grasping it firmly, trying to keep her voice even, trying not to see herself as she was. "I'm Hannah."

She looked into his eyes, and he stared back but said nothing, and Hannah wondered if she was expected to speak next. Sam had offered no guidance here, but surely the buyer led the conversation?

"My wife needs a helpmate," he said at last.

"Yes, Sir."

"And I'm one of the things she needs help with," he added with a self-deprecating smile, showing his teeth only on one side.

"Yes, Sir."

"I can be very demanding," he said, and he looked into her eyes again, as if waiting for her to say she understood. "Almost every day. Sometimes more than once a day."

Hannah blushed, not for her sake now, but for his. They had just met, and he was already admitting something very personal.

“Could you do that?”

“Could I do what, Sir?”

“Could you take care of me?”

“Oh,” Hannah said quietly, and now she blushed for herself. She didn’t know what she could do, how many times a week or a day she could be penetrated. Did anyone know that? So she could only be honest.

“I don’t know, Sir,” she admitted. “I’ve only had ... I’ve only done it ... once.”

She looked at him again, in a way she had never looked at a man of his age and stature, as simply a sexual being that she would be expected to engage with regularly. She imagined herself on top of him, riding him like she had Taylor, and she felt her forehead grow hot. She knew her face was red, and she looked down and saw that her nipples were fully erect.

Done talking with Tanya, the woman walked up, staring hard into Hannah’s eyes, as if trying to read what was behind them. Hannah wasn’t sure if the woman deserved pity or envy.

She leaned forward to inspect Hannah’s tag and Hannah raised her chin, looking up at the ceiling, grateful something had interrupted the awkwardness with Albert.

“Hello, Hannah, I’m Estelle,” the woman said, without offering her hand.

“Hello, Estelle,” Hannah said.

“May I touch your breasts?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

Estelle took Hannah’s right breast in her hand, as Bert had done the day before, bouncing it, squeezing it, gently pinching her nipple.

“You’re still a teenager, aren’t you?”

“Yes, Ma’am. I’m 18.”

“Did Albert tell you what he needed?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

“Could you do that?”

“I’m not sure, Ma’am.”

The woman smiled at Hannah, but it wasn’t a warm smile. “Let me read your chip, and we’ll be on our way.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Estelle pulled out her phone and stepped behind Hannah, and Hannah held still, looked up at Albert, saw that he was staring at her in that way men sometimes did, and she looked down again and folded her arms. She didn’t want them to buy her.

“She hasn’t had any training,” Estelle said to Albert. “She’s never been assessed. They’re selling her on looks alone.”

“How much?” Albert asked.

“One point two five.”

The woman stepped in front of Hannah, put her phone away and stared at the girl from top to bottom.

“Thank you,” she said. She nodded to her husband and they moved to the next girl in the line.

Hannah looked over at Tanya, and Tanya looked back and raised her eyebrows and opened her mouth very quickly, making a face that Hannah understood as expressing surprise, or shock. Reassured that she wasn’t the only one who found the couple strange, Hannah smiled back, then turned her attention to the hall and the buyers making their way through.

A group of young women, led by an older man, entered the hall and spoke to one of the staff people sitting at a desk along the wall. She pointed at Hannah and they made a beeline for her.

The man smiled at Hannah as he neared her. "I'm doing a field trip with my students," he said. "Future brokers. I hope you don't mind helping out?"

"No, Sir," Hannah said, studying his little class. There were five females, two black, three white, dressed casually, in jeans and simple print skirts, and when she looked at them, they looked back, with guarded expressions, as if they didn't know what to make of Hannah, or of the hall. This might be the first time any of them had seen a naked slave girl, she thought, or been in a showroom.

She liked the idea that they were uncomfortable, that there was a wall between herself and them. She imagined taking them to the stacks and watching their faces there.

"I'm Mr. Peterson," he said.

"I'm Hannah," she replied.

The man was younger than Bert Sykes, slim and generally handsome, and he had Bert's demeanor, a professional politeness necessary, Hannah guessed, when one's job involved inspecting and arranging the sale of other people.

"Hannah's just been listed," he said, turning to his students. "I have no idea what she's going for, so we're each going to estimate her price, and anyone who gets closer than me gets an A on today's assignment."

Mr. Peterson stepped up and cupped his hand under Hannah's right breast, massaging it, raising and dropping it.

"Let's see your teeth," he said. Hannah opened her mouth and he peered in, moving his hand to her left breast, continuing to squeeze.

"How much training have you had?" he asked.

"None," Hannah said, guessing he was talking about sex.

"Have you ever had intercourse?"

"Yes, Sir," Hannah said, pausing. "But just once."

“Did you like it?”

“Yes ... yes, Sir.”

“Did you orgasm?”

“Oh,” Hannah said, blushing, unable to answer the question, unable to understand why it had been asked.

“Let’s take that as a yes,” he said.

“Bend over,” he said. Hannah obeyed and he stepped behind her.

“Reach back and spread your lips.”

Hannah parted her legs and put her hand between them, fumbling with her genitals before she figured out how to use two fingers to open herself. She looked straight ahead, not wanting to see him while he looked at her there, trying to forget he was even there. She looked at the girls’ feet instead, saw them shift uncomfortably and knew at least a few of them were imagining themselves in her place, and wouldn’t have wanted to be. Did they pity her? If they were so uncomfortable, why did they want to be brokers?

“Alright,” he said, walking back to his students. Hannah straightened, tried to settle into that place where she saw herself from outside her body, like she was another girl.

“I’m going to write what I think her price should be,” he said, taking a pen and small notepad out of his pocket, “and then you’re going to take turns looking at her, and you’ll write down your numbers, and we’ll see how everyone does.”

The girls all stood still, looking around nervously, at Mr. Peterson, at each other, but not at Hannah.

“Traci, you first,” Mr. Peterson said.

A tall black girl stepped reluctantly away from her peers and did her best to smile at Hannah.

“Hello,” she said.

“Hi,” Hannah replied.



Traci reached up tentatively to Hannah's breast and cupped it, like Mr. Peterson had done. She looked at Hannah's face and Hannah opened her mouth, allowing Traci to peer in, uncertainly. Done in front, she had Hannah bend over and part her lips while she looked at her from behind, and then she was finished. She scribbled something on a piece of paper, handed to Mr. Peterson and rejoined the other students.

"Do not share your estimates," Mr. Peterson said.  
"Barbie, you next."

Each of the remaining four girls followed roughly the same steps, Hannah standing patiently as she was fondled, bending over with a hand on her open vulva, her mind focused on the man who would come for her, her eyes whenever possible peering at the door where buyers came and went.

At last, the minor ordeal neared its end. Mr. Peterson had guessed highest, \$795,000. Traci was closest, at \$650,000. The other girls were lower, at or just above \$500,000.

"Anyone want to guess why I said almost a million?" he asked.

"Because of, um, how she looks?" one of the girls ventured.

"Exactly," Mr. Peterson replied. "It's not as easy to appraise as other attributes, but any time you're valuing a subject, try to imagine how it would feel to own them. Make her up like this and have her serve at your dinner party, or take her on a trip, or take her shopping. It will be understood that a great deal was paid for her. She's being bought because she's expensive. This is not a bargain girl."

Mr. Peterson pulled out his phone and stepped behind Hannah, and she knew she was being scanned and held still for him.

"Now, let's see what the damage is," he said. After another brief pause, he whistled. "We were all off. One million, two hundred fifty thousand dollars."

Startled, Hannah turned around to look at him, suspecting he was joking. He looked up from his phone and

into her eyes with what seemed to be respect.

“Someone knows something about you that’s not in your record yet,” he said suspiciously. “You’ve never been trained, never been assessed?”

“No, Sir,” Hannah said.

“When did you have sex?”

“This morning.”

“How did they say you did?”

“It was ...” Hannah stammered. “I was ... they said ... I don’t know, Sir.”

She knew she was blushing crimson. Being asked to talk with strangers about doing something private was, for some reason, much harder for her than doing the private thing in front of strangers.

“None of us could have known this,” he said to his students, “but most likely, she was a tiger this morning, and whoever supervised decided to mark her up. She’s still gotta be assessed, but someone’s expecting the assessment to go well.”

He turned back to her. “Thank you, Hannah.”

“Yes, Sir.”

## **Marked Up**

She watched the class walk away and swept the room with her eyes, hoping a new buyer or two might have shown up. But there was no one interesting. The clock on the wall by the desks said 3:30, and she realized she was hungry and tired. And she was utterly discouraged. Why was God making her wait for her husband? Hadn’t she already been through enough?

Over the next half hour, an older man, in jeans, scanned her back without speaking. Then a girl, 16 or 17, did

the same thing, barely glancing at her as she stepped behind. If her price surprised them, they gave no indication. Two girls in their 20s scanned her together, asked her name but didn't care to talk further. Another older man, in his 50's at least, scanned her in silence.

Mother was supposed to get almost 10 percent of her sales price: more than a hundred thousand dollars if she went for her listing price, a staggering sum.

Hannah spotted Sam, at the far end of the hall, talking to one of the female subjects, and then she made her way to Hannah.

"How are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm fine," Hannah lied. She truly expected to be on her way to her husband's house by now, but no one had appeared that was remotely eligible, and her time was up.

"Ready to go?"

"I guess so," Hannah said. She wasn't sure.

"Someone put a hold on you."

"A hold?" Hannah echoed.

"Yeah. You can't be sold unless they have a chance to bid on you. They have 48 hours to commit or take the hold off."

"Who?"

"No idea. And I couldn't tell you if I did know. It's very private."

"Why don't they just buy me now?"

"Most people don't have that kind of money sitting around," Sam explained. "Not even rich people. They might have to transfer money from overseas, or take out a loan, or arrange insurance. But there's just as good a chance they're waiting for your assessment. You're kind of an unknown quantity until then."

Sam looked at her phone. "You were popular. There are a couple more holds in waiting on you too, just filed."

“Oh,” Hannah said blankly, but she allowed herself a flush of pride, or relief, or both. She was wanted. Albeit, for ... that. But she was wanted.

By whom, though? Anyone who’d scanned her – or anyone she saw in the hall, for that matter – didn’t look like someone Jesus would have sent.

“You might be able to guess who,” Sam said, waving a staff member over. “Did anyone spend a lot of time looking at you, or talking to you?”

“Not really. I talked to a few people. A class looked at me. I guess I was scanned by five or six people. But some were girls.”

“The person scanning you isn’t necessarily the buyer,” Sam said.

A female staff member walked up. “She’s done for the day,” Sam said.

The girl pulled a set of shackles out of her jacket pocket, knelt, chained Hannah’s ankles together and removed her tether.

“They said I’m going for a million two hundred fifty thousand dollars,” Hannah said as she followed Sam and the staffer back to the room with the salon and cages.

“We decided to mark you up,” Sam said. “You did a great job with Taylor. If you can come close to that with your assessment, you’ll sell for at least that much.”

“What’s the assessment?” Hannah asked, finally ready to voice a question that had been bothering her for days. “What happens?”

“You’ll be paired with at least one male, and one female, and you’ll be scored on everything.”

“Paired?” Hannah repeated.

“You’ll be mated with them,” Sam explained.

“You mean, sex? Like with Taylor?”

“Yes, but it’ll be more formal. You and your partner will need to do certain things, and they’ll score you on each.”

“What kind of things?” Hannah asked, her voice cracking.

They were back in the salon now, as bustling as before. Sam led her past the chairs to the cages by the entrance.

“Can you cage her for a few minutes?” Sam asked the girl waiting there. The staffer unlocked a holding pen and motioned Hannah to step in.

“What kind of things?” she repeated as soon as the door had clanged shut.

“We’ll go over that on Monday.”

“Like the kinds of things I did with Taylor?”

“Yes, that position, and others too.”

“You mentioned ... female.”

“A full assessment involves both genders.”

“But I,” Hannah choked, her eyes welling up. “I like boys.”

“Your sexual preference has been noted,” Sam said in what was clearly an attempt at her most reassuring tone. “By all indications, you’re straight. No woman’s going to buy you for her own use. There are plenty of lesbians for sale. But things come up, no matter who owns you. You need to have a basic understanding of the mechanics.”

“You can just tell me how to do it,” Hannah said, grabbing the bars of the pen. “I don’t need to be assessed doing that.”

“You do,” Sam replied, still trying to reassure. “You can train with me, if you want. Or we can get any qualified girl from the stacks.”

“With you?”

“Yeah, I’m a trainer.”

Hannah's vision was narrowing and she gripped the bars, trying to understand what Sam was saying.

"We would ... you would ... we?" she stammered.

"It'll take about an hour Monday," Sam said. "It doesn't have to be me. But you have to do it with someone. And then, we've got your assessment set up for Tuesday morning. If that goes well, we'll add that data to your chip, and there's a chance we can mark you up again, or get buyers bidding against each other."

Hannah looked at Sam, trying to imagine doing things with her. She couldn't come up with anything other than being on top, grinding without purpose against Sam's middle.

"But you're a girl," she said. "There's nothing to put, to put ..."

Sam laughed.

"Hannah," she said, and she reached between the bars to wrap her fingers around Hannah's hand. "You're overthinking this. Trust me, and just do what you're told. No one's going to hurt you or try to make you do something you can't."

Hannah blinked and looked out at the salon, at the girls being readied there.

"I won't see you tomorrow?" Hannah asked.

"No. Nothing happens on Sunday."

"I'll be in my cage all day?"

"Think of it as a day to catch your breath," Sam said. "A lot could happen to you next week. Good things. You'll want to be ready."

"Okay," Hannah agreed solemnly.

"I'll see you Monday," Sam promised with another squeeze of Hannah's hand.

Sam turned to the girl who stood by the door. "She's ready to go back now."

And then she looked at Hannah. “Bye.”

“Bye.”

A girl Hannah recognized from the showroom was locked in the cage beside hers. Then a boy who’d been on display showed up, stepped into the cage across from hers and turned to face her. She looked down without embarrassment at his penis, semi-erect, then up to his face, noticed without shame that he was looking at her too, at her middle, at her breasts, then back to her middle, and she felt the heat there and wondered if he could see it, if boys had the ability to sense a girl’s arousal.

If Sam came back and told her to have sex with him now, with this boy, she would, she thought, chains and all. She wondered if this made her bad, if Jesus would be offended. And yet, she was only doing what she was told. “Slaves, obey your masters,” the Apostle Paul himself had written. For now, Sam was her master, and she would obey. On Monday, she would try to do her best with whatever she was told to do. But she wasn’t sure she could do it. Or anything.

“Hi,” the boy said, startling her from her reverie.

“Hello,” she said.

“Is someone going to buy you?”

“I hope so,” Hannah replied, finding the question a little rude. “Maybe they’ll buy both of us.”

He opened his mouth in surprise. Her words weren’t what he expected, apparently.

“Maybe they’ll buy us both together,” she continued, “and I’ll tell them you have to do whatever I say.”

He laughed out loud, and the girl in the pen beside Hannah’s looked at her and sneered. “Oh my god,” she said, “you really just said that?”

Hannah looked at her, unable to tell if she was truly offended or just pretending. How could anyone take offense at anything anyone said here?

The girl at the door turned and unlocked Hannah's pen. Hannah stepped out, walked through the door as the girl held it open and was met by the boy who managed the room where her cage had been left.

He pointed to the nearest cage, already open, and Hannah clambered in. It wasn't the same cage, she realized with another unexpected sense of loss. The patterns of tarnish on the floor were clearly different from the one she'd been confined to yesterday, the one she'd been put in while Mrs. Alvarez had watched.

"This isn't my cage," Hannah protested as the boy raised the side and locked it.

"It's a female cage," he said, reaching through the little door to remove her shackles. "They're all the same."

She looked at the bucket, terrified she might discover that another girl had gone in there, but when she raised the lid, she found it empty, and clean. She immediately mounted it, unaware until now how badly she'd needed to urinate.

The little tubes were stocked with water and wipes and food, and she quickly availed herself of all three, her panic replaced by relief, even gratitude, as she tried to enjoy a late, bland lunch.

## **Back to the Stacks**

She was still chewing when the forklift came for her, raising her and speeding her back to the stacks. The driver chose a new spot for her, further into the building, three rows up. She couldn't see the entrance from here, where the caged males and females were rolled in one after another, all in chains, but now she could see a whole wall of captives across the aisle from her, mostly female, but male too, maybe one out of 10.

The urgent mystery that attended every male form the day before was gone. Forever. She had been with a boy. She



had known his body and felt the joy and, she was sure, had given him joy as well.

She was one of the first to be put in this part of the stacks, but soon others joined her, a girl named Susan at the head end of her cage, a girl named Felicia beside her, and then a boy, at the end where the bucket was affixed.

He seemed to know some of the other girls caged nearby, and he talked to them first, allowing Hannah to steal glances at him. He was tall, over six feet, probably, and he looked intelligent, with piercing gray eyes and short red hair.

His penis stayed limp, and Hannah imagined he must have done things while he was away from the stacks. How long did it take a boy to be ready for that again? The buyer she'd met, Albert, said he could do it more than once a day. Would this boy get hungry for a girl again, once enough time had passed? The thought of it left Hannah faintly aroused. He would be there, talking to the nude girls around him, growing increasingly aroused, his penis like a gauge indicating his desire, unable to do anything about it, the girls around him a steady torture.

At last he caught her looking, smiled and crawled to the head of his cage. Hannah smiled back, but she was suddenly nervous. Despite all she'd done, she was still getting used to this. And she wished his cage had been on the other side. Her bucket was down here, fixed between them, stainless steel evidence of an embarrassing biological necessity.

"Hi," he said. "I'm Joey."

"I'm Hannah."

"When did you get here?" he asked.

"Yesterday."

She dropped to her bottom and drew her knees up, facing him, well aware that her breasts were bouncing as she moved.

"How long have you been a slave?" she asked.

"Six months."

“Why are you here? They got tired of you after six months?”

“No,” he said, a look of surprise on his face. Hannah was getting used to saying things that took people aback.

“I finished the job,” he said after a brief pause.

“What was your job?”

“Impregnation.”

“Oh,” Hannah responded. “Like, getting people pregnant?”

“Yeah,” he said. “Women, specifically.”

“Who?”

“There were five. Two slave girls, two lesbian sisters and a single woman who didn’t want to get married.”

Hannah looked at her feet. This was another new thing, another thing that startled her.

“You must have been doing it all the time.”

“One week out of the month, definitely,” he said. “Three of them would ovulate at the same time, so I stayed busy then. Not as much the rest of the month.”

“How did you end up, uh, doing that?”

“Car wreck,” he said. “Wasn’t my fault, but they said it was cause they wanted me.”

“Why?”

“Really high IQ,” he said, pointing to his head. “Like, off the charts high. And I’m not terrible at intercourse.”

“Did you like it?”

“Well, it was sex,” he said, looking down at his penis. “But I wouldn’t want to live that way forever. Every orgasm was scheduled. And they’d make me wait two days between when no one was ovulating.”

“Two days between sex?”

“Between orgasm, however it happened. Sex or masturbation.”

“Oh,” Hannah said, blushing.

“Seriously, the lesbian sisters had a chart everyone went by. Twice a day when the three were fertile, once a day if it was just one girl, and when no one was ready, every other day they’d either get me someone or tell me to do it myself.”

“Get you someone?”

“Yeah, usually one of the slave girls, if they weren’t busy. Sometimes one of the free girls, if they were in the mood, but that wasn’t that common. Sometimes another slave girl someone would bring, sometimes myself. I mean, they’d watch to make sure I did it when I was supposed to, didn’t do it other times.”

Hannah, lost for a moment in the strange world Joey had described, fell silent.

“What about you?” he asked.

“What about me?”

“How long have you been a slave?”

“Since Tuesday.”

“Got a buyer?”

“Three from this afternoon,” Hannah replied, hoping her pride wasn’t too obvious.

“Oh yeah,” he said. “You’ll sell.”

A girl’s voice, from one of the cages that had just been set beside his, cried out “Joey!” and he turned and waved.

“Oh, someone I trained with yesterday,” he said, “talk to you later?”

“Sure,” agreed Hannah. “If I’m still here.”

“You’re going somewhere?”

“I was joking.”

Hannah was struggling to learn the norms of socialization in the stacks, and had further to go than most of

the people here, she knew. Most of her time until this new chapter of her life was spent with Mother, sewing, shopping, reading, talking about God and Jesus and their plans for Hannah.

She talked to her peers, such as they were, only at church, and then only under Mother's supervision. Even the most innocent of them knew more than she, had heard music, seen things on the internet, watched TV, possessed an incomprehensible cultural knowledge that left Hannah lost – on the outside looking in – her mother a constant, controlling presence.

Caged, chained, forced to be naked, she was freer here than she had ever been before, in certain ways.

She turned to Felicia, the redhead beside her, learned her tragic history. She was pregnant but there were problems, and after a week of unbearable pain the Catholic hospital refused to treat out of fear it might cause her to abort, she aborted spontaneously anyway, was accused of causing it, convicted after a two-hour trial and sold by the court to a broker. Then she was shipped off after a final 15-minute farewell with her husband.

Susan, like Hannah's mother but younger and more marketable, borrowed and borrowed until she could borrow no more, and then they came for her, banging on her door at 3 in the morning. She thought she was dreaming until the next afternoon, when she noticed the dream wouldn't end.

A clock had been posted at the end of the row, and Hannah watched as it ticked down to lights out. She got her pillow and blanket at 9:30, and at 10, the stacks were plunged into darkness.

Still shy about relieving herself in front of anyone, especially the boy next to her, she'd waited until now to urinate, sighing as she emptied her overfull bladder. She knew anyone who was listening would hear the rush of water, would know what she was doing, but she prayed they wouldn't care.

Exhausted, she wrapped up, put her head on her pillow and listened to the whispers, furtive voices talking,

talking, sharing obscenities not fit for daylight, groaning as the thin breath of words yielded to wrenching relief. Now she knew that the groans were real, that the cries of ecstasy represented a true condition. Her mother hadn't been faking when Hannah heard her and her father having sex. Her mother had known the carnal, utterly selfish joy of orgasm, at least once, but had kept that knowledge from Hannah. She should have been told that her body could do this.

She wondered if Felicia wanted to talk, but the girl said nothing. She strained to hear Joey's voice, wondering if he would speak, what he would say, tempted to turn around, put her head beside her bucket and eavesdrop. But in the end, she drifted off, forgetting to pray.

### **A Neighbor Named Joey**

Hannah woke up early the next morning, as was her custom, defecated, wrapped back up and waited for the lights to come on. It was Sunday, the Lord's day, and nothing would be asked of her, she knew. She would rest today, talk perhaps, but she was ready to be alone, to turn away for a time and pretend she could see or hear no one.

She wanted to run, or even just to walk outside. She had no idea how delightful a stroll under the trees was until she'd been deprived of it for a week. Her last journey outdoors, through a park on her way home from church, was a week ago, and she wordlessly chided herself for failing to appreciate the glory of that moment.

The lights came on and there was some stirring, the usual passing of wastes, but things remained strangely quiet, Hannah's neighbors nodding to her and then rolling back into their blankets, heads on pillows, heads often enough under pillows.

No one was coming for her bedding, she realized. She'd have them all day. It was a small thing, but enough to trigger a brief euphoria.

She took a biscuit from the tube and, sitting cross-legged on her pillow, ate it and looked out, across the way, at the girls and boys caged in the next stack.

Some continued to sleep, some ate and pondered, some talked quietly to their neighbors. Her eyes lingered longest on the boys. She wanted them to look back at her and, often enough, those who weren't asleep did, as if they could feel her eyes. One boy smiled. One scowled and looked away, and she wondered if he didn't want to be looked at, or if he wanted her and was frustrated. One boy smiled and reached down, grabbing his penis, and she saw that he was erect and she continued to stare at him, into his eyes, keeping her face expressionless, simply drinking in the lust of young people forced, at least for today, to be celibate.

And then, for the first time in days, her mind turned fully to Mother. Her absence from her life, her unknown fate, the way they had been torn apart, had left a giant rip in Hannah's being, something raw and unresolved. Hannah did not know where her mother was, she did not know if her mother was well, and she did not know if she would ever see her again. And the same was true for Mother when she thought about Hannah, Hannah knew. Constant companions since Hannah had been born, inseparably close since she was 15, a sudden, cataclysmic wall of bars and wires and laws had been thrust between them. Hannah allowed herself a few tears, huddling under her blanket and pretending to sleep, seeing her mother again as she had last seen her, flailing, one hand cuffed, and then stung by the sheriff's deputy, and then in her jail booking photo. She longed to hear her voice again, to tell Mother she was okay and had hope for better things, to be assured that Mother was okay as well.

And yet, if things were somehow completely restored, if Hannah and her mother were somehow suddenly returned to that efficiency apartment, things could not be the same. Hannah had been stripped, looked at, felt, chained. Hannah had known a boy. She'd borne the joy between her legs of a thrusting penis, while she was observed. How could she possibly explain that to Mother? Or go back to waiting chastely for a man acceptable to Mother to take her?

Tomorrow, Hannah resolved, she would ask Sam if there were any way for Hannah to contact Mother, or hear from her. Until then, there was nothing she could do, and she tried to set the matter aside.

When Hannah wasn't lying down, or pondering with her eyes turned blindly toward the opposite stack, she made small talk with the others around her. Joey seemed mostly occupied with other things, talking to other girls or sleeping, but when she caught his eye, he would slide to the end of his cage to say hello.

Her conversation with him at noon began bluntly:

"I need to pee," she said. "Can you look away?"

He laughed. "Sure, if you promise not to watch me."

"Are you going now?"

"I can."

"Then I won't be able to watch," she said. "I have to face away from you."

"I have to face away from you too," he said.

"You don't have to," Hannah said, confident that she knew at least this much about the male anatomy. "You could face me and just point yourself straight down."

"It's easier to do it from the other direction, though," Joey said.

"Okay," she said. "You start, and then I'll go."

Joey turned toward his bucket, raised the lid and looked back at her to make sure she wasn't looking, but she was.

"Turn around," he said.

"You too," she said, and she squatted over her bucket and let her urine go. If he was looking now, she didn't care, she realized, and she was suddenly unclear why the whole exercise had been necessary to her. Once a boy had seen you completely naked, did it matter that he saw you pee?

“Can I look now?” he asked.

“Almost,” she said, crawling to pull a wipe from the tube. She passed it over herself, put it in the bucket and closed the lid.

“Okay,” she said.

He crawled to the end of his cage again on his hands and knees and she turned and sat with her legs crossed, one thigh against her bucket.

Joey’s penis was growing, for some reason, and he sat down and crossed his legs like Hannah did, unashamed as his member rose, pointing up. He looked down at it and smiled at her.

“Why did that happen?” she asked, blushing slightly as she reconsidered the propriety of the question.

“I haven’t cum since yesterday afternoon,” he admitted. The question didn’t seem to bother him at all.

“What girl were you with?”

“I wasn’t with a girl.”

“Then how did you ... do it?”

“In a thing.”

“What kind of thing?”

“A thing you put your penis in, and it makes you cum.”

“Why?” Hannah blurted, blushing anew. This made no sense.

“Semen sample,” he said.

“That white stuff ... that comes out?”

“Yeah, they wanted to look at it.”

“Why?”

“Sperm count probably. I didn’t ask.”

“What’s the machine like?”



“Like a pussy,” he said.

“What’s a pussy?”

He laughed. “You really don’t know?”

She shook her head.

“It’s another name for your vagina.”

“Oh,” Hannah replied, wondering how many other words she didn’t know.

“Do you have to do that all the time?”

“No. Like, twice since I got here.”

“Do you get girls too?”

“Yeah, but not enough.”

“How many girls do you want?”

“Two a day. Two every damn day. At least.”

Joey looked down again at his penis and looked back at Hannah, grimacing.

“I bet you wish you weren’t in a cage right now,” she said.

“Or that you weren’t in a cage.”

“What good would that do?”

“I’d get you to come to me.”

“How would you do that?”

“I’d ask nicely.”

“And what would you ask me to do?”

Hannah felt the heat growing between her legs, felt the honey flooding her sheath. She didn’t dare look down, but she hoped the fluid wasn’t showing, or that Joey couldn’t hear the tension in her voice. She wanted to keep talking, though, about this.

“Sit next to my cage,” Joey replied.

“I’m already sitting next to your cage.”

“Kneel next to my cage. Up against it.”

Joey was staring into Hannah’s eyes, unblinking, and she was staring back, oblivious to anything else around her but him. He wrapped his hand around his penis, slowly moving it up and down.

“Would that work?” she whispered, easing closer to the wire, her nose almost touching the metal.

“Yes,” Joey sighed, “you could back up against my cage, and I’d put my cock through, and up into you. Or you could lie on your back, with your pussy up against the wire, and I’d lie on my side, and fuck you that way.”

Joey’s hand was moving faster now, and Hannah realized he wasn’t just touching himself. He was masturbating. This is how boys did it. His hand was like a vagina, and he was sliding it up and down, and then he was going to finish and something would come out, she knew. Something white.

She put her hand on the wires, willing them to break, to let her somehow get to Joey, but nothing yielded and she continued to stare, to breathe him in, to yearn. She looked down, watching his hand, longing to take his penis into her body, to hear him groan the way Taylor had groaned. To feel that thing again, the orgasm.

She knew her vulva was soaked, and she didn’t care. She thought about touching, but Joey’s words and what he was doing were far more stimulating.

He grunted sharply, a sort of “uh, uh,” and she looked down and saw it happen, a jet of white cream shoot from the tip of his penis, landing on the floor of his cage. A second spurt landed on his leg, two more wetted his thigh, and then another shot pearled at the tip and rolled down his shaft and across his fingers.

He continued to grunt, in time with the squirting, until nothing more came out, and then he looked up at Hannah and smiled.

“I wish I could give you some,” he said, still massaging himself.

Hannah said nothing, but she knew her eyes were telling him enough.

He grabbed a wipe and cleaned the semen off his floor and himself, and then he looked up at Hannah, as if to see if she were still looking, or had turned away.

She nodded, still staring, and he nodded back and wrapped up in his blanket.

## **To the Training Room**

A lone male staff member made the single pass through the stacks this day, checking on each subject in turn, refilling food, water and wipes. Hannah assured him she was well, although she was restless to the point of being ill, desperate to stand, to walk, to make love again. Trying anything to distract herself, she ate slowly, took small sips of water, urinated again without caring if Joey saw her or not. She did her hair repeatedly, tying it into a bun at the back of her head, at the top of her head, braiding it on the sides, in the back, shaking it loose, feeling it fall over her shoulders.

Evening came with excruciating slowness, but at last the lights were off and she closed her eyes and listened to the whispers and the relief, the unspeakable words and the small cries of pleasure. She heard Joey's voice and knew he was masturbating again as he talked to the girl beside him, and she felt a sting of unexpected jealousy and immediately tried to dismiss it as ridiculous. And yet, the feeling lingered, and she lay awake and stared into the darkness until slumber took her, prayerless again.

Her sleep was fitful and dissatisfying, and Hannah awoke before lights on, still restless and unsettled.

She eased to her bucket, disgusting now with more than a day's waste in it, relieved herself and sat on her pillow, looking outward, waiting for the day to begin, for the lights to come on, for something to happen. Maybe she would meet the

right man today, but she wasn't hopeful. She wasn't hopeful about anything.

She gave up her pillow and blanket reluctantly and confirmed she was doing well when a female staff member made the day's first pass through the stacks.

She missed her mother, and she wondered about her father. Would he care that she was here? That her mother – his ex-wife – was in jail?

The forklifts began rolling early, cages moving out one after the other. She was one of the first in her group to go, and Joey smiled at her and she smiled back with a lump in her throat, thinking of all the slaves who had mattered to her, however briefly, in the last few days that she might never see again.

As the lift wheeled her through the doors and to the back of the building, she imagined the things that might happen today, and her mind immediately went to something she'd put aside since Saturday: the training Sam said she'd be doing.

She'd be training with a boy, something that roiled her with a mix of jittery anticipation and cold fear. She had no idea how it would be done. What if she failed? And then, she'd be with a girl somehow, possibly Sam.

The little door opened to a training room and she was dumped off as before, alone for now and not wanting to be.

She listened for a key at the door, the hum of the forklift bringing someone else, anything that indicated someone was on their way. But when the second little door opened and Taylor's cage was slid in, she looked away, her heart beating wildly. She had done well with him Saturday. She had climaxed and taken his semen. Was she supposed to do that again today? Or other things? What if she couldn't? What if he didn't want to be with her again?

"Hello, Hannah!" Taylor said brightly, his words calming her a little, like medicine. Still, she couldn't bring

herself to look at him. What if he didn't have an erection this time?

"Hi, Taylor," she said quietly.

"I think we're going to get to play some more."

"Play?" Hannah repeated.

"Or whatever you want to call it."

"I think we have to train."

"Yeah," he said, and his voice broke, and she stole a glance and saw that he was sitting cross-legged, looking at her, his penis already as hard as it had been Saturday, pointing up at the ceiling.

"Do you want to, again?" she ventured.

"God yes," he replied, laughing. "I hope you do."

Hannah blushed. "But it's training," she said. "It will be different."

"It'll be fun," he assured.

"What will we do?"

Taylor opened his mouth to speak, but his first words were lost in the sound of the door unlocking, the voices of Sam and John and a male staffer, talking about something.

"The other girl was one of yours," the staffer was saying. "You ought to say something to her the next time you see her."

"Has she been punished?" Sam asked.

"No, but she's supposed to be brought in before noon today."

"Okay," said Sam. "I'm supposed to get her for the showroom at 3. I'll say something then."

Sam turned to the two cages on the floor, walked briskly over, waved to Taylor and knelt beside Hannah.

"How are you doing, Sweetheart?" she asked, peering into Hannah's eyes.

“I’m really, really restless,” Hannah blurted, leaning toward Sam and wrapping her fingers around the wires. “When do I get out?”

“Just as soon as we can get you two tethered,” Sam replied.

The staff member drew a long chain out of the bag slung over his shoulder. There was a cuff at either end, and he slipped one cuff through the top edge of Hannah’s cage, lowered it in and opened the little door at the side. Hannah offered her left foot, and he reached in and secured the cuff around her ankle. The chain was at least six feet long, long enough to reach into Taylor’s cage, and the staffer repeated the process, cuffing Taylor’s right ankle.

He unlocked Hannah’s cage first and she scrambled out, standing and waiting for Taylor to be freed. She liked being chained to Taylor much better than being shackled alone, and she looked at him and realized the heat was building again, inside the hole between her legs.

Taylor crawled out of his cage and stood beside her, his penis sticking straight out. Hannah studied it, unashamed now, noticing the shape it had taken on, the flared head, the veins, the thick black hair at the base.

“Who gets the first shower?” Sam asked. Dressed more formally than on Saturday, she was in a skirt today, black and cut above the knee, with a cream short-sleeved blouse and black flats.

Taylor and Hannah walked as one to the little bathroom area. Taylor offered to shower first, so Hannah turned to the sink to brush her teeth. As she squeezed out far more toothpaste than her mother would ever have allowed, she peered into the mirror and started, finding there a different girl, a strange girl with dark eyes, fading makeup and long, tousled blonde hair. Delilah’s work had lasted more than a day, through the rigors of the cage and everything that had been done to her hair. Hannah was still beautiful. More beautiful maybe, because the aging of her makeup made her look older and, if not wiser, at least more worldly. Looking worldly

wasn't something her mother would have approved of, but she was glad.

She sat on the toilet as Taylor finished his shower, and then they traded places and she, as two days before, lost herself in the pleasures of hot water, soap and shampoo. She washed everywhere, forgetting anyone was there, or not caring that they were.

After he brushed his teeth, Taylor took his place on the toilet, waiting, watching her, his penis firm but not completely stiff. It was like a gauge, Hannah thought. You could use it to tell not only if a boy was aroused or not, but how aroused he was.

Hannah was still drying off when Sam started talking.

"Hannah, can I assume you know nothing about training for an assessment?"

"Yeah," Hannah replied. She'd never said "yeah" before, only "yes," she realized, but it was a common word here.

Her heart was starting to pound again, all the previous anxieties reviving.

"There's nothing to be worried about," Sam assured. "The assessment covers the basics, nothing that should give you any trouble, as long as we do things right today."

"Okay," Hannah said uncertainly.

"Taylor, how many trainings have you done?" Sam asked.

"Like, a dozen," he replied. "Three since I got here."

"Good. Well, then, let's get you on the mattress."

What had been mere anxiety suddenly became panic, and Hannah wondered if she should halt this now, ask to be returned to her cage and given another day to prepare. But at that moment, Taylor turned toward her and she saw that he was fully erect again, and she knew he wanted her again, and that was, for now, reassurance enough.

The chain clinking as it slid along the floor between them, they moved toward the mattress, Taylor sitting down first, looking up at Hannah expectantly. She sat beside him and tried to smile, her mouth too dry to be used for speech.

John leaned against the wall, tapping on his phone, and Sam grabbed a chair from the table, slid it next to the mattress and sat down.

“The assessment is done in three parts,” Sam said. “Affection, foreplay and intercourse.”

Hannah nodded blankly.

“Hannah, have you ever kissed a boy?”

“Yes,” she said. “A long time ago.”

“How do you think Taylor wants to be kissed?”

Hannah looked at him. Their faces were a foot apart, and he was staring at her and smiling, and she blushed and felt hideously awkward.

“I don’t ... I don’t know,” Hannah stammered.

“Right,” Sam agreed. “You’ve never kissed him, so you don’t know. The first kiss is going to be at least a little uncomfortable, but it will give you information. So go ahead.”

## **Training with Taylor**

“Go ahead what?” Hannah asked, laughing nervously and turning to Sam.

“Kiss Taylor.”

“Oh.”

Hannah turned back to Taylor. He closed his eyes and held still, waiting for her to act. She moved her face toward his and, not knowing what else to do, touched his cheek with hers and looked back at Sam, so embarrassed she felt woozy.

“Okay, good start,” Sam said. Hannah knew she wasn’t being honest, but the fact she didn’t laugh helped.



“Now, touch your lips to his.”

Hannah returned to Taylor, still waiting passively with his eyes closed, and she put her lips on his stiffly, tentatively. She pulled away, watching his reaction. He inhaled again but was otherwise unresponsive, except that his penis remained firm, swaying gently as he breathed.

She returned to his mouth, softening her lips to conform to his. She felt him smile, and she smiled and their mouths opened. She smelled the toothpaste and, behind it, his maleness, and she pressed in, her mouth opening wide, understanding now that this was another way to unite with a boy, to give of herself completely, to open another hole to him and to allow things to happen that didn't require thought or preparation.

Passive until now, he began to kiss back, his tongue in Hannah's mouth, against her teeth, on her lips, and she kissed in return, learning and practicing at the same time with everything new he did.

She turned toward him, her legs parting instinctively, her ears oblivious to the soft clink of the tether as it rattled under her foot.

“Good, Hannah,” Sam said quietly. “Very good. Now lie down and kiss.”

Taylor moved to the middle of the mattress, stretching out on his back, and Hannah followed him, lying on her side next to him, returning her mouth to his, pressing hard, their collars tapping together with a faint chime. She wanted to drink him in, to take all of his body in hers through her mouth, and she opened and tasted and licked and kissed with a fervor she thought possible only under the influence of deity.

“Alright, Hannah, you're doing great,” Sam said. Hannah, seeing Sam as a welcome guide to a place of wonder, didn't mind the interruption.

“That was affection,” she said. “Now we're going to do foreplay. Reach down and touch his penis. Wrap your hand around it, but be gentle.”

Hannah obeyed, tentative again, but Taylor thrust against her fingers and grunted and she knew it must feel good. Remembering what Joey had done the day before, she stroked him gently, and he continued to move against her as they returned to kissing.

“Ready for oral, Hannah?” Sam asked.

Hannah looked over her shoulder to stare into Sam’s eyes.

“Isn’t this oral?”

“Oral sex,” Sam clarified. “You’ll put your mouth on his penis.”

“What?” Hannah asked. “Why?”

“It’s part of foreplay.”

“Why?”

Sam laughed before she could help herself but quickly regained her composure.

“It’s something that’s done, because people like it. Trust me on that. It’ll be part of your assessment. So you need to at least go through the motions.”

Hannah sat up, looking down at Taylor’s penis and back at Sam.

“Put my mouth on it?”

“Lick it, kiss it, take it into your mouth.”

“My teeth will hurt him.”

“You don’t use your teeth,” Sam said. “You use your tongue and your lips.”

As Taylor waited patiently, Hannah got up on all fours over him, then lowered her mouth slowly to his sex.

“There’s something coming out,” Hannah said.

Sam leaned forward to look. “That’s called pre-ejaculate. It’s part of his semen, and it means he’s very aroused.”

Hannah paused, uncertain how to proceed.

“It’s okay to lick it off,” Sam said. “Start with that. It’s not pee. It’s clean, and you might like the taste. It’s the same thing he put in you Saturday.”

The thought of taking into her mouth anything that came out of another person’s body repulsed Hannah, so she ignored Sam’s instructions and put her mouth at the middle of Taylor’s shaft. As soon as her lips touched his skin, his penis twitched and she jerked back.

“It moved,” she said, looking at Taylor.

Now it was Taylor’s turn to laugh. “It does that,” he said.

“Did I hurt it?”

“No.”

Hannah held his penis so it wouldn’t move again and returned her mouth to it. This time, she put her tongue on it, just below the head, licking tentatively.

She tasted nothing, but she felt the firmness under his skin, the wooden insides of his member, and she remembered that it was hard because of her and that interested her, if it didn’t arouse her, and she continued to lick, behind the head, then down the shaft, unwrapping her hand and holding it with two fingers now so she could run her tongue from the base to the tip. She felt her middle warming up again and knew her juice was starting to flow. She had been tasting that for years, the fluid from herself, and what was coming out of Taylor was the same thing, she reasoned, or the same sort of thing, and she pressed her tongue against the hole at his tip and cleaned him. She squeezed his shaft again and more came out and she licked that too, now fully aroused, lost in the delight of a male body that was, for now, entirely hers.

She opened her mouth wide and brought Taylor’s sex into it, her lips wrapping around the mid-point of his shaft, her tongue continuing to lick.

He squirmed and grunted and she pulled back.

“Did my teeth hurt you?”

“No,” he replied hoarsely. “It’s good. It’s good.”

Hannah returned to him, Taylor grunted again and thrust into her mouth and Hannah realized he might orgasm, that she might make him climax with her mouth, and then the white fluid that shot out would have to be reckoned with.

“We don’t want him cumming just yet,” Sam said, putting her hand on Hanna’s shoulder. “You need to take a break.”

Hannah had forgotten Sam was there, but she was grateful for the interruption. A little clear fluid at his hole was one thing. But she did not want him squirting the rest of what was inside him into her mouth, down her throat.

Hannah sat back and looked at Sam.

“You’re doing great,” Sam said.

“Thank you,” Hannah responded, but she didn’t believe it. What else could Sam say?

“Now I want you to get over him, so he can put his mouth on your vulva and you can suck his penis.”

“So he can ... so he can do that?” Hannah said, mystified.

“Yes.”

Hannah looked at Taylor apologetically. He raised up on his elbows and smiled at her, not apparently disappointed by what Sam had proposed.

“Why does he have to do that?” Hannah asked.

“Because he wants to,” Sam said. “Right, Taylor?”

“I do,” Taylor agreed.

“Why do you want to do that?” Hannah asked, horrified that anyone would have to put their mouth on that part of her body.

“I don’t know,” Taylor said. “I just do. Most men do.”

If anything, Taylor's penis was even harder, even thicker, Hannah noticed. If he didn't want to do this, surely his arousal would subside. She would let him do it, then, but she looked at him, his torso and mouth, and had no idea how to proceed.

"Swing your leg over me," Taylor said, and he put one hand on her thigh, the other around her chain and guided her into position above him, her knees against the mattress near his elbows, her feet on either side of his head, her tether almost taut now, running from her ankle to his.

Suddenly something was against her vulva, a mouth or a tongue or, perhaps, the spirit of God, because that's what it felt like, a sudden wet pressure against her opening that felt like it was reaching through her body and licking her soul.

"Oh!" Hannah cried. "Uh, uh, uh, uh."

Taylor was doing things to her she didn't know were possible, moving his tongue and lips from her clitoris to her lips to her hole and back again over and over, faster and slower, maddening and unbearable and perfect, simultaneously.

She lowered herself to his sex as it swung in time to the movements of his mouth, and she raised it and swallowed it, grunting mutely around it.

Her orgasm came fast and hard, a shaking spasm of pleasure and surprise and something akin to terror. Had she not had her mouth full, she would have screamed.

In the midst of her long release, Taylor pulled his penis away from her and she thought at first she'd bitten him, and then wondered if he was going to orgasm, but nothing came out beyond another drop of pre-ejaculate. Only when she was done with her pleasure did she realize that he'd pulled away because he was about to climax and didn't want to yet.

Hannah, panting, still on her hands and knees over Taylor, looked up at Sam, who seemed to be very far away, her body wavering as if part of a mirage, her face invisible, swallowed by the universe.

“Think you can keep going?” Sam asked.

Hannah stared at her, sensing that words had left her mouth, but too distracted by her throbbing middle to perceive them.

“What?” Hannah asked, and her words sounded very far away in her own head, as if spoken by another girl.

“Think you can keep going?” Sam repeated.

“Oh,” Hannah grunted, torn between exhaustion and the desire to hang onto this, to not let it go yet. “What else is there?”

## **Two Positions**

“Intercourse,” Sam said. “Two positions. It would be three if you hadn’t been on top of Taylor last time, but you passed that one.”

“Okay,” Hannah agreed returning to the present, to her body, to the task at hand.

“Taylor, get behind her,” Sam said. “Hannah, stay on your hands and knees and let him enter you from behind.”

Hannah eased away from Taylor, careful not to drag the tether across his body, and got on her hands and knees. Four-legged, she thought. Like an animal.

She closed her eyes, listening to the faint rattle of the chain as Taylor positioned himself. She drew her breath in when she felt his fingers against her lips, opening her, and she grunted quietly as he slid his penis into her body.

It felt good again, impossibly good, but different from last time, the pressure in different places, and she began to move involuntarily, pushing back as Taylor pressed up, quickly finding the same urgent rhythm they’d settled into Saturday.

“Good,” Sam said. “Very good. Taylor, can you make it to one more position?”

“Yeah,” Taylor gasped, quickly withdrawing.

“Hannah, on your back,” Sam said.

Hannah dropped, rolled, opened her legs wide, certain at least in this instance what was about to be done, and Taylor stood and stepped between her legs, their tether gathering into a coil besides Hannah’s ankle.

Because Hannah’s lips were already splayed wide, Taylor simply knelt and thrust, quickly going deep into her.

In this position, Taylor was able to press against her clitoris, and Hannah lifted her pelvis and grabbed him around the waist, forcing him to grind against her swollen knot.

Too soon however, she felt him thicken, she felt the change in his rhythm and knew he was at last having his orgasm, that his white cream was spilling out as it had before to fill her.

He looked down at her, grimacing, and she smiled and pulled him toward her, wanting to kiss again. Both their mouths were open as soon as they touched, tongues exploring as he released and panted.

With one last groan, he was done, and he collapsed on her, his full weight against her chest and belly. Hannah raised her arms to his upper back and wrapped her legs around his thighs, wanting to hold him a little longer as his penis softened and slipped out of her.

She kissed him everywhere she could reach now, on his mouth, his cheeks, his forehead, his ears and scalp.

He smiled and kissed her back, but he looked puzzled, and Hannah wondered if he were surprised by affection that came after sex. Were all boys like that, she wondered, their hearts growing limp along with their penises? It was a sad thought, and it brought her back to the moment, the stacks, her cage on the other side of the room, and Sam, still sitting in a chair a few feet away.

Taylor was motionless now, breathing softly into her shoulder, his weight pressing against her.

“Don’t fall asleep on me, please,” Hannah said, irritable and not sure why. “Just use the mattress like you did last time.”

Hannah eased him off of her and he stirred and looked around blankly, then fell still again on his side, a bead of fluid at the tip of his penis.

“Did you want to cum again?” Sam asked.

“I think I could have,” Hannah replied, sitting up, consciously choosing to admit only what she was able to do, not what she wanted to do.

“Tomorrow,” Sam said, “do everything like that again. Like you did now. You’ll pass, at least when you’re with the male.”

Hannah looked down to watch Taylor’s semen oozing out of her hole. There was no blood this time, just their mingled fluids putting a wet oval where she sat.

“Who will it be?” she asked. “That assesses me?”

“No idea,” Sam replied. “They’ll bring someone from outside.”

“A slave?”

“A subject. Probably. And the girl probably will be too.”

“The girl?”

“You’ll have a male and a female partner for the assessment,” Sam said. “Didn’t we go over that Saturday?”

“I guess so,” Hannah said, regretting she’d brought it up. They’d also discussed training with a girl today, and Hannah didn’t want anything to do with that.

Sam stepped to her bag and pulled out two cans of Coca-Cola and two protein bars. Taylor sat up groggily, smiled at Hannah as if they shared a secret no else knew, and he and Hannah ate and drank in silence, sitting together on the mattress, while Sam talked into her phone. Hannah heard enough of Sam’s words to know that she was talking to Bert.



“She did beautifully,” Sam said. “No, just with a boy so far. Taylor.” Another pause, and then, “Yeah, I probably will. Unless she’s picked out another female trainer, which I doubt.”

Hannah looked at Taylor, wondering if he heard what Sam had said, and if he understood what it meant. To Hannah, the meaning was clear and humiliating.

Sam said a few more words into her phone, hung up and dialed again.

“We need a male picked up from training room 4,” she said. “Okay, thanks.”

Hannah, staring at the space on the floor between her feet, felt a light touch on her arm.

She turned to look at Taylor. “You’re good, by the way,” he said. “Really good. You’re going to do well.”

“Thanks,” Hannah said, not really sure what “good” meant in this context.

The door to the training room unlocked and a female staffer walked in.

Taylor stood and Hannah realized she’d have to accompany him and she stood too and walked with him back to his cage. He crawled in and the girl closed and locked the side of his cage, then unlocked his cuff and slipped the tether out.

“Tether her next to the mattress,” Sam instructed, and Hannah returned to the bed and watched as the cuff was secured around a ring in the floor.

This is how she would be for Sam, she told herself. Sam would be training her for the assessment. Would Sam really do things with her?

Hannah’s mind went of its own accord to what Sam looked like in the nude. She was big-boned, sturdy, with heavy breasts and thick, solid thighs. Her strawberry blonde hair was shortish, cut at the neck. She was pretty, with light freckles across her nose.

At least, Hannah thought, she would be pretty to a boy, probably. Hannah didn't care.

"Okay," Sam said, sitting down in the chair by the mattress and leaning toward Hannah. "Now we're..."

Sam's phone rang. She pulled it out of her back pocket, raised it to her ear.

"Hey, Bert," she said. Hannah could hear Bert's deep voice on Sam's phone, but not his words.

"They want her now? She's not ready."

Bert said something and Sam nodded.

"Okay, 30 minutes, I'll ask them to hurry in the salon, but I can't promise anything."

Sam hung up and looked at Hannah. "Slight change in plans."

She dialed and spoke quickly. "I need a girl chained for the walk to the salon. She's in training room 4."

The door opened next to Taylor's cage and he offered a small wave to Hannah as he was lifted and carted away. There was too much going on, too many unknowns, so Hannah just looked at him, not waving or smiling.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 4: The Assessment of Hannah**

### **An Introduction**

The door to the training room opened and a female worker walked in, a set of chains slung over her shoulder.

“Can you stand for me?” she asked.

Hannah obeyed and the worker took her hands one at a time and cuffed her wrists in front, then knelt to chain her ankles. A chain running from her handcuffs to her leg irons kept her hands low, at her waist.

“Why do I have to wear these?” she asked Sam.

“We don’t have time to send you in your cage,” she replied. “You’ll get to walk.”

The staffer released her ankle from the tether securing her to the floor and opened the door, motioning her to step through.

On the other side of the door, Hannah entered what looked like a normal office area, a hallway that opened into work spaces, cubicles, a meeting table. A few employees, male and female, glanced up at her, but most continued to work, as if there was nothing strange about a nude, chained girl walking by.

A nude male approached from the other direction, chained the way Hannah was, escorted by a girl, his penis half erect, his hands around it to protect it from his restraints, and she looked at him as he passed and he looked back at her, but neither smiled.

With her hands chained in front, covering herself felt natural, and touching could be done discretely, so one finger went to her sex. She was still leaking Taylor’s semen; it was on her lips and on the insides of her thighs, and she wondered if it could be seen by the workers, and the idea horrified her.

Being seen nude and chained was one thing, but bearing the offal of sex in front of strangers was something else altogether, deeply humiliating, and she blushed and kept her eyes down, praying that her hands hid the worst of it. She wished Sam would walk before her, but she stayed behind, her steps almost inaudible.

The staffer unlocked a door to the left and Hannah and Sam passed through, arriving at the same salon where Delilah had tended her the day before.

“Hey, Babydoll!” Delilah said brightly from a chair by the door where she was making up another girl.

“Hi, Delilah,” Hannah replied, remembering Delilah’s troubled history, her rejection by her parents.

“Let’s get you into one of the shower cages,” Sam said, leading the way through the room, Hannah hobbling after.

Once Hannah was confined, her chains were removed and she douched her vagina, washed around her vulva and dried off. Shackles were applied and she was released and escorted to a chair to be cuffed.

Delilah wouldn’t be making her up this time, she realized with disappointment. Today, it was a female staffer who started by shaving her legs, creaming them and passing the razor quickly from her ankles to her hips, methodically positioning her legs, surprisingly efficient at doing this to a girl restrained to a salon chair.

Hannah raised her hands so her underarms could be shaved, trying not to jerk away, and then the staffer applied a quick pass of makeup – eyes, cheeks, lips. She put a wave in her hair and let her go.

Sam took her arm and hustled her to the door that led to the showroom.

“Is someone waiting for us?” Hannah asked.

“Yes, they should be here any second, if they’re not already in the showroom.”

“Who?”

“The family that put the hold on you Saturday. They want to talk to you.”

“Family?” Hannah repeated. “I didn’t meet any families.”

“Just one of them scanned you Saturday, most likely,” Sam said. “Then they showed your file to the rest of them and they liked what they saw.”

Hannah remembered the pictures Bert had taken of her in her cage, of her breasts, of her on her hands and knees, and tried to imagine a family looking at something like that, together.

“What do they want to talk about?” Hannah asked, another wave of panic causing her heart to start pounding.

“No idea,” Sam admitted. “Whatever they want to know from you, probably. Tell them the truth, be yourself. They probably just want to know if they’d want you living with them.”

Hannah was walked to the front of the showroom, tethered, and her shackles were removed.

“That might be them over there,” Sam said, motioning to a family of four sitting at one of the tables along the wall.

Hannah stared. There was what she assumed was a mother and father in their 40’s, slender and impeccably dressed, and the teenaged girl who had come through the showroom alone Saturday, scanning Hannah without speaking to her.

And there was a boy with them too, turned to the side, saying something to his father, nodding seriously. Hannah’s heart pounded as she studied him in profile. Was he the one? Was this the family? Were they buying her for him?

Sam squeezed Hanna’s arm and walked over to the family, bent over deferentially to speak to them, nodded and pointed to Hannah.

They turned to look, all four staring at Hannah as if trying to read her soul. She looked back briefly, then averted her gaze out of sheer embarrassment.

The man retrieved a coat from the chair where he'd been sitting, put it on.

Hannah folded her arms and looked down, remembering she was nude and that this wasn't a dream, and suddenly she didn't want to be doing this, didn't want to be here, to be looked at, to be considered. Would they squeeze her breasts? Would they tell her to bend over and part her lips? Did she want them to buy her? What if she said the wrong thing and they went away? What if they found out she had done nothing in her life but sew and live with her mother in tiny, rundown efficiency apartments?

They walked toward her, escorted by Sam, setting an agonizingly slow pace as they continued talking.

She glanced at them and then looked away, as if there were other things in the showroom that were just as interesting as they were.

She didn't dare look at the boy, not directly, but she got a sense of a male in his early 20's, short blond hair, athletic, healthy.

Ten feet from her, they stopped talking and looked at her, staring again, and she looked back and smiled and tried to see herself as they must see her, and her fear ebbed. They were just people, after all, not so different from the rich people at church. They were here to see her, and if she looked half as good as she had Saturday, she was beautiful and they would have to know that.

"Hello," she said softly, trying to keep her voice even. She dropped her hands to her sides and shifted her feet, her tethers rattling faintly.

The sound of her voice, or the mere fact she had spoken, seemed to change things. She was looking up now, into their faces, and the man and woman smiled at her, the girl

opened her mouth like she was going to say something, and Sam beamed proudly.

Only the boy remained unchanged, standing stiffly, his jaw set, his eyes unreadable. Hannah's eyes lingered on his face, his body. He was at least six feet tall, in chinos and a button-downed, short-sleeve shirt in peach and yellow plaid.

He was very handsome, Hannah thought, in the same way that wealthy boys are always handsome, and she felt nothing for him. Nothing.

"This is Hannah," said Sam. "Hannah, these are the Petrosyans."

Hannah nodded and smiled, and the mother stepped up to her. "Hello, Hannah," she said. "I'm Laura. It's so good to meet you."

"Hello, Mrs. Petrosyan," Hannah said, shaking the woman's hand. The woman was beautiful, blonde like Hannah and her son, and exquisitely dressed, in a navy skirt with white pleats, a white dress shirt with navy piping, a string of pearls.

The father went next. His hair was jet black, like the daughter's, and Hannah thought he might be foreign, a suspicion confirmed as soon as he opened his mouth. "Hello, Hannah," he said with a thick accent of some kind. "I am Ormek Petrosyan."

He stared into her eyes until she looked away. "Nice to meet you, Mr. Petrosyan."

"Dr. Petrosyan," he corrected.

"Oh," she said, blushing furiously, silently cursing herself. She'd made that mistake at church once, and she vowed never to do it again, now she just had. "I'm sorry. Dr. Petrosyan."

She looked down in misery, humiliated by everything, a mere disrobed slave, not beautiful now, not worthy of these people, not worthy of the son.

If they'd decided to give up on her, however, the daughter hadn't gotten the message yet. She stepped up

tentatively and offered her hand.

“I’m Athena.”

Hannah looked at her and the girl smiled, finding something about this funny perhaps, or merely awkward. She had dark, strange eyes, turned up at the corners, as if they were smiling of their own accord. Her black hair formed a square around her face, her bangs cut straight across her forehead. Dressed more casually than the rest of the family, in jeans and a pale blue t-shirt, she was a few inches shorter than Hannah, and Hannah wondered if she were still growing.

“Hello, Athena,” Hannah said. “You must be very wise.”

Laura laughed and Athena stared, backed up, grabbed the boy’s arm. “Say hi to her,” she whispered.

The boy scowled at her and turned to Hannah, his feet moving slowly.

“I’m Allain,” he said. “Hello.”

## **The Contract**

Hannah lifted her hand first, and Allain took it, his grip firm but without spark. If they were buying her for him, she would serve him, but could she ever love him? Wasn’t love supposed to be instant and obvious?

She continued to stare at him, into his eyes, and he stared back, waiting perhaps for her to say something clever about his name, but she knew nothing of gods named Allain, so she was silent.

“Hannah,” said Laura, “do you know why we’re here?”

“You want to buy me?”

“We might want to bring you into our family,” Laura corrected. “We think our home would be a happy place for you.”



“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, realizing that they wanted her to like them, that they had dressed up for her and were being polite because they wanted her to want to be with them, that they would not buy her if she didn’t.

“I would like that,” Hannah said as honestly as she could, not knowing what else to say.

“How much schooling have you had?” Ormek asked.

“I left school when I was 15,” Hannah said, deciding that further details should not be shared. “But I studied at home after that. I read a great deal.”

“Would you like to keep learning?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir,” Hannah replied, startled by the question. “I very much would.”

Ormek smiled. “We hope to close tomorrow,” he said.

Hannah wasn’t sure what he meant and looked to Laura, who winced and shook her head. “He means that we hope to finalize everything tomorrow, here,” she said. “We hope to bring you home tomorrow.”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “Oh.” Her eyes filled with tears and she wasn’t sure why, but the word “home” kept playing over in her mind.

Laura seemed to understand her pain, and she stepped up and put her hand on Hannah’s upper arm, squeezing it.

Feeling like a fool again, Hannah passed a hand under each eye, certain she was smearing her makeup everywhere.

“We’re going to go now,” Laura said with another squeeze, “but Athena is going to stay. She has something for you to read.”

Hannah looked at all of them again, blurry now, her eyes lingering longest on Allain, imagining making love to him, using her training on him. She thought about Taylor and felt the tingling between her legs that preceded sex with him, and turned the reverie off.

“It was very nice to meet you,” she said.

Allain approached her again, and took her hand in both of his.

“Hannah,” he said, and his eyes were almost pleading in their intensity. “I hope we’ll ... see you again.”

Hannah nodded, startled by his sincerity, and his sudden vulnerability. Was the transaction mutual, in a sense? Were they trying to sell themselves to her, even as she was being sold to them?

Allain turned and he and his parents left the showroom.

Hannah and Athena watched them go. As soon as the door closed behind them, Athena turned to Hannah.

“Can you talk to me?” Athena asked. “For awhile?”

“I didn’t have any other plans,” Hannah agreed, and Athena gave her another startled look.

“Do you like to joke?” she asked.

“I guess so.”

Athena summoned a staff person and Hannah was shackled, released from her tether and walked to a couch beside the wall. There, a short chain was run from her shackles to a ring in the floor.

Athena sat beside her, a canvas bag on her lap.

“What’s it like?” she inquired quietly, but her eyes were blazing when she turned them on Hannah. “Back there?”

“What do you mean?”

“Where are you kept?”

“In a cage, most of the time.”

“How big is it?”

“Very small. Like, the size of a refrigerator.”

“Are you kept naked?”

“Yes. Everyone is.”

“Are there boys there too?”

“Yes.”

“Can you see them?”

“Yes, one was next to me yesterday.”

“What did you talk about?”

“Oh,” stammered Hannah, “a few things.”

“Did you have sex with him?”

“No. He was in a different cage.”

“Have you had sex with any boys here?”

“I ...” Hannah mumbled. “Why?”

“I don’t know anything,” Athena said, and then she laughed. “I’m not wise.”

“It’s okay,” Hannah said. “I don’t mind talking about things. But you’re young. How old are you?”

“17.”

“How old is Allain?”

“23.”

Athena reached into her bag. “I’m supposed to give you a contract, for you to read. You have to sign it or we won’t buy you ...or won’t bring you home, I mean.”

She handed it to Hannah, two pages of black words in large type:

This is an agreement between The Ormek Petrosyan Family and Hannah, Subject ID N8114P165.

We are very pleased to bring you into our family. We know that you may have passed through great hardships in your life, and we will do our best to provide you with a nurturing environment in which you can grow and serve.

Welcome!

1. We pledge to provide you with nutrition, comfort, safety and adequate leisure.
2. In exchange, we ask that you do your best to provide companionship, support and service, obeying any reasonable request quickly and respectfully, and questioning an order only when you truly do not understand it.
3. We will conform to all applicable laws with respect to you, and ask that you do the same. We will provide a copy of any law in question upon your request.
4. You will take care of yourself physically and mentally, alerting us if you notice anything amiss and accepting any care provided. You will not harm or endanger yourself in any way. Cutting, taking non-prescription narcotics and unnecessary risk-taking are strictly forbidden.
5. You will be provided with rewards for good service, including but not limited to books and other entertainments, spending money, and extra freedoms, comforts, and travel.
6. You may send up to five letters per month.
7. We will inspect everything you receive and reserve the right to destroy or send anything back that does not meet our approval.
8. Because of your considerable value, you are at risk of theft at all times, even in our home. Therefore, you will be confined and/or restrained whenever we feel necessary.
9. Should you be disobedient, we promise to punish you fairly and consistently. In the event of an infraction, you will receive a clear description of how you have fallen short, and will be given a chance to explain yourself prior to being punished. Punishments may include but not be limited to verbal reprimand, loss of rewards or privileges, additional confinement, additional restraints, corporal punishment, and sale.

Hannah read the document over twice as Athena waited beside her. She'd found its words both hopeful and frightening, and she caught her breath on the ninth term. Life

with the Petrosyans could be good or terrible. Like anything else.

Of course, the most important information wasn't in the document.

"May I ask some questions?"

"Of course," Athena replied, nodding.

"Where would I be confined?"

"We have a few places where we'll keep you, probably."

"What are they like?"

"Well, one's sort of like a cage."

"How big is it?"

"Like a small room."

"Does it have ... a toilet?"

"Yes."

Hannah paused and blinked.

"Can I ever ... see people?"

"Yes," Athena replied. "We'll be there a lot."

"I want to see my mother," Hannah said, her eyes watering again.

## **Negotiations**

"Where does she live?" Athena asked.

"Here," Hannah replied. "Or, she's in jail right now. But the jail is here, in Fort Worth. I guess she's still in jail. I don't know."

A tear rolled down Hannah's nose and dropped onto the paper. She tried to brush it away with her hand, smearing the letters.

“Why is she in jail?” Athena asked, and Hannah noticed that there was no discernible sympathy in the question. Athena just wanted to know things.

“She fought with a deputy. She punched him really hard, I think, and made his nose bleed.”

“Oh my god,” Athena said. “Why?”

“It was when they took me.”

“Who took you?”

“Some people. Mr. and Mrs. Alvarez, and their workers, and the deputy.”

“They just said ‘Come with us?’”

“No, they handcuffed me and put me in a cage.”

“Why?”

“My mother borrowed a bunch of money, and she couldn’t pay it back. So they took me. They said I was part of the settlement.”

“Did you cry?”

“Yes. I’ve been crying a lot. You would too.”

“I don’t think I would.”

Hannah looked at Athena sharply. The girl was smiling, obviously unable to understand what Hannah was telling her on any but the most superficial of levels. Would they all be this way, unable or unwilling to appreciate her pain? To suffer without the sympathy of others, she thought, that was a new sort of loneliness, and it frightened her.

“I want to see my mother,” Hannah blurted.

“When?”

“Now.”

“You don’t mean, um, literally now, right?”

“I know I probably can’t right now. But I haven’t seen her in almost a week, and I miss her, and I want to know she’s okay, and I want her to know I’m ... I’m ... okay too, I guess.”

“Sure.”

“It has to be in the agreement.”

“Okay.”

“I won’t sign it if it doesn’t say I can see my mother.”

“Okay,” said Athena. “When?”

“Um,” Hannah stalled, not sure what to ask for, not prepared for this conversation. “Every month.”

“I’ll tell Mom and Dad,” Athena agreed, and she smiled at Hannah as if she liked that things weren’t going to go exactly to plan, that Hannah had thrown up an objection. There was a mischief about Athena, Hannah thought, possibly even a destructiveness. She’d known a girl at Four Pillars like that, strangely rebellious, questioning everything, figuring out ways to violate the spirit of the law while fulfilling its letter, or vice versa. She was punished often enough, but sometimes she got away with it and, Hannah suspected, was so pleased by the rare victory that her frequent defeats were worth it.

“Do you think Allain’s cute?” Athena asked.

“Yes,” Hannah said honestly. “I think he’s beautiful.”

“We’re getting you for him,” she said. “You know that, right?”

“Yes,” Hannah replied. “I assumed it wasn’t for you.”

Athena leaned forward and covered her mouth, then looked back at Hannah and laughed.

“When I scanned you yesterday, you were just standing there,” Athena said. “So I thought you’d be just like, nothing.”

“What do you mean?”

“Just like ...” Athena’s face went blank and her voice became robotic, “‘No, Ma’am, yes, Ma’am, very good, Ma’am.’ But you’re funny. And you say things people don’t expect.”

“I’m just saying things,” Hannah said, “because of how it’s been this week.”

“So, what happened?” Athena inquired. “I mean, with your life?”

“A man wanted to marry me when I was 15,” Hannah recalled. “He was too old and he already had three wives, so I told my mother no, and she left with me.”

“She left?”

“We were at Four Pillars Tabernacle of Jesus. It’s this big place outside Fort Worth where people live. And we left that and moved into the city. She left my dad and her relatives and everyone. But it was hard for her. She couldn’t make it.”

“You can have a bunch of wives there?” Athena asked.

“Up to four. It used to be more. But then just four.”

“Four Pillars?” Athena asked. “Are you sure it wasn’t Four Pillows?”

Hannah looked at Athena, not sure what she meant at first, and then she understood. The four solemn pillars of God – faith, family, government and commerce – had become the four pillows. Of the bed.

“Oh!” she said, and then she laughed for the first time in weeks, laughed as hard as she had ever laughed in her life that she could recall. Hannah laughed so hard she began to cry, wiping her eyes.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she said to Athena, not knowing why it was funny. She imagined the great men of Four Pillars now, standing proudly in front of the Sunday Assembly, each holding four pillows, for their four wives, and she continued to laugh, doubled over. Everything else, her nudity, her collar and chains, her uncertain fate, were for this moment subsumed by mirth.

Hannah slowly regained her composure, wiped her eyes again, saw the black smears on her fingers and knew her face was a mess, but she didn’t care. She looked at Athena,



and the girl smiled wickedly back at her, clearly finding Hannah's laughter delicious.

Athena pulled out her phone, tapped into it, looked back up at Hannah.

"What else do you want to know?"

"I want to know everything, I guess," said Hannah. "What's your house like?"

"It has 25 rooms."

"Twenty-five bedrooms?"

"No, seven bedrooms. Twenty five total rooms. Like kitchen, main dining room, smaller dining room, living room \_\_\_\_"

"It has two dining rooms?"

"Yes. A big one for, like, big dinners for people, and the one where we usually eat."

"It's a mansion."

"It's not that big."

"But it sounds nice."

"I guess."

"What will it be like, for me, living there?" Hannah asked, hoping that a vague question would lead to at least a little information. Would they be mean to her? Were they stingy, greedy, selfish, cruel, inconsiderate? She couldn't ask directly, but that's what she most wanted to know.

Athena seemed to understand her intent. "They're nice, but weird."

Hannah raised an eyebrow. She found it strange Athena said "they," as if Athena weren't one of them.

Hannah looked away, not wanting to do anything to stop Athena from talking.

"We have this, um, mean room."

"Mean room?" Hannah echoed.

“That’s what I call it. Everyone who owns, who has, um, people, has a room like that. Where the person goes if they don’t ... you know, for ...” Athena’s voice trailed off, but Hannah understood and wanted to know nothing more. The “mean room” didn’t matter, she told herself, because she would never do anything to go there.

“And then, Dad ...”

Athena’s phone vibrated and she looked at it. “Dad says you can see your mom, but not every month. Every three months. Maybe more, but at least every three months.”

Hannah looked down, not wanting to negotiate with Ormek through Athena’s phone, hopeful that the family would be as kind as they seemed, even if they remained oblivious to her suffering.

“That’s okay,” Hannah said.

Athena’s phone shook again.

“Dad wants to know when you’ll be assessed.”

“Tomorrow, I think,” Hannah said.

“What time?”

“I don’t know.”

Athena tapped on her phone and put it away.

“They’re saying you’ll be good at it.”

“I don’t know.”

“What do you have to do?”

Hannah stared blankly at her.

“For the assessment? What do you have to do?”

“I don’t know,” Hannah replied, not quite lying. “I’ve never done one.”

“You have to be with a boy, don’t you?” Athena persisted.

“I think so. Maybe.”

“And a girl too?”

Hannah bit her lip and looked down, and all the pleasure of Athena's company evaporated.

"Okay," said Athena, accepting silence. "I have to go now. But I'll see you again if we buy you, or get you or whatever. Tomorrow maybe."

"Okay," Hannah said, still looking down, her mind elsewhere.

Athena shoved the agreement back into her bag and turned toward a nearby staff person. "I'm finished with her."

She stood and smiled down at Hannah.

"I hope we will," she said.

"Okay."

Athena left the showroom through the front door – the door where free people passed through – while Hannah sat and waited, not wanting Sam to come back for her.

## **Back to the Training Room**

There were 10 other slaves here and only four buyers: what Hannah assumed were a couple, in their 40s, and a woman with a young man that was probably her son. All but one of the those for sale were female, and Hannah stared at the male, a young black slave looking about awkwardly, possibly embarrassed about his penis, long and erect and pointing down. When he noticed Hannah staring at him, he stared back until she closed her eyes and listened to the music, something from the Big Band era that reminded her of Mr. Walsh, their music teacher at Four Pillars. He was one of the few outsiders allowed inside the compound, and Hannah knew he had only one wife, and she found him exotic and fascinating. For a time, she even loved him, the pure way a 14-year-old girl loves an older man.

Mr. Walsh, Hannah realized, might have been to her adolescent mind a ticket out, an escape, however fanciful, from Four Pillars. She'd never been happy there, she admitted

to herself for the first time. And leaving there with Mother wasn't an escape, not at all. She and her mother had Four Pillars locked in their minds, even if they existed outside its borders. Only now, with her ankle chained to the floor, could she say the locks that bound her to Four Pillars had been smashed.

She'd spent very little time until now thinking about the workings of her own mind, but free time and radically changed circumstances forced reflection, and she wondered what else she might discover about herself, her youth, her life.

She opened her eyes to watch the far door and saw Sam appear with a female staff member.

Her stomach churning, Hannah stood and held still as her restraints were switched, a set of chains applied to her wrists and ankles as before, her shackles and tether removed.

"You're going to be assessed at 10 tomorrow morning," Sam said. "If anyone asks again." She wasn't smiling and Hannah studied her, wondering if Sam was upset with her. She soon got her answer.

"You can't just make demands," she said.

"Oh," Hannah said. "I asked to see Mother."

"You demanded it," Sam corrected.

"Yes, I did," Hannah agreed, her tone bordering on defiance as she followed Sam and the staffer back through the showroom door. "She's my mother."

"I know. It just kind of surprised them, though. Dr. Petrosyan called me, kind of worried."

"Did they decide not to buy me?"

"No, they still want to, if your assessment goes well. He just asked if he should be worried."

"What did you say?"

"I said no, that you're okay, you just love your mom."

"That's true," Hannah agreed, and she blinked and blurted, "I need you to get in touch with her for me."

“That’s not my job. It will be up to your buyer what happens with your mom.”

“Oh.”

“Does she have a history of violence?”

“My mother?” Hannah replied, laughing. “No.”

“You told them she hit a policeman.”

“Once. Because he arrested me.”

“You were arrested?”

“When I was made a slave,” Hannah said, raising her voice. The conversation was forcing her to remember things that hurt, to live through them again, and the unfairness of that – of everything – was making her angry. “He was a deputy. He handcuffed me and they put me in a cage. I should have fought him too. I should have tried to get away.”

Sam stopped in the middle of the hall, put her hand on Hannah’s elbow and glanced at the girl escorting them. She stared back, expressionless. They were just outside an office area, several employees within earshot. One, a young man, was looking up at Hannah as well.

“Please be quiet,” Sam whispered.

“They shouldn’t be allowed to take someone away from their mother like that. They shouldn’t be surprised if someone fights them.”

“That doesn’t matter,” Sam said quietly, tugging Hannah’s arm to get her moving. “Don’t say it.”

“Do you get money if they buy me?” Hannah asked, resuming her slow walk. It was something she’d been wondering about since Saturday: who among the people she’d met would benefit.

“I get money if anyone buys you,” Sam replied curtly, clearly surprised by the question.

“How much?”

“Don’t ask people about money,” Sam said. “It’s rude, and it can get you punished.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“I get one percent. John gets half a percent.”

“Fifteen thousand dollars?” Hannah blurted. How many people was she going to make rich?

“Yeah,” Sam agreed, “if you go for full price. That’s what I get.”

As they talked, Hannah passed the salon and the office area and arrived back at the training room where she’d been before, her cage still waiting by the wall, Sam’s bag on the table.

Without asking permission, Hannah went straight to the toilet, relieving herself, wiping awkwardly in her chains.

Sam walked over to the table but pointed toward the mattress, and Hannah stepped over to be tethered and unchained, sitting while it was done.

The worker left and locked the door.

“We have to do one more training,” Sam said. “Do you have anyone you want to train with? I mean, a female?”

“No,” Hannah said, finding the question strange. How was she supposed to find someone?

“So it’s going to be me,” Sam said. “Okay?”

“Yeah,” Hannah agreed, trying to sound calm.

“We just have to go through the motions, and then tomorrow, you do the same thing with the girl they bring you, and you’ll be fine.”

“Okay.”

Sam pushed off her shoes and unbuttoned her blouse, starting at the top, opening it, slipping it off and draping it over a chair, a white lace bra holding her breasts up.

Hannah watched her, butterflies swarming through her stomach. John wasn’t here, probably by design. If he showed

up, Hannah would curl into a ball and refuse to do anything.

Sam looked away, toward the wall, and Hannah gazed at the mattress and noticed the place where Taylor's semen had spilled out of her, a cream-colored, irregular oval on the white sheet. Hannah turned back to Sam as she unbuttoned her skirt at the right hip, unzipped it and slid it down her thighs, revealing a pair of light blue panties.

Sam looked down and angled her arms behind her back, unhooking her bra and sliding it down her arms. Her heavy breasts dropped, her pink nipples already hard.

With another quick motion, she slid her panties down to her ankles and stepped out of them. Her pubic hair, like Hannah's, was carefully trimmed, a reddish blonde triangle slightly darker than the hair that framed her face.

She set her discarded clothing on the table and stepped over to Hannah.

"Stand up."

Hannah obeyed, barely breathing, Sam standing a foot away from her, facing her.

"Do you want to do this?" Hannah asked quietly.

"This isn't about want," Sam replied, and Hannah sensed sympathy in her tone. "You just have to do. Sometimes, you won't want to do something, and then you'll be glad you did it. Other times, you will want to do something and then wish you didn't have to. You just do what they want, and life will be fine. You're not going to enjoy everything. That's not how this works. That's not how life works."

Hannah stared at Sam, surprised by the philosophical turn.

"Girls know how to make themselves feel good," Sam said. "So they can make another girl feel good. That's all it has to be. Okay?"

"Okay."

"Do you remember the three areas of the assessment?"

“Yes,” Hannah said, grateful to have something to focus on. “Um, intercourse. And affection. And, and, um foreplay.”

“It’s the same with girls,” Sam said. “But affection is much more important. So is foreplay. And intercourse doesn’t always happen. Depending on the girl, it might never happen.”

“How can intercourse ever happen?”

“The girl puts something on, or just puts something inside the other girl.”

“What do you mean?”

“Do you know what a dildo is?”

“No,” Hannah replied, stifling a laugh despite her nervousness. The word was funny.

“It’s an object shaped like a penis, and you might be asked to wear it, at your middle, like you’re a boy, or to just hold it in your hand and put it inside your partner that way.”

“Oh.”

“Kiss me.”

## **Affection and Foreplay**

“I’m not ready for this,” Hannah said, her stomach screaming, her blood rushing in her ears. She sat down on the mattress and stared at the space between her feet.

For a long, strange moment, there was silence. Or near silence. A place like the stacks could never be completely noiseless. Doors opened and closed, forklifts hauled their cargo, people spoke and their voices reached Hannah’s ears as distant, unintelligible hums, lower-pitched for males, higher for females.

She listened for Sam’s breathing, but heard nothing, and she thought at first Sam must have given up, put her clothes on and left, but when she glanced to her right, Sam’s



feet were there, in the same place they'd been. Hannah lifted her gaze up Sam's legs to her naked middle, the slit of her vulva, then her belly, her breasts, her blue eyes.

Sam wasn't staring at her – she was looking away, toward the wall – and that relieved Hannah for reasons she couldn't understand. So Hannah continued to look up at Sam, and Sam finally looked down, and the sympathy was still there. Sam was just trying to get her job done, and she was willing to wait as long as she had to for Hannah to be ready.

Hannah, still frightened, still deeply uncomfortable, but no longer incapacitated by anxiety, slowly rose to her feet and turned toward Sam.

Sam seemed to be trying to guess at Hannah's mind, and she looked into her eyes, and then at her mouth, then back to her eyes.

“Will you kiss me?” she asked.

“You start,” Hannah whispered.

“You have to start,” Sam said.

“How?”

“The same as you did with Taylor.”

Hannah stepped forward until her breasts brushed against Sam's. She stepped back to keep them apart, and leaned her face forward, touching her lips to Sam's.

Sam stayed still, passive, so Hannah tilted her head and pressed her mouth in, keeping it closed and tight at first, then relaxing, as she had with Taylor.

Sam's lips parted and Hannah opened her mouth and Sam put her tongue just beyond Hannah's teeth. Their breasts touched again, and Hannah didn't care.

Sam's mouth was softer than Taylor's, and it tasted a little like mint, and the way coffee smelled, and Hannah let the tongue explore her teeth and lips, and then pressed her own tongue against it and, briefly, slipped it into and out of Sam's mouth.

Sam was a girl, Hannah reminded herself. Boys weren't supposed to have sex with each other. That was in the Bible. Girls probably weren't, either.

Sam pulled her mouth away and moved it to Hannah's ear.

"With girls, affection is a lot more important," she whispered. "Touch me."

"How?" Hannah whispered back.

"Hug me. Run your fingers along my spine. Make me feel like you really want to be with me, even if you don't."

Hannah pretended Sam was Taylor and tried to touch her the way Taylor would be touched, on his back, tracing his ribs, lower down.

Sam did the same to Hannah and it felt good. Being touched gently always felt good, Hannah thought, no matter who was doing it. Hannah sensed a little heat between her legs for the first time since she'd been with Taylor. It was because of Taylor, she told herself.

"You'll need to lead during the assessment. But otherwise, let the girl lead at first," Sam said, "unless she tells you to lead, or it seems like she's waiting for you to lead."

"Lead?"

"Go first. Do each thing first."

"Okay."

"Let's lie down."

Sam pulled away and dropped to the mattress.

Her tether rattling, Hannah did the same, lying on her side next to Sam, like she had with Taylor that morning.

"Kiss me and touch my breasts," Sam said. "We're going to move from affection to foreplay."

Hannah obeyed, rising up on her elbow, lowering her mouth to Sam's, pressing just her fingertips against Sam's left breast.

“Squeeze,” Sam said. “Pinch my nipples. Do what would feel good to you.”

Sam’s breasts were thick and firm, and Hannah explored them only as objects of interest, squeezing them and feeling the way the nipples stood up under her attention.

The kissing went deeper, the girls’ tongues stretching into each other’s mouths, but Sam pulled away.

“Lick my breasts,” she said. “Suck my nipples.”

“Why?” Hannah asked. Was Sam producing milk? If so, Hannah wanted nothing to do with it.

“Remember how good you made Taylor feel with your mouth?”

“Yes.”

“The nipples are the same. Lie on your back.”

Hannah obeyed and Sam rose up on her elbow and lowered her mouth to Hannah’s right nipple, licking it, sucking it, pulling it into her mouth and holding it between her teeth to stroke it with her tongue.

“Uh,” Hannah grunted, overwhelmed by the sensation, not certain it was good.

“Did you like that?”

“I don’t know.”

“A lot of girls do. Now do it to me.”

Sam rolled to her back and Hannah did her best to reciprocate, desperate for this to end.

Sam put her hand on the back of Hannah’s head, holding her in place. Sucking Sam wasn’t terrible, just strange, and Hannah continued working her for another minute before Sam whispered her next command.

“Touch my vulva.”

Hannah raised her mouth from Sam’s breast and looked down at the girl’s middle. Sam raised her legs and

parted her thighs, and Hannah reached down reluctantly, her fingers stopping at the top of Sam's hair.

"Do you ever touch yourself?" Sam asked.

Hannah stared at Sam's sex and pretended not to hear.

"Touch me like you touch yourself. Touch me like you'd want to be touched."

Hannah knew she was blushing and fought the urge to turn away, to curl up facing the wall and tell Sam she was done. Unintentionally, perhaps, Sam had painted her into a corner of humiliation. No matter how she touched Sam, Sam would assume this is what Hannah did to herself. But telling Sam this isn't how she touched herself would be admitting to something humiliating too.

She remembered the mental trick she had taught herself, and her body became the body of another girl, its deeds the actions of another girl, while she watched from someplace else.

She slid her hand past Sam's pubic hair and pressed two fingers against her lips. Sam sighed, her breath warming Hannah's cheek, and raised her pelvis.

"Open me," Sam said, "and put your finger against my hole."

Hannah parted Sam's lips with a pair of fingers and, after a few moments of fumbling, found the opening of her sex, resting the tip of her middle finger against it.

"Move your finger around in a circle," Sam said. She was leaking, the way Hannah leaked when she touched herself, and the sensation was familiar, and more comforting than she expected.

"Run your finger up my slit, to my clitoris, and circle there."

Hannah's fingers moved slowly up the trail of Sam's folds to the swollen little knot, and she thought about how it felt when she touched that place.

As Hannah circled Sam's clit with her wet middle finger, Sam breathed out sharply and raised her pelvis again, pressing against Hannah's hand, and it occurred to Hannah that Sam might be getting pleasure from this, that being touched like this felt good, even if it was just part of her job.

"Okay," Sam whispered. "You're doing great."

With what seemed to be some effort, Sam closed her legs and Hannah withdrew her hand and sat up, crossing her legs and adjusting her tether so it wasn't under her thigh.

Sam sat up and turned to face her.

"How are you feeling?" Sam asked.

"Fine," Hannah replied in another of many instances of gross understatement since last Tuesday.

"Lean toward me," Sam said.

Hannah did, wondering if Sam wanted to kiss in this position.

"Now back."

Sam looked down and Hannah followed her gaze, to the little circle of dampness where her sex had touched the white sheet.

Sam leaned back, allowing Hannah to see the puddle she'd produced.

"We're both enjoying this," Sam said. "At least, our bodies are. And it's normal, even if neither of us is a lesbian."

"Okay," Hannah mumbled.

"Now, last thing," Sam said, looking into Hannah's eyes, her own expression unreadable. "And probably the hardest thing for you."

## **Foreplay, Continued**

"Okay," Hannah said, feeling her heart thump in her chest, knowing what was coming next even if she couldn't

admit it to herself.

“We need to lick each other,” Sam said. “Down there.”

Hannah grimaced, not caring how Sam might feel about that reaction. She didn’t want to do this, not at all, not ever, and she didn’t care that Sam knew.

“Have you ever tasted yourself?” Sam asked.

“Oh,” said Hannah simply, the question not one she could never imagine answering.

“Can I taste?”

Hannah was silent but she leaned back and Sam reached down, sliding her middle finger an inch up Hannah’s sheath, drawing it out and putting it into her mouth.

“Every girl tastes a little different,” she said. “And every girl’s taste is different at different times of the month.”

“Okay.”

Hannah stared at Sam’s mouth, looking for signs of revulsion, wondering if Sam would vomit.

“Taylor tasted you,” Sam observed. “He liked it.”

“He’s a boy.”

Sam laughed. “Yeah, but his taste buds work the same as a girl’s.”

“It’s about more than taste,” Hannah countered.

“Will you taste me?” Sam asked. “The same way I tasted you?”

Sam leaned back and raised her middle, her legs spread, her vulva pink and wet.

As she had before, Hannah put her middle finger against Sam’s opening, wetting just the tip, and drew it back. Then, closing her eyes, she raised it to her mouth and put her tongue against it.

She tasted nothing.

“Go inside me,” Sam said. “And taste again.”

Hannah knew she was being manipulated, that Sam was forcing her to take small steps toward something she would otherwise be unable to do. She looked at her ankles, the broker's cuff on one, the tether on the other, and knew that this new thing was as inevitable as all the others.

She reached down again, pushed her finger into Sam's hole, gently stirred her insides, pulled her finger out and put it back into her mouth.

Like her own vagina, Sam's organ had a taste like nothing else, musky, salty, strange and interesting.

"Is it terrible?" Sam asked, smiling and pretending she was ready to have her feelings hurt.

"It's not," Hannah said. "It's fine."

"Did you like it when Taylor licked you?"

"Yes."

"Will you let me lick you like that?"

"I guess so."

Sam lay back. "Turn around and get over me, like you were over Taylor."

Hannah just sat for a moment, her mind whirring, her doubts screaming: Sam doesn't want to do this. Sam is only doing this because she's being paid. Sam hates my taste. Sam hates me.

"My chain's too short," Hannah said, for a moment truly believing she'd found her way out. Sam would agree, would realize that this was hopeless, that Hannah's tether wasn't long enough and the training would have to end now.

Instead, Sam sat up and turned around so her head was at the foot of the mattress, near the ring in the floor where Hannah's tether had been fastened.

Hannah looked away, despairing, wondering if she could stop cooperating, but Sam just waited, patience one of her most effective tools.

Hannah left her body again, watching as another girl moved her restrained ankle slowly over Sam, careful not to drag the chain across her, straddling her face with her thighs, her hands on either side of Sam's hips.

"Slide back a little," Sam instructed.

Hannah obeyed and suddenly, the same pleasure Taylor had given her ripped through her body again, tongue and lips and teeth working her clitoris, her folds, her hole.

"Oh, oh, oh," Hannah grunted. Sam was better at this than Taylor. Obviously, she'd done it before and, more importantly, she knew what felt good in a way Taylor couldn't. But did she want to do this to another girl?

Lost in the sensation, Hannah rocked gently against Sam's mouth.

It didn't surprise her, didn't terrify her, when Sam's legs began to part, opening wide, her knees raised.

Sam only grunted, but Hannah knew what she meant and, for the second time in her life, and the second time that day, she lowered her mouth to another person's sex organ.

Hannah forced her tongue out, pressing it against Sam's hair, licking tentatively, hoping there was no taste here.

Sam, still working Hannah generously, perhaps even gladly, grunted again, raised her pelvis and widened her spread.

Hannah, fighting the urge to pull away, not wanting to end what Sam was doing to her, put her tongue on Sam's clitoris, brushing it lightly, tasting nothing.

Sam immediately raised herself, either because it felt good or because she wanted more of Hannah's mouth for training purposes. Thinking that Sam liked this helped, though, so that's where Hannah went in her mind as she pressed forward, her tongue sliding down Sam's wet, open slit.

Sam moved her pelvis up and down slowly, and Hannah settled into a rhythm, licking from Sam's clitoris to the folds around her opening.



Sam grunted again, reached up to part Hannah's lips with her fingers, and pushed her tongue deep up Hannah's sex.

Knowing Sam wanted her to do the same thing, still wrestling with a deep reluctance, Hannah closed her eyes and tried to get her tongue up Sam's vagina, finding it more difficult than she expected. Her tongue quickly tired as she made it stiff and straight.

Now, despite her struggles, she was tasting the fullness of Sam's sex, the liquor and the salt and the indescribable essence that wasn't completely female or even, Hannah thought, quite human.

Sam relaxed her mouth and pulled away and Hannah raised up on her arms.

"Are we done?" Hannah asked, mostly relieved.

"Almost," said Sam, closing her legs.

## **Intercourse**

Hannah climbed carefully off Sam and sat down beside her, cross-legged, hands in her lap.

Sam stood, went to the bag she'd set on the table and drew something out, black ribbons hanging from it.

"I assume you've never seen one of these?"

She held it out to Hannah. Across her palm lay a long black rod, with a barbed tip, veins, testicles at the base.

"It's a penis," Hannah observed, adding firmly, "I don't want it in me."

"It's not going in you," Sam said. "It's for me."

"It's the thing I put on?" Hannah asked.

"Yes, it's called a strap-on. The belts go around your hips and your legs."

Hannah laughed, finding in the odd device the perfect solution to the awkwardness of what she was having to do.

“It will turn me into a boy,” she said. “Why wouldn’t a girl just get a real boy?”

“Some girls don’t want to be with a boy. They want a girl. But they still want something inside them. So you need to know how to use it.”

“Okay.”

Sam looked at Hannah, into her face, as if trying to understand her feelings. Hannah just smiled, so Sam handed her the strap-on and Hannah, after studying it for a moment, held it up to her, secured the belts around her hips and legs and cinched them tight.

“Are you okay with this?” Sam asked.

“Yeah,” Hannah said.

“It really bothers some girls. I thought it would bother you.”

“No,” Hannah said, “it’s just a thing to wear for someone else. If it’s for them, it doesn’t seem embarrassing. Maybe for them it would be, though.”

She looked down at herself, her new penis sticking straight out, obscenely.

“You’re ready to start?” Sam asked.

“I guess so,” Hannah said. “But I’m not really sure what to do.”

Sam dropped to the mattress, lay on her back and spread her legs.

“Just pretend you’re Taylor,” she said.

Hannah lowered herself to the mattress, crawled over to Sam, the dildo bobbing, and knelt between Sam’s legs.

“Go ahead,” Sam said.

Hannah lowered her hips and positioned the tip of the dildo at the door of Sam’s chamber. Sam angled her pelvis up and Hannah moved closer, the toy slowly entering Sam’s vagina.

“Gently,” Sam said, the word a little short, and Hannah imagined herself as Sam, having this done, a plastic penis being slid up her sheath. She still didn’t understand why a girl wouldn’t just want the real thing, but if some females wanted to make love only with other females, this might make sense.

She knew Sam would want the toy pushed straight up into her body, while it would be easier for Hannah to just drop straight down, so doing it properly required some creative thrusting. Hannah quickly learned that she needed to put her hips between Sam’s thighs, and to thrust from there, not from above.

Once in position, getting the dildo deep into Sam’s body was easy, and Sam looked up at Hannah and grimaced, as if what was being done to her hurt. Hannah knew that pain and pleasure sometimes provoked the same expression, however, and she continued pushing gently until Sam’s body had swallowed the entire rod.

Hannah looked down at her middle and saw that their hair was touching, Hannah’s light brown pubic hair mingling with Sam’s blonde-red muff. She withdrew half the dildo, eased it back in and heard Sam grunt quietly. She pulled it out again, noticing this time that the tool was wet, glistening with Sam’s lubricant, and she knew by sight and sound that Sam liked this, it felt good to her and Hannah was doing it right.

After three more thrusts, Hannah returned her gaze to Sam’s face and the two girls locked eyes.

Sam drew in her breath and whispered, “Kiss me.”

This time, Hannah obeyed immediately, dropping down onto Sam, allowing their breasts to touch, erect nipples against round flesh, then open mouths engaged again, tongues exploring, lips pressing, breath exchanged, as Hannah’s lower half continued grinding, sliding the object in and out of Sam’s chamber, the sound of fluid being rhythmically stirred filling Hannah’s ears.

“Okay,” Sam whispered with what sounded like great effort. “Okay ... you’re done.”

Hannah raised up, pulling the dildo out of Sam's hole, wondering if Sam would have minded if she'd kept going.

On her knees between Sam's legs, she unbuckled the strap-on and dropped it to the sheets, feeling a sense of indefinable incompleteness.

"Do you want to cum?" Sam asked huskily.

"To have an orgasm?" Hannah asked.

"Yeah."

"I had an orgasm with Taylor."

"You can have two in one day," Sam laughed, and she rose, holding herself up on her elbows. "That's a rule. Not quite a law, but an important rule. If a subject gets stimulated, he or she needs to be allowed to finish, if they want."

"Okay."

"Do you want to?"

"I don't know."

"That means yes," Sam said, laughing again. "I won't watch if you want to masturbate."

"I don't know how."

"You've never masturbated?"

"I've touched myself," Hannah admitted quietly. "But I never made myself ... made myself, um, have an orgasm."

"Do you want to learn how?"

"I don't think so," Hannah said, imagining how awkward it would be to rub herself while Sam watched, guided her, corrected her.

"Do you want to cum on my mouth?"

"Do you want me to?"

"Not that it matters," Sam said, "but yes, I do. Get back over me, if you want. It shouldn't take long."

Hannah straddled Sam again, coiling up the tether under her ankle, and immediately felt her mouth, but it was

doing something different now, her tongue tapping her clitoris quickly, almost like a machine.

“Oh no no no sweet Jesus!” Hannah screamed in surprise as the orgasm wracked her body.

She rolled off Sam and curled up, hugging herself, her legs drawn up, facing the wall, once again trying to make sense of things that were, less than a week ago, so foreign as to be unimaginable.

After perhaps a minute or two, Hannah returned to the present, surprised by the silence. Then she heard Sam’s breath, coming quietly in quick, sharp pants. She turned to see her staring at the ceiling, glassy-eyed, her right hand working her vulva, her breasts rocking.

“Umm, umm, umm,” she grunted as her hips twisted and her legs bounced, and Hannah realized Sam had just cum, and she turned back toward the wall, strangely contented.

## **Hannah’s Choices**

Hannah felt a hand on her shoulder and heard John’s voice. “Hannah,” he was saying. “Hannah, wake up.”

She’d fallen asleep and now, groggy, she thought John was waking her to have sex with her.

She turned, saw that he was clothed, saw Sam sitting at the table, also fully dressed, and returned to the present.

“How long was I asleep?”

“Almost 45 minutes,” Sam said.

Hannah looked at the clock on the wall and saw it was noon.

“I’m hungry.”

“Want another protein bar?”

“No. Can I get a biscuit from my cage?”

“I’ll get it,” Sam said, and she pulled the food tube from the holder, dispensed a biscuit and brought it to Hannah.

“We need you to look at some people,” John said, kneeling at the foot of the mattress.

“Of what?”

“Your partners for tomorrow’s assessment.”

Hannah sat up and John handed her a tablet with a full-length picture of a boy, nude except for his collar.

“First the males,” he said. “Slide the pictures left or right to look at them. If someone interests you, tap on it and you’ll see more pictures.”

“What is this for?” Hannah queried.

“These are the choices for tomorrow’s assessment,” Sam said.

“I’ll be having sex with them?”

“They’ll be assessing you,” Sam replied. “One boy and one girl. We’ve gone over what you’ll do.”

Hannah bit into her biscuit and crumbs dropped onto the tablet screen.

“Is Taylor on this list?” she asked, handing the tablet back to John. “I want Taylor.”

“Taylor doesn’t do assessments, Hon,” Sam said.

John shook the tablet free of food and held it out to Hannah again. He tapped on the picture of the boy and it disappeared and was replaced by a close up of his erect penis.

“Oh!” Hannah exclaimed. “It’s his, it’s his ...”

“You need to see what he’ll be putting in you,” Sam explained. “There’s a picture of every boy’s genitals in there.”

“Will I have to choose a girl too?”

“Yeah,” John replied, adding, “There’s a picture of each girl’s breasts and vulva.”

Hannah closed her eyes. She knew she was blushing, tormented by another unexpected humiliation. She didn't want to be watched as she chose sexual partners, as she looked at stranger's organs and decided which she wanted to touch, to lick, to accept between her legs.

She flipped through quickly, choosing a boy and a girl almost at random without looking at any more images of genitals, and she handed the tablet back to John.

He tapped on the tablet and put it away.

Hannah looked at Sam, who was studying her phone, sliding her finger over it, tapping it, writing something to someone about something.

They had made love together. They had kissed, fondled. Sam had given Hannah an orgasm. They had been profoundly intimate. And yet now Sam was more interested in her phone than in Hannah.

This is how things were, Hannah reminded herself: sex as a duty, as a chore, as a job. But she continued to stare at Sam, and when Sam at last raised her eyes from her phone and looked up at Hannah, she smiled just barely and Hannah felt a connection, however slight.

"Ready to go back?" Sam asked.

"To where?"

"The stacks."

Hannah looked up at the clock again and her heart sank. Ten hours on the hard metal of her cage floor before she got bedding, then sleep followed by another day of frightening unknowns, this time in the form of assessments with two strangers, one a female.

After that, her future grew dimmer. Perhaps the Petrosyans would buy her, or maybe they'd lose interest, or she'd fail the assessment and they'd rescind their offer. Or they'd buy her and be terrible. Her mind turned to the mean room Athena had mentioned. Her certainty she would never do anything to end up in it was beginning to waver. How could she be sure she would do everything exactly as they wanted it?

“Ready to go back?” Sam repeated.

“I guess so,” Hannah replied.

A worker was summoned, Hannah was confined to her cage and returned to the stacks.

Her immediate neighbors were three females, but a boy sat two cages away, and she looked at him on occasion, and he stared back as she talked to the girls around her.

She shared her tragic story, as she had many times in the last week, and learned each of theirs: an abusive husband who sold his wife, a wrongful conviction for drug possession, a family with too little money.

Hannah was the only girl whose sale was imminent, buyers at the ready, and her listeners welcomed details of her meeting with the family. They seemed particularly interested in what Hannah knew about the house, and when Hannah couldn't answer a question, they speculated, guessing about the dwelling's appearance, its neighborhood, where she would be kept.

Night came, bedding came, darkness fell, and her neighbors masturbated and whispered. She lay awake, staring into the void, lamenting, worrying, wishing sleep would come.

It did for a time, and then she was awake again, sleeping restlessly, waking, waiting for dawn, sleeping again.

The lights caught her by surprise this morning, waking her instead of coming on after she'd already begun her day. Her neighbors stirred, said good morning, moved to their buckets and emptied, and Hannah did the same, urinating and defecating, another thing she was no longer self-conscious about.

It had been a week since she woke up with her mother in their tiny efficiency, free in a sense, not free in other senses. She imagined herself as she was today going back seven days in time to herself and trying to explain what she had experienced since then, what she had suffered, what she had enjoyed. The pleasure would be the hardest thing to explain, and she got a lump in her throat as she imagined her slightly



younger self staring at her, listening to her words, trying to understand. No matter what happened from this moment on, she was already irretrievably changed.

She watched her neighbors get carted away one by one while she waited, interminably, for them to come for her.

At last, at 9:30 that morning – just a half hour before her assessment – her cage was picked up and taken to the room next to the salon. She was shackled, uncaged and granted passage through the door.

“Why are you here?” the man there asked, and she lifted her chin while he read her collar.

“I have an assessment at 10.”

He checked his tablet. “You’re running late,” he complained, as if it were her fault.

“Yes, Sir.”

“Is there any semen in your vagina or rectum?”

“No, Sir,” she replied, wondering why there would be ejaculate in her other hole.

He confined her to a shower cage and she bathed quickly, her mood lifting as it always did under the warm water, the soap and shampoo.

She finished and was handed a towel. She wasn’t going to be made up today, she suspected, so she squeezed her hair dry the best she could and waited, watching the slaves go by on their way to be prepped for the showroom. Delilah was there, chatting happily and making some other girl beautiful.

Delilah was an inspiration, Hannah told herself, the best example she’d found in all her life of someone who turned something awful into a blessing.

Hannah didn’t start feeling nervous until the staff person showed up to chain her hand and foot. It didn’t help that the girl had nothing to say, no small talk, nothing to distract, so Hannah shuffled after her in silence through the salon and into a maze of halls, ending at a narrow hall with three doors, each with a small window at eye level, that said

“Assessment Stall 1,” “Assessment Stall 2” and “Assessment Stall 3.”

The girl peered through the window, unlocked the first door and Hannah, blood rushing through her ears, stepped into a small cage, no more than three feet square, with bars from floor to ceiling on the sides and in front.

The girl closed and locked the door behind her.

### **In the Assessment Stall**

Two more cages, empty, stood beside hers. All three cages faced a single larger cage, a small version of the training room, with a toilet, sink and mattress. This is where she'd be assessed, she guessed. Another row of bars lined the far side of the assessment cage, and beyond that were chairs, a cabinet and a blank wall, painted white. Everything was well lit, bright overhead fluorescents illuminating what was done here.

The people who would assess her would sit in those chairs, she realized, and watch her and her partners through the bars.

She was so anxious she was becoming physically ill. How could she do this? In front of total strangers? She could not for the life of her remember either of those she had chosen the day before, the boy or the girl. What if she had chosen someone she didn't like?

Still chained, Hannah started so violently she almost toppled when the door to the adjoining cage opened.

A nude boy, chained and collared like she was, stepped in, the door quickly closing and locking behind him.

Hannah vaguely recognized him from the tablet yesterday. She glanced at him and looked away, no idea what to say, certain she was blushing furiously.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hi,” Hannah said, looking at the mattress, as if there was something there she wished to know more about.

“Thanks for picking me.”

Hannah turned to him, looked into his dark eyes. She had not chosen unwisely, she reassured herself. He was tall, dark-haired, with something undefinable about him that said he was sweet.

Talking to him, she knew, however awkward, would help.

“I didn’t look at any of your pictures,” she said. She wanted him to know that, for some reason. His hands, chained at his middle like hers were, covered his genitals, so she still had no idea what he looked like there. All the boy parts she’d seen in the last week were similar enough, though, and she guessed he wouldn’t be doing assessments if he were built strangely.

“Is there anything you want to know?” he asked.

“Well ... are we allowed to talk now?” she asked, and she looked out past the assessment cage, wondering when someone would come to watch.

“Is this your first assessment?” he asked.

“Yeah.”

“It’s okay to talk,” he said. “They give us a few minutes before things start, but no conversation after that.”

“Oh,” Hannah said, her anxiety mostly gone now, replaced by the same irreverence that had popped up in ways that surprised her over the last week.

“I’m Hannah Loughbridge,” she said, bowing formally. “It’s very nice to make your acquaintance.”

He laughed, stepped toward the bars that separated them, raised his right hand as far as his chains would allow and offered it to her.

“Hello, Ms. Loughbridge, I’m Zachary Perkins,” he said with obvious irony. “It is a pleasure to meet you.”

She took his hand and smiled at him, looked down again and saw that his penis was firming up. Her opening was responding to him too, warming and leaking fluid, and she knew an important question had been answered: She would be able to do this with him. She might even enjoy it.

“Been a slave long?”

“Seven days,” she said. “How about you?”

“Born into it,” he said. “My mom’s owner got her pregnant, so I was his property from day one.”

“How’s it been?”

“In a lot of ways, great,” he said. “I live with mom and my owner – my dad – and his family, and I got to go to school, and I’m almost never chained.”

“Except here,” she observed.

“Yeah, it’s a rule for everyone. They even put me in the stacks once, a few months ago.”

“How long?”

“All afternoon.”

“I’ve been in them since Friday.”

“At night too?”

“Yeah.”

“Damn,” he said, and Hannah wondered if this were an accomplishment, something that would win her the admiration of other slaves.

“How did you get this job?”

“It’s something I was interested in, and it pays pretty well.”

“They let you have the money?”

“A little. My owner gets most.”

“How did you end up here? With me?”

“They show us pictures of girls who need assessments, and they showed me yours and I said I wanted to

do it.”

“What pictures?”

“Your face, your breasts, your—“

“Was one from behind me?”

“Yes. You were in a cage.”

“Was one from the side?”

“Yeah, you were on your hands and knees.”

“Could you tell I was crying?”

“No.”

“I was crying when they took those pictures.”

Hannah fell silent, remembering something that was terribly painful at the time that seemed ordinary now.

“So,” he asked cautiously, “what do you like?”

“What do you mean?”

“For people to do? During the assessment?”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “Does it matter? We just do what they say, right?”

“Yeah, but it would help me to know a few things,” Zachary explained. “Like, when will you cum?”

“Am I supposed to today?”

“It will help your score.”

Hannah blushed again, and laughed nervously. “I don’t know. It just happens.”

“When?”

“Well, first of all,” Hannah began, wishing she didn’t have to explain this, “I’ve only had three orgasms in my life. So it’s not like I know that much about it. But once I was on top. And twice it was because, um, because someone was, um, licking me.”

“Okay, I’ll probably be able to tell when you’re ready,” he said. “Just pull back a little if you’re not ready yet,

and press in when you want to climax, and I'll try to finish you, if they give us enough time."

"Okay," Hannah said, and imagined being licked by Zachary, or pressing her clitoris down on him from on top, and her middle was alive now with a feeling she knew was lust and wasn't ashamed of.

But when a door opened on the other side of the assessment cage, Hannah's nerves went jittery again.

Two men and a woman entered, talking quietly to each other. Hannah guessed that one of the men was in his 50's, one in his 20's, and the woman was probably 30. How did people get a job like this?

They glanced briefly at Hannah and Zachary and then took their seats and pulled out phones and tablets and started poking at them.

Hannah studied them, waiting for something to happen. At last, the woman looked up from her tablet.

"Assessee," she said. The word meant nothing to Hannah, but the woman was staring at her and Hannah assumed she was addressing her.

"Yes, Ma'am?"

"Are you prepared to be assessed?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Do you have any physical complaints or psychological debilities that might interfere with the assessment?"

"No, Ma'am."

The woman was staring at her tablet now and speaking mechanically, and Hannah guessed she was reading from a script, that the same words were read over and over again to girls and boys going through the assessment.

"You will have 20 minutes with a male partner, and 20 minutes with a female partner," the woman droned. "You may orgasm any time you like. However, if you find after orgasm

you are unable to complete your session with either partner, that will count against your score.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“You will be assessed on a scale of 0 to 10 in three categories: physical responsiveness, obedience, and your partner’s assessment of your performance.

“Physical responsiveness score criteria include production of fluid, confirmed orgasms, and overall physical performance as determined by our observations. Obedience score criteria include speed and accuracy in following instructions. Your partner responsiveness score will be based on both our observations and an interview with your partners following the session. You are not required to bring your partner to orgasm, but verified partner orgasms will have a small positive impact on your score.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said when the woman paused and touched her screen.

“You may speak only for clarification of an instruction. Do not speak to your partner during the assessment. All questions may be directed only to us. Vocalizations of pleasure are permitted but will have no impact on your score and may affect your score negatively if I or the other assessors find them distracting.

“Excessive requests for clarification will negatively impact your score.

“Disobedience will severely impact your score and may also result in punishment.”

Hannah’s head was starting to swim. She wanted to be with Zachary and get it done, and having everything laid out like this was frustrating and disorienting.

“Our three sets of scores will be averaged and you will receive a single final score of from 0 to 30 for each of your two assessment sessions. Do you have any questions for us?”

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

The door opened and a staff person walked in.

“Let the female into the assessment cage,” the woman told him.

He pushed a button on the wall and the bars before Hannah slid sideways.

“Step into the assessment cage please,” the woman said. “Come to the bars, turn around and bend over.”

### **Assessment Partner 1: Zachary**

Perplexed by the instructions, Hannah obeyed, pressing her bottom against the cold metal and turning her head to look at the assessors. The woman stood first, sanitized her hands, stepped over to Hannah and reached down. Hannah winced as she spread Hannah’s vaginal lips, put her finger against Hannah’s hole and ran it down her vulva to her clitoris. The two men followed suit, touching Hannah the same way.

Physical responsiveness was part of the criteria, Hannah reminded herself, guessing they were trying to tell how aroused she was now – meaning they would be touching her again, later, to compare.

This was another delay, another humiliation, and she looked up at Zachary in frustration, still chained like her and waiting patiently in his cage. He smiled back, not appearing the least bit uncomfortable.

“Unchain the female,” the woman said. Hannah turned to the bars and offered her hands to the staffer. He uncuffed her wrists and ankles and put her restraints in the cabinet against the opposite wall.

“Open the male’s cage and unchain him,” the woman said.

Zachary stepped beside Hannah and was released. She looked down at his penis, dismayed to see that it had softened somewhat as the preliminaries dragged on.

“Standing affection,” the woman said.



Hannah looked at the woman, who stared back at her expectantly. The men on either side of the woman shifted uncomfortably.

“Do you want me to start?” Hannah asked.

“Standing affection,” the woman said again, more sharply.

Hannah, ashamed, certain she had already lost points, turned to Zachary and offered her mouth.

Five inches taller than she, he bent down to her and their lips touched.

She remembered kissing Taylor, kissing Sam, and she put her tongue against his lips, his teeth, his tongue, relieved that she was finally doing something besides listening to boring instructions.

Zachary shifted and she felt his penis lengthening at her gut, poking her there. She pulled her mouth away, looked down and saw that he was fully erect, so she reached down and pulled it up, then pressed against him so that it was trapped between their bellies, like a small animal they both had to care for.

She smiled up at him and kissed him again, a deep, longing kiss, their mouths like two lovers coiling together. She wrapped her arms around his waist, stroking his back the way Sam had instructed, sighing as he arched beneath her touch.

When his penis slipped out from between them, she pushed it down this time, allowing it between her legs so it would press up against her vulva. It pulsed against her sex gently, and at first she thought it was drumming out Zachary’s heartbeat against her, but the movement was irregular and she guessed that boys – or Zachary at least – had muscles there, that he could use to move his penis up.

“Assessee,” the woman barked, “kneel and perform oral sex.”

Hannah, startled and annoyed, looked at the woman, ran the instructions through her head momentarily and dropped to her knees.

A pearl of fluid hung at Zachary's tip, but she didn't mind. She grabbed his penis at the base and smothered the head with her tongue, then licked the underside of his member from his balls to his tip, wishing she knew how it felt to him. She looked up, noticed he was staring down at her, tight-lipped and tense, and she guessed it was good, and she smiled up at him, then returned to licking before she took as much of his penis into her mouth as she could comfortably fit, her tongue continuing to service the parts of the shaft it could reach.

"Assessee, on your back on the mattress," the woman commanded.

Hannah crawled to the mattress and lay flat, her legs slightly parted.

"Affection," the woman said.

Zachary lay beside Hannah and they returned to kissing, slowly and hungrily. His penis had no taste that she could sense, but she wondered if he could taste himself on her mouth. He didn't seem to mind, though, licking her mouth and tongue hungrily.

He rested his hand on her belly, so she grabbed it and, still kissing him, moved it to her breast. He squeezed and massaged her, stroked her nipple, leaning toward her so that his penis rested against her thigh.

She grabbed it and stroked it lightly.

"Assessee, back to the bars for an inspection, please," the woman said.

With profound effort, Hannah released Zachary's penis, scrambled to her feet and returned her rear to the bars, bending over.

The inspection was quick but humiliating, three strangers running their fingers down her slit, from her hole to her clitoris. She knew she was thoroughly lubricated. And now they did too.

"Assessee, on the mattress on your back," the woman said. "Partner, perform oral sex."

Hannah quickly got into position, raising her knees and spreading her thighs as she rose up on her elbows to look at Zachary, and he knelt and smiled at her as he moved his mouth to her vulva, and she smiled back, nodding, ready to orgasm.

With every stroke of his tongue against her lips and clitoris, her pelvis jerked involuntarily, and her rhythmic pants turned to groans.

“Intercourse. Partner, penetrate her vagina.”

Zachary pulled his mouth away, moved forward and lowered his hips to hers, parting her lips with two fingers and filling her hole quickly.

Hannah, not ready for Zachary to take his mouth away from her sex, accepted him with a mix of disappointment and pleasure, grunting as her walls stretched around him but wishing he could have continued to lick her.

She pressed her pelvis up as she had with Taylor and they ground against each other until Hannah was ready to burst.

“Assessee, on all fours,” the woman commanded.  
“Partner, enter her from behind.”

Hannah, now completely frustrated, stifled a sob and did as she was told, rolling over to her hands and knees, holding still for the not-unpleasant sensation of being entered from behind.

“Partner, you have two minutes,” the woman said.  
“You may finish now.”

Zachary slid in and out of Hannah with quick, deep thrusts, his orgasm building within 30 seconds, his groans of pleasure lasting another 30. The knowledge that he was squirting white cream into her chamber filled her with a desperate lust for which there was no solution.

Zachary grunted quietly, his joy obvious, while Hannah held her vagina still and waited for him to finish.

Done after a few more quick thrusts, he withdrew and she looked back at him, sitting on his knees, appearing happy and dazed. Unfulfilled, denied her orgasm, she felt only lost and alone.

“Assessee, step to stall 1,” the woman instructed.

Hannah rose slowly and returned to her cage, watching the door slide back into position.

“Partner, step to the bars for restraints,” the woman said.

Zachary was chained and told to step into the third stall. With an empty cage between them, he looked at Hannah sheepishly, knowing she hadn’t cum.

“Assessee, did you orgasm?” the woman asked.

“No, Ma’am.”

“Would you like to masturbate?” the woman asked.

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, the question only frustrating her further. She had wanted to orgasm with Zachary. She certainly wasn’t going to fumble with her middle, probably to no avail, while Zachary and the assessors watched.

She knew her vagina was soaked, with her own fluid and Zachary’s semen, but she didn’t dare reach down to check. She held her hands at her sides, waiting.

The door from the hall to the middle cage opened and a girl walked in, nude and chained.

She looked at Zachary, nodded, then turned to Hannah.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 5: The Sale of Hannah**

### **Assessment Partner 2: Elana**

Hannah remembered her now. She was brown-skinned, Hispanic most likely, and she had reminded Hannah of Stephanie, the first slave she'd met, in the truck that took her from the Alvarez's store to the stacks. Stephanie had been nice. She was hoping this girl was too.

"Hello," the girl said quietly, her thick black hair down to her shoulders, her small breasts squeezed between her arms, her chained hands hiding her sex organ.

"I'm Hannah."

"I'm Elana."

"Hi."

"Has he already assessed you?" the girl asked quietly, looking briefly at Zachary.

"Yes."

"Did he cum in you?" she asked.

"Oh," whispered Hannah, blushing again as she realized why Elana was asking. "Yes. Is that okay?"

"Can you wipe before we start?"

"Yes," Hannah agreed.

"Do you want to cum?"

Hannah stared at Elana, not sure how to answer. She looked at the three assessors, all tapping on their phones, scoring her performance with Zachary, perhaps. They didn't seem to be listening to the conversation, but she hated all of this just the same.

"I don't know," she said.

"You can cum during oral," Elana said, and she nodded and looked at Hannah clinically.

“Oh.”

“Girls almost never cum with a male during assessment,” Elana explained. “Everything’s too fast. So I can do it.”

“Are you ... are you a lesbian?”

“No. I’m just good at this. And you’ll get a better score if you let me take care of you.”

“Okay,” Hannah agreed. “Um, where do you live?”

“In the stacks for now. I’m being sold. But I’m listed as an assessment partner, so I’m getting a break.”

“Oh.”

“Assessee, are you ready to start?” the woman barked.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Open stall 1.”

Hannah’s cage door opened and she stepped quickly to the toilet and wiped her vulva, pressing six handfuls of tissue against it before Zachary’s semen and her own fluid was mostly gone.

“Open stall two and unchain the female.”

Elana left the cage and stepped to the bars to have her restraints removed. Once they were off, Hannah approached her tentatively, looked down and saw that Elana’s pubic hair was thick and long, growing wildly above her sex.

Hannah glanced at the woman, saw that she and the two men with her were all studying their phones. She was impatient to get started, but there were no more nerves, she noticed. This was just something to get through. She’d been with Sam, and she was ready to be with Elana now, and to let Elana try to bring her to orgasm, although she wasn’t sure it would happen.

“Standing affection,” the woman commanded.

Hannah turned toward Elana and the girls wrapped their arms loosely around each other’s waists; hips and breasts

touching, mouths open and pressed together, tongues wrestling. They spent what felt like five minutes that way, exploring each other's mouths, each other's backs. Hannah reached up and squeezed Elana's breast, noticed that her nipple quickly hardened.

"Affection on the mattress."

Hannah and Elana dropped, Elana on her back, Hannah beside her, kissing again, trying to do the things she guessed the assessors wanted to see. She held Elana's right breast briefly, kissed it, took the nipple between her lips, moved her hand down to the girl's mound and ran her fingers through Elana's coarse, black pubic hair, the way she used to play with her own hair. She continued to suck the nipple as she slid her hand further, past Elana's muff and down to her vulva, her lips and clitoris.

Elana sighed and raised her pelvis and Hannah slid two fingers slowly into her partner's vagina, then pulled them out. The girl was wet enough to coat Hannah's fingers with a thick, clear fluid. Not ready to lick it off, Hannah smeared it on Elana's clitoris, made a slow, gentle circle around it, and raised her hand to take her breast again.

"Foreplay," the woman announced. "Mutual oral sex, assessee on top."

Elana spread and raised her legs, and Hannah stood and got in position over her, knees at Elana's shoulders, hands besides Elana's hips. She lowered her sex to Elana's mouth while she looked at Elana's hole, waiting for the licking to begin.

As soon as the tongue began playing across her outer lips, Hannah grunted and rocked, dropping her own mouth past Elana's hair to engage her sex.

Elana had a strange taste, not as salty as Sam, and almost tart, and Hannah licked tentatively while she got used to it.

Elana, meanwhile, was done licking around Hannah's hole and was now pushing her tongue into Hannah's chamber,

sliding down her vulva to her clitoris for a few quick strokes before returning to her opening.

Hannah arched her back, rocked her pelvis and forced her clitoris against Elana's mouth. Elana pinched Hannah's clit between her upper teeth and tongue and began to work it with a sort of vibration-lick that made Hannah cry out, the orgasm inevitable, unstoppable. She pulled her mouth away from Elana, raised up on her arms and looked straight ahead, at the far wall beyond the bars, where nothing was.

"Aaaaaah sweet Jesus!" Hannah cried, bucking against Elana's mouth, overcome with a long-awaited joy. "Uh ... uh ... uh ... uh."

Hannah held still for a long while after her climax, panting as she rested on her hands and knees over Elana.

She glanced sidelong at the woman and the two men, not wanting eye contact but just hoping to get some idea of how interested they were in what she was doing. They all were just sitting there, not nodding in approval, not cheering. Not that Hannah wanted them to, necessarily. But she had completed a sincere, hard orgasm under what she felt were very difficult circumstances. Hopefully they at least noticed.

"Mutual oral sex, assessee on the bottom."

Hannah rose stiffly, realizing for the first time how exhausted she was, how tiring sex could be.

Elana rolled out of the way and Hannah took her place on the mattress, back flat against it, arms at her sides. She raised her knees and spread her legs and Elana got on all fours over her.

Hannah wanted to be done. She didn't want this anymore. She wanted to be back in her cage, sitting and resting and doing nothing. But Elana lowered her mouth to Hannah's sex and Hannah raised her pelvis and lifted her mouth to Elana's vagina, soaked with lubricant.

Elana had not cum yet, Hannah knew. Did she want to? Was there time? How long had she and Elana been together?



She put her tongue against Elana's clitoris, licked it gently, reminding herself she knew nothing about how to provoke an orgasm in another girl's body. She didn't even know how to please herself.

But Elana was apparently ready to do the work for both of them. She ground her clit against Hannah's tongue and lips, sliding back and forth while Hannah did her best to hold her mouth still. Because Elana never removed her mouth from Hannah's sex, Hannah was able to follow the progress of her partner's climax through that connection. Elana's mouth stiffened and her breath began coming in short, sharp gasps. After no more than 10 seconds of staccato breaths, the girl's orgasm began with a grunt, muffled against Hannah's wet slit, followed by a long exhalation and then a series of quick moans, "ohohohohoh."

As her grunts ended, to Hannah's horror, something squirted out of Elana's vagina onto Hannah's chin, into her mouth.

Hannah lay still but her insides churned with a deep revulsion, a horror of being urinated on, if that's what had happened. Hannah had no choice but to taste it. The fluid seemed more like lubricant than what she guessed the flavor of urine to be. Nevertheless, she desperately wanted this to end, wanted to push Elana off of her, scream and run to the sink, wash her mouth out, demand a toothbrush. But she did not stir, her mouth obscenely wet, her legs obscenely spread, while Elana scrambled over her, turning around to lie next to her. Elana smiled and Hannah saw gratitude in her eyes, and what seemed to be a question. She wanted Hannah's permission to kiss again. Hannah closed her eyes and offered her disgusting mouth to Elana, hoping the girl wouldn't be too horrified by what was there.

Elana, apparently not disgusted at all, licked Hannah's face – around her mouth, her cheeks, then down to her neck – and Hannah pondered the unfathomable, that Elana knew what had come out of her body and liked it.

"Intercourse," the woman said, and she rose and stepped to the bars with something in her hand.

Hannah looked up, regarded what the women held – the thing girls put on to be like boys, the thing Sam called a strap-on – and despaired. But Elana rolled off her and Hannah stood obediently, accepted the device from the woman and, after a little fumbling, slipped her legs through it, buckled it in place and tightened the straps.

The dildo poking straight out from her middle was blue – a ridiculous color, she thought – and she looked down at Elana, peering up at her from the mattress, resting on her elbows, legs spread expectantly.

Hannah knelt between Elana's legs, lowered her hips and positioned the tip of the toy at the girl's opening. Elana raised her pelvis and Hannah realized Elana wanted this, that it felt good, that she didn't mind having a plastic object put inside her.

Hannah's first thrust was cautious, a slow penetration of Elana's sheath while the girl beneath her breathed out and rocked. If they were allowed to talk, Hannah would have asked what she wanted. Fast, hard thrusts? Gentle, steady insertion? Lacking verbal cues, she had to watch Elana's eyes, finding in them all the answer she needed.

Hannah's second thrust was a little faster, and Elana's face registered pleasure, a grimace that looked like pain but, Hannah had learned, meant approval.

Hannah withdrew and pushed in again, faster, burying the dildo as far as it would go into her partner's body. Elana gasped, smiled, closed her eyes and raised her legs, her feet above Hannah's hips now.

Hannah, up on her arms over Elena, settled into a quick rhythm, Elena grunting with each insertion, pushing her pelvis up, breasts rocking, eating the toy with her wet slit. When her breath started coming in short gasps, Hannah sensed she was going to cum again, and she wanted Elena to, so she kept pushing, varying her angle slightly, inserting a little faster, a little slower, until Elana reached up, grabbed Hannah's upper arms tightly, almost painfully, and groaned

out, a deep, guttural comment on what, at this moment, in this place, was the best thing the universe could do, for anyone.

With the next thrust, Elena squirmed and grunted and Hannah knew it was done, that the toy wasn't feeling good anymore, so she dropped down on Elana's body to bring their mouths together, Elana swallowing Hannah's tongue as eagerly as she'd accepted the toy, their collars tapping together with a quiet ring.

"Time," the woman announced. "Come to the bars to be restrained."

With a final, hard kiss on Hannah's mouth, Elana dropped her head to the mattress, allowed Hannah to clamber off her, rose to her feet and stepped over to the bars to be chained.

"Partner, enter stall 2," she said. Elana obeyed and was locked in while Hannah took her turn at the bars, removing the strap-on, watching as her wrists and ankles were cuffed. She wanted to wash her face, her mouth, her body, but none of that would be possible as long as her hands were secured at her waist.

"Assessee, stall 1."

Hannah complied and the door slid shut and clicked, locking her within. She wondered if sitting were permitted. The cage was too small to lie down in.

She wanted to sleep.

She looked around, at the assessors, at Zachary and Elana. Nothing was happening

Was she allowed to talk to them? She was about to find out, to whisper something, when the woman spoke, reading from her script again:

"Assessee: Your assessment is completed. You are not to speak to your partners. We will conduct interviews with both your partners after you leave, and will file your scores within the next two hours. Thank you."

"Thank you," Hannah replied.

## Very Bad News

More awkward silence followed, and Hannah realized they were all waiting for her to go away, so they could talk about her. It wasn't her fault no one had yet come to get her, she told herself, and she shut them out and lost herself in reverie.

She could still taste Elana's spurting discharge on her tongue, but she was no longer as repulsed by it, or by anything else. When people were deep in sex with each other, they could do things they wouldn't otherwise do, she thought. So could she. She could lick a girl between her legs while three strangers watched, and groan with satisfaction while a boy she'd just met slid his penis in and out of her vagina.

Sexmind, she thought: the condition of the mind when you are taken over by sex, where you'll do things you wouldn't do when your mind was normal. She wondered if Satan put it there, or if God had. Why would either want to, though? Regardless, there was no reason for shame. When sexmind took her over, she would follow its dictates, and when it was done, she would be who she was, and she wouldn't hate herself for who she had been.

Sexmind.

The door behind her opened wide and she turned to find a male staff member and Sam. Hannah smiled at her, surprised how pleased she was to see a familiar face.

"Hi, Sam," she said, shuffling into the hall.

"Hey, Hannah."

Something about Sam was off, Hannah immediately noticed. She seemed mad again, or just tense.

The staffer leaned forward, read the characters on Hannah's collar, looked at his phone, then grabbed the chain between her wrists and locked a red cuff around it. Puzzled,

Hannah looked at him before he and Sam turned and headed through the door into the main hall.

“What’s going on?” Hannah demanded, doing her best to keep up.

“How did it go in there?” Sam asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Did you cum?”

“Yeah, once.”

“Did they?”

“Yeah. The guy once. The girl twice.”

“How did you feel?”

“I liked it. Most of it, anyway.”

“What didn’t you like?”

“The girl ... something came out of her. At the end. When she ... had her orgasm.”

“She ejaculated?”

“Is that what it’s called? She’s a girl.”

“Yes. It happens to girls too.”

“What is it?”

“Just fluid. Lubricant. Whatever. How did you react?”

“I just stayed there. I didn’t move. We had to do the strap-on after that.”

“Okay,” said Sam. “You probably did fine. Everyone’s waiting for your score, and if it’s good enough, the Petrosyans will be buying you this afternoon.”

“What’s good enough?”

“You need to have at least a 25 with the boy, 20 with the girl.”

“If it’s lower than that,” Hannah stammered, “couldn’t they keep training me?”

“I think you’ll do fine,” Sam replied. “And training’s expensive.”

“Did you get paid for yesterday?”

Sam stopped in the middle of the hall and stared hard into Hannah’s eyes. “What did I tell you about asking about money?”

“Not to do it,” Hannah said. “So I won’t ask other people about their money. But I’ll ask you. Because you’re you.”

“Look, Hannah,” Sam began, and she put her hand on Hannah’s arm. Hannah looked at her carefully, remembering their intimacy yesterday but sensing for the first time, with a dead feeling in the pit of her stomach, that something was very wrong.

Sam blinked at her, drew in her breath. “You’re new, so it’s almost excusable. But you’ve got to stop saying things.”

“What’s going on?” Hannah asked again, this time with panic in her voice.

“They heard what you said yesterday.”

“About what?”

“About wishing you’d tried to get away. When the sheriff’s deputy fought with your mother, and they took you.”

“It was just talking.”

“You were talking about escaping.”

“No I wasn’t. I was talking about wishing I didn’t let them take me.”

“They heard your words literally. Resisting and running away would be illegal. It’s considered escape.”

“Okay,” said Hannah, trying to sound dismissive but terrified of where this was going. “I won’t say things like that again. I’m sorry.”

Sam looked hard into Hannah’s eyes and took another breath before she spoke again.

“You need to be punished.”

“What?” Hannah blurted, certain she hadn’t heard what Sam said, even as the spasms in her belly indicated she had.

“You need to be punished,” Sam repeated.

“When? Where?” Now it was Hannah’s turn to stop, and she shrank back toward the wall, her chains rattling.

“They’ve got you on the schedule for half an hour from now. 11:45.”

“Schedule?” Hannah echoed. A part of her believed her life was over, that she was about to be killed for a few stray words. The thought that it would be done in accordance with a schedule, as if it were just another routine matter, added to her horror.

“They should be done by 12:30,” Sam said, stepping up to Hannah, lowering her voice and speaking with willful calmness. “It depends on how many other girls are in line.”

“No,” Hannah cried quietly, and her eyes filled with tears. Everything she had hoped for – a good life with the Petrosyans, seeing her mother again, being an obedient subject – were fading away, replaced by a hideous self-image of herself as a flawed, unlovable, rebellious slave.

“You’ll get through it,” Sam assured. “You’ll come back to the training room and I’ll give you lunch, And I’ve got Delilah promised for you at 1. And the Petrosyans will be here at 2 if your scores are good. And then you’ll probably leave with them.”

“What are they going to do to me?”

“I don’t know,” Sam replied. “But it’ll hurt. And then it will be over.”

“No,” Hannah said, this time emphatically.

“No what?”

“I’m not going to do it.”

“You don’t have a choice.”

The male staff member who had been walking with them coughed quietly and Hannah was suddenly aware of his presence again. She looked at him. He was staring back, into her eyes.

“Can we have a moment?” Sam said to him. “I’m really sorry. She’s new and she’s going through a lot right now. Can you excuse us for just a few seconds?”

He nodded, pulled out his phone and moved to the opposite wall, no more than 10 feet away.

“Hannah,” Sam said in an urgent whisper, “you’ve got to lower your voice and get control.”

Wishing she could wipe her eyes, terrified and furious at the same time, Hannah struggled mightily within her tormented mind but in the end, composure won for now. She took a deep breath and looked down.

“Okay,” she said meekly.

“You can be reported for saying ‘no,’” Sam whispered, and she tilted her head discretely toward the staffer. “And if he reports you, you’ll get another point, at least. And if you do it again, that’ll just add to it. So don’t make this any worse than it already is.”

“What are they going to do to me?” Hannah hissed back.

“I don’t know,” Sam said.

“Yes you do,” Hannah countered. “Tell me.”

“It can be lots of things. It’s up to the people in the room.”

“What are some of the things?”

“I don’t know.”

“Yes you do.”

Hannah took a step toward Sam and suddenly saw her mother, face a mess, handcuff dangling from one wrist, trying to rescue her daughter from the truck. Now, Hannah thought,



she was trying to rescue herself with the same fierceness. Or, if not rescue herself, at least know, at least be prepared.

“Yes you do,” Hannah repeated.

Sam sighed. “It’s normally either stress positions, if there’s time, or something with your skin that won’t leave a mark.”

“What’s a stress position?”

“Stocks, or suspension, usually. But there probably won’t be time to do that to you.”

“Skin?”

Hannah was forcing herself to stay calm, to continue to question Sam. She didn’t want to know, but she had to know.

“Usually it’s electric,” Sam whispered, looking at the staffer. He seemed oblivious, still poking at his phone.

“What do you mean?”

“Like a prod, or a taser or something.”

“I think that’s what they used on my mom,” Hannah whispered, choking, a new round of tears flowing. “And she screamed and fell, and then it was like she was dead. Walking, but her eyes were dead.”

“That was law enforcement grade,” Sam said. “This isn’t anything like that.”

Hannah looked at Sam, a new awareness dawning.

“You’ve done it, haven’t you?”

## **Rage in the Hall**

“Yes,” Sam admitted after a pause, her eyes going dark.

“How many girls?”

“I worked discipline for six months.”

“When?”

“Two years ago. I stopped when the nightmares got too bad.”

“I hate you,” Hannah whispered, certain of this. She imagined Sam doing to girls whatever was about to be done to her, and it infuriated her. Sam had been intimate with her, and had gotten pleasure from her, and now Sam was allowing her to be taken, to be hurt, to suffer. Sam had, worse, inflicted suffering, on girls like Hannah. Hopeful girls. Innocent girls. Girls guilty of nothing more than a few stray words.

Hannah began drawing from a place in her mind that she didn’t know existed. She’d heard certain words, perhaps no more than once, from her father, during her darkest hours. She thought she’d forgotten it all.

She hadn’t.

“You bitch,” she hissed. “You bitch. You’re a, a, a goddamned bitch.”

Sam crossed Hannah’s jaw with an open-handed slap hard enough that Hannah shut down for a moment while she worked out what had just happened.

“Ah!” she exclaimed as soon as she understood she’d been hit. Simultaneously, she tried to raise her hands to defend herself, or even to slap Sam back, drawing her chains tight.

Outraged by the evil of her own helplessness, and all the evil that Sam suddenly represented, Hannah filled her lungs, about to offer the only comment, the only defense she had access to, a scream for the ages.

But Sam leaned forward and, with a face set like stone, eyes wide, mouth in a pained grimace, she grabbed Hannah’s arm hard enough to make it hurt and whispered with profound urgency: “Shut! Up!”

For a moment, the two girls just stood there, Sam gripped by what seemed to be a furious terror, Hannah simply heartbroken, going through her short but rich history with Sam in her mind – the lessons, the patient instruction, the protein

bars, the training, the sex – trying to reconcile it with what had just happened, quickly deciding she couldn't.

Sam looked back at the male staffer, still leaning against the wall, but now with his phone put away, studying the two females before him.

"I need to get her to a training room," Sam said. "She's working through some things."

"I need to take her in 15 minutes," he said.

"I know," Sam replied sharply, turning and taking Hannah's arm, escorting her as quickly as she could move through the halls, past the working people and at least one female slave who didn't look up as Hannah passed by.

The staffer unlocked the training room door and, after they'd entered, locked it behind them without joining them.

Hannah looked around the room sadly. It was like all the others, with a shower, a toilet, a mattress. She remembered the innocent pleasures in a room like this with Taylor, with Sam. All of that seemed a million years ago now, lost, never to be recovered.

Hannah, still in her chains, walked to the sink to wash her face awkwardly while Sam pulled a chair out from the table for her. Hannah was weeping audibly before she sat, issuing loud sobs, wails of anguish. Seated, she bent over and raised her hands as far as her restraints would allow, crying into her fingers.

Sam sat quietly across the table from her, waiting.

Even lost in sorrow, Hannah knew her time was limited. She understood that the boy outside the training room was going to take her to punishment, soon, and saying "No" to him would do no good.

"Is that what the red cuff's for?" Hannah asked, noticing it fastened to the chain between her wrists. She'd forgotten the boy put it there. But there it was, like a horrible red sore.

"Yeah," said Sam.

“Tell me what to do,” Hannah begged.

“Don’t complain. Don’t swear. Don’t expect anyone to talk to you or be nice. You’re just a thing to them. You have to be, or they’ll go crazy. Don’t ask questions. Don’t say anything unless you’re spoken to. Just go, do what you’re told and get through it.”

“How much will it hurt?”

“It’ll hurt enough to make you yell.”

“Will I faint?”

“I’ve only seen a few girls faint, and I think most of them were faking.”

“How long will it hurt?”

“You got three punishment units. That means they’ll do three things to you. Each could last as little as a few seconds, or longer.”

“Do the Petrosyans know?”

“No. They don’t own you yet.”

“Will they find out?”

“Only if you tell them.”

“I’ll never tell them.”

“If they ask, you have to.”

“Does Mrs. Alvarez know?”

“Yes.”

“What did she say?”

“She’s hysterical.”

“What?”

“I called her. She started screaming on the phone, so I had to hang up.”

Hannah swallowed, processed what Sam said and wailed again, her eyes spilling tears, her nose running. A few stupid, careless words were causing pain everywhere. She

wondered if there were a way for her mother to find out. With that thought, she reached such a state of sorrow and fear that she prayed, as she had often enough over the last week, to cease to exist. Or at least to pass out. Perhaps she'd wake up in a hospital, her crime forgiven, if not forgotten.

Sam crossed the room, grabbed a wad of toilet paper, pressed it into Hannah's hand. Hannah looked up at her, trying to read the woman she thought was her friend. Sam clearly didn't want this for her, didn't want her to suffer. And yet she'd done it to other girls. She seemed nice and evil at the same time, as if she were two different people.

"You slapped me," Hannah said, and she hunched over so she could raise her hand to her jaw, still tender.

"I did you a favor."

"How?"

"He heard you call me a bitch. That's worth at least a point, maybe two. If I hadn't slapped you, loud enough for him to hear, he would have reported you."

Hannah looked at the clock and thought about the cruel, unbending justice of this place. It was 11:35.

"I have 10 minutes."

"He needs to take you soon, though," Sam said. "You need to be down there by 11:45, and it's more than a five-minute walk."

With a final sniff and pass of the tissue under her nose and across her eyes, Hannah rose and looked down at her body, as if seeing it for the last time. She stepped to the door. Sam followed her without speaking and knocked.

The staffer unlocked the door immediately and opened it, looking carefully at Hannah, then at Sam.

"She's ready," Sam said. "She's okay now. Thanks."

"Yeah," he said, obviously not caring if Hannah were okay or not. He was simply another unfeeling part of the system, Hannah thought, fulfilling his role without any regard for the pain and humiliation he caused. She looked down at the

red cuff, swinging between her wrists. Everyone she passed would see it, and know where she was going, that she'd been disobedient and was going to suffer for it. She wrapped her hand around it, almost without thinking, and made her way into the hall.

"Don't cover that," the boy told her absently, as if he said it all the time.

She passed the office areas again, at first looking at the workers there to see if anyone noticed the red cuff. Someone did, a female worker, looking up from her computer first at the cuff, then into Hannah's eyes, and Hannah looked away, sick with shame. For the rest of the walk, she looked down at the floor immediately before her shackled feet, too distraught to realize the trip included an elevator that brought her down at least one floor, possibly two, until she stepped off it.

She and the boy escorting her were alone here, no work areas, no one else walking in either direction, so she looked up, her heart thumping with a terror unlike anything else she had felt during this most difficult week of her life.

Things were darker here, the long hall lit by a single column of flickering fluorescent lights. Doors lined either side of the hall, all closed, presumably all locked. The sign over one read "Janitorial," another "Medical Supplies," and a new thought entered her mind, that there was no punishment room down here, and the staffer was bringing her to a place where he could rape her, or kill her.

So it was with a mix of relief and horror that Hannah heard a high-pitched female voice, raised in a single, piercing cry of anguish. The scream was followed by words, too distant to make out, but clearly uttered in distress.

"Please, please, no," Hannah begged, stopping, looking at the boy with the fear of a wild animal.

"Do you want more punishment?" he asked, looking back at her.

"No."

“Walk.”

Another shout, from a different girl, this one clearer, louder, sounding less pained and more annoyed, even merely exasperated. The sounds were coming from behind a closed door at the end of the hall.

Heart thumping wildly, she followed the boy as he reached it, reading the sign above it with a sick feeling: “Female Discipline.”

## **The Discipline Room**

A third girl screamed just as he pulled the door open, her cries followed by unintelligible babbling. Hannah crossed the threshold in a state of woozy terror, heart pounding, world spinning.

She took in the room quickly, noticing immediately it was set up like the salon, an irony that was not lost on her. Just beside her stood five small holding cages, each with a toilet. Two were occupied, one by a sitting girl, one girl standing, looking out anxiously. She looked into Hannah’s eyes with an unreadable expression, almost a smile, and Hannah realized that, even here, kinship was possible. It was a small, comforting thought.

Beyond the holding cages, two rows of stations, at least two dozen in all, ran in parallel lines toward the other end of the room. Here, the similarity with the salon ended. The stations, instead of being identical chairs where girls sat to be made more beautiful, were varied, each designed to hold a girl in different ways so cruel things could be done to her, to make her more obedient.

Two girls were standing, eyes downcast, still in their chains and further restrained by cushioned arms that had been closed around their calves, thighs, and around their ribs just under their breasts.

There were two more girls, at stations further into the room. Hannah could see one girl’s head and another’s feet, her

ankles cuffed with the chains she was brought in, clamped in place as well with a pair of metal brackets. Her punishment included being held upside down, Hannah observed numbly to herself. The girl's feet moved slightly, and Hannah knew she was still alive.

Three staffers were working the room, all female, each in black coveralls. One sat at a desk just inside the door, tapping on a computer, while the other two conversed near one of the restrained girls.

The woman at the desk looked up, first at Hannah, then at the boy escorting her.

"Is this the three?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said, pulling a folded piece of paper from his pocket and handing it to her. "Here's the order. They want it expedited."

"We'll get her done as quick as we can," the woman replied irritably.

Focused on the woman at the desk, Hannah didn't notice that the two workers were done talking and had stepped to the girl nearest them until she screamed. Hannah looked up, saw that one of the workers was holding a short, thick rod against the girl's upper back. As she cried out, she writhed within the pads, and then uttered a final, hopeless moan as the girl withdrew the device.

The other worker stepped up and pressed something small against the girl's shoulder. Hannah winced, waiting for the scream, but the girl was still. The second staffer was merely writing on her. Her punishment was being recorded on her skin.

The staffers moved to the next girl and Hannah looked away and closed her eyes as another cry filled the room. How could Sam have worked in such a place for six months? How could she have worked here for five minutes?

The boy left and the woman at the desk stood, unfolded the paper the boy had given her and glanced at it.

"What did you do?" she asked, not looking up.



“I ... I ...” Hannah stammered. “I talked about my mom.”

The third girl shouted and said “Damn!” but Hannah hardly heard her.

“You get three tries,” the woman said. “That’s not what you did.”

“Oh, oh,” Hannah mumbled, her eyes filling with tears again as she recalled those terrible moments a week ago, and her ill-advised words about them to Sam earlier today. “I ... I talked about trying to get away. Instead of letting them arrest me.”

“Closer,” the woman said. “Why was that wrong?”

“It was like I was trying to escape,” Hannah said, adding with a stifled cry, “I’m sorry.”

The woman grabbed a marker from her desk, stepped up and compared the number on Hannah’s collar to the one on the sheet.

Satisfied she had the right girl, the woman looked at Hannah’s feet. “Turn around.”

Hannah obeyed and felt the cool ink against her shoulder, smelled its chemical essence. The woman was putting squares on her back. One, two, three. For the three punishments she was to get. The first girl would touch her with that thing, and the other would put a mark in the square, Hannah thought. Like she was a piece of paper, here to be processed.

“Come get her,” the woman said to the workers. “She’s a three.”

One of the girls stepped over and grabbed Hannah’s arm at the elbow. Hannah let herself be guided to one of the stations near the front of the room. “Face the wall, feet on either side of the drain.”

Hannah obeyed blankly, going to that place in her mind where her body belonged to another girl. She looked down, placed her feet on either side of a large drain and

wondered why it was there. Did what happened here make some girls lose control, spilling urine and worse between their legs? Did they vomit? Did they ever bleed?

The girl secured the pads around Hannah, raising her breasts one at a time to get the upper pad in place, fixing it so tightly Hannah struggled to breathe.

Without warning, she sensed what felt like a tap on her lower back, as if someone were touching her with their finger, and then the finger seemed to grow remarkably cold, and then it was just pain, pure pain, spreading out from the small of her back up her spine to her neck and down her left thigh, like her body was being impaled by a bolt of jagged lightning.

“Ahhh, God, Sweet Jesus no!” Hannah screamed, writhing within her restraints. “Please please please stop!”

And then it was over, the finger gone, the pain just a memory.

Hannah jerked again when she felt the touch of the pen to her shoulder, remembered that she would be marked after each punishment and it wouldn’t hurt.

The staffers made their way down the line, each girl responding as she had before, with her own signature cry. Hannah closed her eyes and wept quietly. The fact she’d made it through her first punishment made no difference. She still had two to go.

The girls made their way back to Hannah’s position, standing behind her, and Hannah turned her head to see them.

“Eyes forward,” one of them said, her command followed by what seemed to be the next words of an ongoing conversation.

“And then Robert finally said what was bothering him. You’ll never guess what it was.”

“Tell me,” the other responded.

“He’s still jealous about this guy I went out with. Once. I mean, once, before I met Robert.”

“Did you have sex with him?”

“Yeah, but Robert doesn’t know that.”

“Maybe he suspects it. And he knows you’re holding out on him.”

“Maybe. But still ... Hey, it’s noon. You ready to take the wand?”

“Whatever.”

“We do the front now.”

“I know, I know.”

The two staffers stepped before Hannah, the wand in the other girl’s hand.

“You pick the place,” she said to her colleague.

“Side of the left breast.”

“Noooo!” Hannah screamed involuntarily as the device was raised to her breast and pressed against it. “Aaaah God Jesus help me!”

Hannah closed her eyes and opened them again. The two girls were standing in front of her, a new conversation underway.

“She says she can dance, and then she gets on the floor and she’s doing this one move, like, with one arm, so I just turned away, and then ...”

Time had passed. The other girls had their breasts touched, and she hadn’t heard them. She had no memory of having the square on her back marked.

One more, Hannah told herself. One more.

The girl raised the prod to Hannah’s belly, just above her belly button, pressed and held while Hannah writhed and called on Jesus for a rescue that would not come.

The pain subsided and she stood panting, listening to the screams of her fellow sufferers.

She was done, she said to herself. She hadn’t died. She’d be getting a shower. Delilah would be making her up.

She would be seeing Sam again, and have lunch. And maybe the Petrosyans would buy her, today, and she'd finish the day in a house with two dining rooms, as wonderful as this place was awful.

A strange serenity settled over her, even as the shouts of misery continued to ring out beside her, and she thanked Jesus despite his apparent decision to forsake this place.

She was released, the red cuff was taken off her chains and, after a few minutes in a holding cage, a female staffer came for her, another round of cries echoing down the hall after them.

Back in the training room, Sam sat the table, hands clasped before her as if in prayer, but Hannah was certain she didn't pray.

She looked up at Hannah, and Hannah knew she'd been crying, and Hannah didn't care.

The staffer shackled her ankles together, removed her full restraints and left.

## **Lunch with Sam**

Hannah sat down at the table across from Sam and smiled at her. "I want lunch."

Sam looked up, mystified.

"You've been, right?"

"Yes."

"Are you okay?"

"What do you think?"

"I can't tell," Sam said, "but I'm worried you're in some kind of state."

"You used to do that?"

"I told you I did."

“And I called you a bitch. Because you are.”

“You’ve got a mouth on you.”

“Are you going to slap me again?”

“No.”

“Because I can slap you back now?” Hannah asked, raising her unmanacled hands.

“No,” Sam replied. “Because I don’t have to protect you from yourself again.”

“You used to work in a place like that.”

“Yeah, we’ve established that.”

“It’s the most awful place I’ve ever seen. Or been to. Or heard of.”

“You know what?” Sam said. “You’re not the only victim here. The slaves – the subjects – aren’t the only ones who suffer.”

“Yeah,” Hannah said, not trying to sound agreeable. She thought about her mother and put on that face, the weariness, the pain, the contempt.

Sam leaned back and raised her hands, fingers splayed, as if she were trying to protect herself from Hannah’s eyes.

“Look,” she said. “Let’s just get through the next 30 minutes, and then I’ll take you to Delilah and out to that family and we’ll be done.”

“What do you mean ‘done?’”

“You’ll probably never see me again,” Sam replied, staring down at her fists. “And I’m sure that will make you happy.”

Hannah let the words sink in for a moment.

“They’re buying me?”

“Oh yeah, they’re buying you.”

“I passed the assessment?”

“Almost 30 with the boy,” Sam said, looking into Hannah’s eyes, something akin to admiration in her face. “Like, one point short of perfect. And 27 with the girl. A lot of lesbians would kill for that.”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “How?”

“You’re a natural,” Sam replied. “They weren’t looking for experience. They assess confidence. Interest level. Creativity. And how you make your partners feel. You must have impressed them.”

Hannah looked down at the table. The fact she’d passed – with flying colors, no less – broke something loose in her mind, that had been lodged there for hours, a deep, aching tension, and she raised her hands to her face and wept, not with joy exactly, just with relief, or a sense that something had gone right, that she was good, at least at something.

Hannah let herself cry for two minutes, determined to shed all her tears now, so she would have nothing left after Delilah made her up. In her mind, she was already the Petrosyan’s property, and she was ready to serve faithfully, even gratefully.

If she were set free today, told to go home, to her mother, to return to the way things were, she would refuse. Seven days had changed her completely, permanently. She could not go back. She didn’t want to go back. She wasn’t sure she wanted what lay before her – she didn’t know enough about it to be sure – but she would never go back to where she’d been, not willingly.

Done weeping, she looked up at Sam. “Give me lunch.”

Sam leaned over, reached into a bag on the floor and pulled out an apple and a protein bar and set them on the table.

Hannah took the apple, stared at it, bit into it and thought about her last meal with her mother. Bitter as the memory was, the fruit was good, and she would not give it up. But she would remember. Every time she took an apple, she would do so in honor of Mother.

“So, you’re okay?” Sam asked, staring cautiously at her.

“No,” Hannah said. “I’ll never be okay.” She grabbed her left breast and pulled it right, looking down at the side, finding a slight red mark there, but nothing over her belly button. “I thought I was dying, it hurt so bad. One of the girls screamed every time. There was a girl who ... I only saw her feet. I—“

“I know, I know,” Sam interrupted, clearly not wanting to know more. “But today, with the Petrosyans. You can do it?”

“What do I have to do?”

“Just be bought. Mostly stand there and do what you’re told. But someone will need to look at you.”

“Who?”

“The bank.”

“The bank?”

“They won’t do a loan unless they know what they’re funding is worth the price.”

“What does that mean?”

“They’re doing a loan. With you as collateral. So you have to be worth the loan.”

Hannah just stared at Sam.

“If the Petrosyans don’t pay, they’ll repossess you, and they want to make sure they can resell you for at least the amount of the loan.”

Hannah swallowed, imagining that day, if the Petrosyans stopped paying and a bank had to come for her, certain it would be at least as terrible as being taken from her mother.

“They have to look at me?” Hannah asked. “Like, how?”

“It’s nothing you haven’t already been through,” Sam replied dismissively, and Hannah wondered if Sam didn’t want to say more for some reason. “Do you want to take a shower here or in the salon?”

“Here,” Hannah said.

Sam grabbed a douche out of her bag. “Rinse your vagina. You’ve got 12 minutes.”

Hannah finished the apple, tore through the protein bar, washed everything down at the sink and cleaned up, douching three times. Her next shower, she thought, would be at another place, the nicest home she’d ever been in. Maybe they wouldn’t shackle her.

Oblivious to anything in the training room until she was done bathing, she shut off the water, took a towel from Sam and saw that a staffer had joined them.

It was him – the same boy who had taken her to punishment.

“Why are you here?” she demanded, unable to conceal her hatred.

Sam grabbed the towel and stepped up to her, their toes almost touching. Sam’s expression was a mixture of fury and wide-eyed fear.

Hannah understood, softening her expression and closing her mouth tight, trying to calm her heart. There was no reason to be angry, no reason to hate. He did the job he had to do and today she would be leaving him and his awful world behind.

“I have to chain you for the walk to the salon,” he said, holding up the restraints.

“Yes, Sir,” Hannah said meekly, and she stepped to him and held out her hands, looking down to watch the chains go on, the shackles come off.

She walked in silence with Sam and the boy to the salon, almost wishing she could go there in her cage instead,



not wanting to be near him, or to say anything that might get her into trouble again.

“Oh my god, Hannah,” Delilah shouted as soon as she was escorted into the bustling room. Hannah stepped to the waiting chair, slipped her foot through the cuff, watched as her chains were removed.

Sam took up a position just in front of the chair, her face a mask of calmness, but Hannah could see the stress in her eyes and understood her fear from a commercial perspective. If Hannah was too traumatized by her experience in the discipline room to cooperate, the sale might fall through, and if it did, Sam would be blamed. She was there when Hannah broke the rules so, right or wrong, they’d blame Sam. Maybe she would be fired. Hannah didn’t want that for her, as disgusted as she was with Sam today.

She was ready to be sold, and nothing would interfere with that. But she liked that Sam was worried. She deserved a little discomfort, at least. Hannah looked up at Sam with a sort of half-smile, trying to be unreadable, and Sam looked back, her eyebrows raised in the ongoing question of the moment. Hannah looked away, as if too troubled to answer.

There was a man at Four Pillars who had been to war, got burned on part of his face and his arm, suffered greatly then and continued to suffer afterwards, in ways that Hannah didn’t fully understand. Intense trauma continued to haunt one for some reason, despite one’s prayers and faith.

Now, you could barely see his burns, but they hurt all the same, forever. Would she continue to suffer too?

“Everyone must walk over thorns to reach their Eden,” Mother would say whenever things got especially tough. “If your feet aren’t bloody, you’re not ready for paradise yet.”

The next time she saw her mother, she would tell her, “My feet have bled,” and Mother would understand without, Hannah hoped, needing any details.

## **Delilah Notices**

“Let’s touch up your pubic hair first,” Delilah said, scooting up a chair.

Hannah slid up, spread her thighs and watched as Delilah carefully trimmed her fur, starting at the top of her mound, cutting around her clitoris, gently tugging on her lips to shape the hair around her hole.

Done there, Delilah grabbed a pair of shears and stepped behind Hannah, immediately drawing in her breath

“Oh my god, Baby, what did they do to you?” Delilah whispered, running her finger against the place on Hannah’s back where the three squares had been drawn.

Hannah doubled over, immediately so horrified she was physically ill.

“Wash it off, wash it off, please wash it off!” she begged through gritted teeth.

Delilah stepped away and Sam put a hand on Hannah’s shoulder. “Hannah, Hannah, it’s okay. It’s okay,” she whispered.

Delilah returned with a wet towel smelling strongly of chemicals and went to work on Hannah’s shoulder while Sam stepped behind her to supervise.

“It’s supposed to be sweat-proof, oil-proof, soap proof,” Sam said quietly, “so it probably won’t be completely gone until tomorrow.”

“God damn it,” Delilah said under her breath.

“Just do your best,” Sam said, “but don’t irritate her skin.”

“I know what I’m doing,” Delilah hissed furiously. “Why did they do it?”

“You know that’s none of your business,” Sam hissed back.

“Then report me,” Delilah muttered. “I know she didn’t deserve it. Whatever it was, she didn’t deserve it.”

Hannah brought her hands to her face, fighting the urge to scream, to cry out, to tell Delilah through tears everything they had done to her, and the reasons. Delilah’s sympathy had triggered something she thought she had under control.

“You know what happens,” Sam said in a quiet, urgent whisper. “Just do your job and keep your compassion to yourself. You’re upsetting her.”

Delilah laughed, a sweet, confident sound that broke the tension and brought Hannah back to the present.

“The day I keep my compassion to myself,” Delilah announced, “is the day I stop being Delilah.”

Delilah scrubbed, gently but repeatedly, the friction starting to hurt.

“That’s gonna have to do,” she muttered.

“That’s it?” Sam asked. “It’s still there.”

“Any more and I’m gonna burn her,” Delilah said, “and that’s going to look as bad as those damned torture marks.”

Done scrubbing, Delilah stepped around the chair to the front, bent over and stared into Hannah’s eyes.

“We’re gonna get through this, you and me,” Delilah said, and Hannah saw tears in the girl’s eyes, fought anew the urge to cry and instead smiled weakly, with a gratitude that could not be put into words.

“Yes,” Hannah said firmly. “Yes.”

Delilah took a deep breath, walked to the little table where she kept her things and returned to Hannah. She made a few quick passes through her hair with the shears, used an iron to give her a subtle curl, then stepped before her and bent low, looking into her face, hunting for tears. Finding none, she went to work – eye liner, shadow, rouge, lipstick, highlights. Finished, she brought the mirror to Hannah, but Hannah

looked away, seeing in her mind only her shoulder, marked with the fading ink that spoke of unspeakable things. What if one of the Petrosyans noticed? Would they call off the purchase?

Done, Delilah waved to a staffer who shackled Hannah's ankles but left her hands free. Delilah opened Hannah's cuff, Hannah slipped off the chair and the two girls shared a long embrace.

"Good luck, Sweetheart," Delilah whispered, her voice breaking.

Mustering all her strength, Hannah successfully fought the urge to weep. She turned and followed Sam in silence out of the salon and into the showroom.

Under a bright, lilting tune she guessed was Beethoven, she scanned the far wall, past the slaves chained for display, her heart skipping a beat when she saw the Petrosyans seated at a table: Ormek, Laura, Allain, Athena. Her eyes lingered longest on Allain, seeing him as a sexual partner, allowing herself to imagine being with him, taking him into her body, feeling him release inside her.

Bert and three strangers stood near the Petrosyans, conversing quietly, and Hannah at first ignored them in preference for the family, but her eyes returned to them, because at least one of them looked vaguely familiar, a woman dressed for business, in a navy skirt and matching blazer.

And then Hannah made the connection between the well-dressed, dark-haired woman before her and the woman in a t-shirt and jeans who had caged her, tended her, fed her, brought her a Bible, cried for her, and was now about to be made rich by her: Mrs. Alvarez.

Hannah stopped, overwhelmed with a mix of feelings too disparate to work through.

"What's wrong?" Sam asked, touching Hannah's elbow.

No one had noticed them yet, but Hannah knew Sam was full of anxiety, just waiting for Hannah to break down, to

make a scene, to do something that would ruin the sale and, possibly, Sam's career.

"Nothing," Hannah lied, still taking a perverse pleasure in Sam's discomfort. "Just a foot cramp."

Hannah resumed walking, her chains making a faint rattle against the tile floor. As she and Sam stepped around a girl being interviewed by two young men, her eyes returned to Allain, and he noticed her now and smiled, and the rest of his family followed his gaze and all of them stood, as if Hannah were a visiting dignitary.

## **Bank Inspection**

Hannah heard a quiet "Oh" and knew Mrs. Alvarez had noticed her too, but barely recognized her behind the elaborate mask Delilah had created.

For the last five steps before she reached the Petrosyans, Hannah stepped harder intentionally, knowing it made her breasts bounce. She looked only at the Petrosyans, ignoring Mrs. Alvarez.

"Hello, Hannah," Laura said softly, offering her hand.

Hannah greeted each of them calmly, politely, staring into Allain's eyes longest when he stepped forward, the last of them to say hello and shake her hand.

"Hannah," said a female voice to her left, and Hannah turned to find Mrs. Alvarez at her side, her mouth tight, her eyes searching, clearly as riven by emotion as Hannah. She looked older, more serious, and Hannah wondered if the last four days had been harder on her than they'd been on the girl she was selling.

"Hello, Mrs. Alvarez," Hannah said, keeping her arms at her side when Mrs. Alvarez embraced her.

Mrs. Alvarez stepped back but searched Hannah's face, not daring to ask her about being punished, but obviously

wanting to know. Hannah stared back at her blankly, and Mrs. Alvarez collected herself by necessity.

“You remember Bert,” she said, and Hannah accepted his hand, feeling nothing for the first man who had been, in a professional sense or otherwise, intimate with her.

A man and woman, both strangers to Hannah, stepped up next.

“Hannah,” Laura said, “this is Ms. McHale. She’s representing us in your, in your, in today’s ... project. And this is, oh, what was your name again, Sir?”

The man, middle-aged, balding, in a suit and tie, stepped up to Hannah and closed her hand tightly within his. “Arnold Batchelor,” he said warmly, “I’m just the lawyer, so you don’t have to worry about me.”

Hannah nodded, her head starting to swim. She was terrified that someone was going to notice the marks on her shoulder.

Everyone here was rich, or about to become rich; and they were all here for her. She wanted this to end.

“First things first, Hannah,” said Mr. Batchelor “We have a contract for you with the Petrosyans. If you can sign that, we can proceed.”

Mr. Batchelor motioned her to join him at the table. She sat, looked down at her naked body, the chains on her ankles, and wondered briefly if this were all a dream. She turned to look for Sam, her most tangible connection to what was real, but Sam had slipped away, her work finished here.

Mr. Batchelor set the two-page contract in front of her, stapled in the upper left-hand corner, and she glanced over it quickly.

After the introduction, listing “The Ormek Petrosyan Family and Hannah, Subject ID N8114P165,” there were the nine original terms, about taking care of her, rewarding her, following the law, confining and restraining her, and punishing her. But now there was a tenth:

10. You may visit with your mother for up to four hours once every three months, at a place to be determined by us, but only if your mother is not incarcerated, is not a threat to your physical or mental well-being, and has made no attempt to bring about your escape.

Hannah bit her lip and read over the last paragraph three times. There were enough conditions here, she knew, that she could be prevented from ever seeing Mother again. But she would be allowed to send five letters, and to receive anything Mother sent that was acceptable to the Petrosyans. That might have to do.

She allowed her mind to wander briefly, over what she would write, what she would say to her mother if they ever met again, and she understood that their next words would be difficult, perhaps impossibly so. Everything important that had happened to her since the last time she saw Mother was shameful, embarrassing, unchaste. Worse, she was a willing participant in some of it. Worst of all, she'd enjoyed some of it.

Hannah took the pen and signed her name, just "Hannah," on the line where Mr. Batchelor had drawn a red X.

He slid two more duplicates of the contract before her, she scanned both to make sure the tenth term was included, and signed them.

Mr. Batchelor looked up at the Petrosyans and smiled.

"Thank you, Hannah," he said. "Now just a few more formalities, and this fine family will get to take you home."

Hannah nodded.

"Do you know anything about a bank inspection?" he asked her.

"The bank has to make sure I'm worth the loan they're giving."

“Very good,” he said, seeming surprised by her answer. “Now, the bank folks are waiting for you in one of the rooms where they do their thing, and they’ve asked that you be brought to them in full restraints. So that means we have to chain your hands to your feet.”

“Yes, Sir.”

Mr. Batchelor waved an employee over and she put Hannah back in the chains she wore whenever she walked through the building, her hands cuffed in front and secured to her ankles with a chain just long enough so she didn’t have to bend over.

Embarrassed with all of them there, although she wouldn’t have felt any shame in front of one or just a few of them, she left the showroom with a sense of relief, following the staffer through a side door that read “Inspections.”

They stepped into a small room and faced a second door, with a window and a girl peeking through it. The girl opened the door and they entered what looked to Hannah like a prison, a large space divided by bars into small cells, each with a large table in the middle.

Through the bars, Hannah could see another nude slave girl, up on the table on her hands and knees while a man stood behind her. The bars obscured what, if anything, he was doing to her, and they were speaking too quietly for Hannah to hear their words.

But then the girl groaned, a quiet, resigned protest of something. Hannah, assuming she was going to be subjected to the same treatment, gripped with a sudden anxiety, stared at her feet until the girl escorting her unlocked a cell door and told her to step in. She obeyed, the staffer locked the door behind her and left without speaking another word.

Hannah resumed looking toward the girl and the man with her, seeing nothing but her head through the bars. Then the girl, as if sensing someone’s eyes on her, turned to look back. Hannah felt as if she’d been caught doing something shameful and she turned away, pressed her bottom against the side of the table and looked down. Waiting here, chained and



alone in a tiny cell, was one more of the endless torments of the last seven days, and she wanted it all to end. She turned her mind again to Mother and realized there was simply no way to resolve the questions of what she would say to her, what she could and couldn't reveal.

She heard a door close, steps, voices, looked up to see a female staffer enter the room, followed by a man and woman, both dressed professionally, in suits. They made their way among the bars to Hannah's cell, the girl unlocked the door and they entered.

"Hello!" the woman said brightly but impersonally, and Hannah said "Hi" quietly and looked down again. The staffer locked the door and looked at Hannah.

"Chains off," she said, and Hannah put her hands to the slot in the bars to be unrestrained.

As soon as that was done, she turned quickly toward the two new people, hoping they wouldn't notice the marks on her shoulder or, if they did, wouldn't care.

The man approached her first and focused on her breasts, pinching her nipples, pressing the flesh of her breasts one at a time, in front and on the sides, squeezing roughly enough to make Hannah wince. She still wasn't used to this, but she knew protesting would be useless, if not dangerous. If she had breast cancer, she thought to herself, someone would have discovered it by now.

"Open your mouth, please," the woman said once the man was finished, and Hannah obeyed and held still for a thorough inspection of her teeth, her lips, her gums and tongue.

"Can you get up on the table for us?" the woman said. "Up on your hands and knees?"

Hannah, her heart starting to thump, obeyed. The man and woman stepped behind her and she felt fingers against her vulva, pulling her lips away from her body, tapping her clitoris. She didn't know whose fingers were touching her, and she didn't care.

The fingers pulled her lips apart, and she felt what she thought was a finger at her opening, then realized it was an object, something that was going to be inserted inside her.

She flinched, remembering her resistance when Bert had tried to do the same thing, a short few days ago.

“Hold still,” the woman said.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said quietly, accepting the object up her vagina.

“Ma’am?” Hannah said tentatively.

“Yes?”

“What are you doing?”

“We’re measuring your chambers,” the woman replied. “We’ll be done soon.”

“Both?”

“Yes.”

Hannah looked down at the space between her hands, trying to fathom this latest indignity. Why did they need to measure her other opening?

They continued pushing the thing inside her, and she tightened her vagina around it, trying to sense its shape and thickness. It wasn’t as big around as any of the penises she had held, but it wasn’t comfortable and she wanted it out.

“Don’t tighten, please,” the woman said.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said quietly, blushing, deeply mortified.

She could feel the tip of the device touching the depths of her sex, and then it was stirred inside her and she grunted.

The pushing done, she felt something new, a pressure, an expansion, accompanied by a muffled click. She could come up with no answer for why a bank would do this, how something like this could relate to a loan, but she fought the urge to question, to resist, or simply to cry, watching herself

from outside her body as she had learned to do, trying to forget she was really there.

The device, whatever it was, continued to stretch her, slowly, relentlessly, pushing her to the edge of panic. What if it didn't stop? What if it tore her? Her pain and discomfort were of no concern to anyone here, she knew.

Just before discomfort turned to pain, just before she whirled on these new tormenters and demanded they remove the object, the expansion stopped, the rod shrank down and was withdrawn.

"Six point two," the woman said.

Hannah looked back and saw that she was tapping something into her phone.

Hannah looked straight ahead again, starting when she felt a finger against her anus. It pressed, slid around the opening, departed before returning to the hole and entering, just far enough to stretch her out and make her grunt. She sensed a wetness, a smoothness to the finger and suspected something was being put on her to allow penetration.

Dreading what was coming next, but resigned to it, she barely flinched when something that wasn't a finger touched her there and began slowly working its way into her.

She could feel the steady penetration but couldn't tell how deep it was going or how thick it was. She wasn't as sensitive back there, she knew.

It had begun to dawn on her that a boy might want to use her anus in the same way as her vagina, but why anyone would was beyond her. It didn't get wet like the front did, and it was the dirtiest place on her body. And it was too small, she thought, imagining the pain of taking a boy that way.

As before, she felt an expansion, breathed in and allowed the rod to do its work, more confident now that they weren't going to damage her. As before, discomfort was just about to yield to pain when the stretching stopped.

"Five point four," the woman said.

The device was removed and Hannah grunted and looked down at the table's gray linoleum. A thousand girls before her had studied the same thing with sad eyes, she was certain, and she tried to reconcile this violation with the wealthy family waiting in the showroom to buy her. Did they know what girls were put through back here?

"All done, off the table," the woman said. Hannah obeyed, a staff member was summoned and Hannah stepped to the port to be returned to her chains.

## **Bank Lecture**

On the walk back to the showroom, she did her best to move her mind to something resembling a normal state. Adaptation was a virtue, she reminded herself. Adaptation to being bought by a family – to belonging to the wealthiest people she had ever met – meant acting normal after being caged, watched having sex, restrained, tortured and violated. It meant continuing to act human after people had repeatedly treated you as something less. So as she crossed the showroom floor, returning to Mrs. Alvarez, the Petrosyans, Bert, the lawyer and the others, she smiled, as if being chained and naked in front of strangers was the natural state for her, something she was comfortable with, something she liked.

No one smiled back, except Bert. All the Petrosyans seemed nervous, their beautiful faces drawn, their half-smiles unconvincing, and she wondered if buying someone felt just as strange as being bought. Perhaps stranger.

"Stand right here, Hannah," said Mr. Batchelor, pointing to the floor beside the table.

A stack of documents had been placed on the table, where Ormek, Laura and Mr. Batchelor sat. Allain and Athena were on the couch. Everyone else except Mrs. Alvarez had found a chair. Hannah glanced at her briefly. She looked back, forcing a smile.

“You should have gotten all the sale documents in my email last night,” said Mr. Batchelor.

“We did,” Ormek said.

“Have you had a chance to look everything over?” Mr. Batchelor asked.

“Yes,” Ormek replied. Laura nodded.

“Good,” said Mr. Batchelor. “Let’s make our way.”

He pulled the first document off the stack, set it before Ormek and described its purpose briefly – something from the Texas Department of Health, where they had to promise to maintain Hannah medically or something, and submit her for a health inspection upon request. Hannah knew it was important and might have bearing on things that would happen to her with the Petrosyans, but she found it hard to follow and her mind wandered. She looked at Allain once, meeting his eyes, and was instantly embarrassed.

She’d been to a half dozen weddings at Four Pillars, twice as the flower girl, and the couple were always told to look into each other’s eyes during the vows. This was not a wedding, however, the vows being exchanged were between Allain’s parents and the State of Texas, and looking into his eyes was stupid.

Hannah searched the room, wondering if she were truly done with this place. No one chained for display was familiar to her. She imagined seeing Taylor and wondered if she would feel anything looking at the first boy she’d had sex with. Right now, she felt nothing, for anyone.

When she returned her attention to the matter involving herself, she noticed that the stack of documents the Petrosyans needed to sign was small, and the pile of agreements they’d already put their hands to was thick. More time had passed than she’d noticed, apparently. She had lost track of time when she was being punished, too. Was this something her mind was doing, in response to the stress?

Two more people had joined them, their arrival completely unnoticed by her. It was the man and the woman

who'd done the bank inspection. They stood off to the side, the woman holding a thin binder, and Hannah guessed there was information in it from what they had done to her. She wondered how much detail they would provide, dreading the moment either spoke.

Mr. Batchelor picked up another set of documents, some of the thickest, and slid them across the table to the Petrosyans.

"And now the loan," he said. "This one's between you and First Federal of Dallas, so I'm going to let them take the floor."

The man and woman stepped up, on either side of Hannah. She looked at them in turn, expecting – or really, hoping – to be told to stand somewhere else, but they seemed to want her there.

After quick introductions, the woman spoke first:

"Now, have any of you taken out a subject loan before?"

Ormek, speaking for everyone, shook his head.

"Our goal is the same as yours," she began. "You pay off the loan in 10 years, as scheduled. But plans can change. For any reason, you might decide to resell her or trade her before the loan is paid off, so maintaining her value as a recreational asset will ensure that you can settle your debt from the proceeds and, ideally, make a profit on her."

"A well-maintained female in her late teens can hold much of her value into her early 30s. But you've got to take care of her."

The woman reached into her binder, pulled out two sheets and set one before Ormek, one before Laura.

"Follow along with me, please," she said. "First, preventative medical care is really important. Dental, pap smears, breast exams, overall physicals. There are a half-dozen clinics in town that specialize in subject exams. You can drop her off one morning and pick her back up the next afternoon,

and the fees can be minimal, even free if you allow them to use her in service or research.

“Second, all punishment needs to keep her long-term health and value in mind. Do not use a closed fist on her face. Do not break the skin. Refrain from punishments that do no physical harm but are meant to cause severe psychological suffering. Females subjected to extensive psychological punishment have been shown to produce less lubrication, to orgasm less frequently, and to be less engaged during sexual encounters.

“Third, nurture her, give her books, take her places. Long-term isolation and restraint has been shown to cause significant, premature depreciation, both physically and mentally.”

Hannah looked at the paper the woman had set down, seeing numbered paragraphs that were too distant to read but, she imagined, matched what she was saying. She was glad the woman was advocating care and advising against severe punishment, but the reasons she was giving – simply to preserve Hannah’s value – didn’t seem right. Did all the Petrosyans see her this way, as simply a thing to be treated well for financial reasons? Is this how Allain felt?

“Finally, some specifics on her use,” the woman continued, handing a second sheet to Ormek and Laura.

“She’s young, in excellent shape, clearly worth her sales price, but how well she maintains that value depends on how she’s used. If you breed her, she will lose value. It’s a decision plenty of owners make, but no matter how well you maintain her through the process, her breeding history is going to count against her on resale.

“Now, if you overuse her vagina, you will damage it and that will reduce her value. Based on our examination, nothing over six and a quarter inches in circumference, or seven inches long, should be inserted up her sex organ, and no insertion should happen without lubrication. She’s got an above-average ability to produce her own fluids, but always

check her. You'll see a few recommended commercial lubricants on the sheet.

"Don't expect her to be honest about how penetration feels. Subjects will lie to please their owners, or out of a sense of duty. Ask her, but listen to her too. An attentive owner can tell the difference between a subject's pleasure and pain, and if you're hurting her, it will negatively impact her performance. A girl can lose 10 points on her assessment after a year of misuse.

"Now, anal," the woman continued. "Use that hole sparingly, and always, always lubricate. And nothing over five and a half inches in circumference should be inserted. Insert slowly and give her a chance to relax. And when in doubt, measure."

Hannah, so mortified now she felt woozy, looked at the Petrosyans, noticing Laura's face first, drawn and tight. Ormek was studying his fingernails, and Allain was looking out into the showroom, biting his lip, his eyes almost closed. Only Athena seemed unperturbed by the presentation, staring back and forth at her parents and Hannah. When Hannah's eyes met hers, she smiled, partly supportive, partly conspiratorial, and Hannah was reminded that this was a complicated girl, unpredictable, possibly a friend, possibly her worst enemy.

"Lastly, breast care," the woman went on, oblivious to the embarrassment she was inflicting on a wealthy, proper family that was buying a sex slave but would never, Hannah suspected, describe it that way, even to themselves.

The woman grabbed Hannah's right breast, squeezed it, raised it and let it fall. "The breasts are the first place a buyer looks to determine a female's quality. They need to be firm and upright, and the nipples should point up or straight ahead. So put her in a bra when you can."

Hannah looked down and willed herself to see what lay below her eyes as someone else's body.

"Nipple piercing isn't recommended, but if you have it done, make sure to use a licensed professional. The same for



genital piercing.”

The woman paused, smiled.

“Overall, just use common sense. Treat her the way you’d want to be treated. Treat her the way you’d want your daughter treated, and she’ll deliver years of service.”

Hannah looked at Athena again, certain most of what had been done to her over the last week would never happen to Athena, unless her parents were dead.

The woman looked up from the piece of paper in her hand. “Are there any questions?”

Ormek grunted and Laura looked away, clearly both determined not to learn more.

Finished now, the woman set another document before Laura and Ormek. Hannah glanced at it, able to read the large print that confirmed that they had received borrower counseling. They signed it and the loan document, kept a copy of each and handed the others back.

“Last thing,” said Mr. Batchelor, “and this is for all three of you.” He looked up at Hannah and she looked back, nodding.

## **Out of the Stacks**

“For any number of reasons, the State of Texas may take control of you,” he said, continuing to look at her. “If you’re found to be abused, for example, they can take you away for your own protection. Or if you attempt to escape, or commit another crime. It might be for a few days, or a month or the rest of your life. And they might take you away, or they might let you stay with the Petrosyans. It’s called a certificate of authority, and if you’re handed one, whoever gives it to you becomes your owner and your master. They’ll put a red tag on your collar, and you’ll do as they say until the tag comes off and the certificate is rescinded.”

Mr. Batchelor slid the last pair of documents across the table. Hannah looked down, saw that it said “Acknowledgement of Certificate of Authority” at the top. There were places for the Petrosyans and Hannah to sign. After Laura and Ormek signed, Mr. Batchelor handed Hannah a pen and she bent over, studying the language of the document. It said the same things Mr. Batchelor had, just more formally, and she worked through it as quickly as she could.

“Are you reading it, Darling?” Mr. Batchelor inquired.

“Am I not supposed to, Sir?” Hannah asked, looking at him.

“No, that’s fine,” he said, and he laughed. “But that’s a first. My goodness, young lady, I do believe you are going to surprise these folks. More than once.”

Hannah looked at him and smiled. She took his words as a compliment. Stepping closer to the table, so she get enough slack in her chain to reach the bottom of the sheet, she signed the signature blank that said “Subject” on both forms, dropped the pen and stepped back.

“All done,” Mr. Batchelor announced, and he picked up the stack of signed documents and sorted them into several piles, some for the Petrosyans, some for himself, some for the other participants to the transaction.

“That’s yours, Dear,” he said, handing a single document and an envelope to Mrs. Alvarez, who shoved it all into her purse without looking at it. This was the money, Hannah assumed, and she knew there would be no joy in it for the woman, at least not today. Mrs. Alvarez had done what was necessary, and now she was rich, but not happy.

Mr. Batchelor nodded to Bert, and he stepped over, accepted an envelope, knelt and removed the broker’s cuff from Hannah’s ankle.

“Been a pleasure, best of luck,” he said to her. She ignored him, turning to Mr. Batchelor.

“How will you pay my mother?” she asked him.

Mr. Batchelor looked up at her wide-eyed, possibly a little annoyed, or just surprised again. “That’s handled by a separate department,” he said.

Hannah studied his face. There was something he wasn’t saying, she thought. Something he was keeping from her, but the nature of his secret was impossible to guess at, and she wasn’t sure how to pursue the matter without doing something that could get her punished again. She nodded at him and looked toward Mrs. Alvarez. Mrs. Alvarez looked back, seemed to be trying to decide what to do and settled on a perfunctory hug, a gesture that hid layers of meaning, emotions, history.

Embrace complete, she turned on her heel and left the showroom.

Never, Hannah imagined, to return.

For the Petrosyans, the problem of owning a human was just beginning, and Hannah turned her attention to them.

Ormek glanced up at her, his impassive face indicating he’d recovered from the awkwardness of the bank presentation, and he rose and stepped to the wall where a black canvas bag lay. He picked it up, set it on the table and pulled out a small box that clinked faintly.

“We bought some things for you,” Laura said quickly with a smile, and she reached into the bag and pulled out two handfuls of dark blue fabric. “Something to wear on your way home.”

Laura fumbled with one piece of the fabric for a moment, then held it out expectantly. Hannah stepped up and Laura wrapped it around her middle and snapped it closed. Hannah looked down, at the first clothing she’d worn for four days – a skirt covering little more than her middle, ending at her upper thigh – and felt embarrassed. Mother had never allowed her to wear shorts, or a skirt that didn’t run all the way to her ankles, so this little stretch of fabric – which would leave her vulva exposed anytime she sat – seemed more immodest than mere nudity.

“Thank you, Ma’am,” she said.

Laura held up the second piece of fabric. Hannah, understanding that it was meant to cover her breasts, raised her arms as much as her chains would allow, and Laura wrapped the second piece of fabric around her, snapping it in place.

“Thank you, Ma’am.”

Now it was Ormek’s turn. Hannah glanced at the box he held. It read “Custom Four-Point Alloy Restraints” and featured a simple drawing of a nude female, from the front and in profile, chained by the wrists and ankles.

“These should be more comfortable than what you’ve been wearing,” Laura said hopefully. “We used Bert’s measurements for them, and they’re very light.”

Ormek opened the box and pulled out a length of chain and four cuffs, all one unit.

“We’re going to put these on you,” Laura said, “and then they’ll take the other ones off.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, quietly despairing. She had hoped she’d leave this place unrestrained.

“It’s necessary,” Laura said softly. “So we can get you home.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Athena,” Laura said, looking at her daughter, and Athena stood, the half-smile returning to her face.

“Taking care of you will be one of Athena’s chores,” Laura said. “So this ... this kind of thing will often be done by her.”

Athena took the chains from her father, studied them for a moment and selected one of the smaller cuffs. She looked into Hannah’s eyes, and Hannah looked back, and then looked down, raising her right hand as far as her chains would allow.

Athena took her wrist gently and closed the cuff around it, looking into her eyes again. Hannah had no

inclination to smile, and she wasn't sure that's what Athena wanted to see, so she merely looked at her, emotionless.

Athena cuffed her other wrist and knelt to restrain each ankle.

A worker was waved over and she removed Hannah's original chains.

"How do those feel?" Laura asked. "Better?"

"They're longer than the others," Hannah offered, noting that she could raise her hands almost to her breasts now. It was a small improvement, but an improvement nonetheless.

There was a pause while the Petrosyans looked at each other, whispered uncertainly and then, as one, turned toward Mr. Batchelor.

"Well, she's yours now," he said smiling, with a wave of his hand. "Go ahead and take her home."

"Don't we need to change her tag?" Laura asked.

Mr. Batchelor stood and Hannah raised her chin while he took her tag between his fingers.

"Hannah," he read. "Female, Recreational."

He looked at Laura. "You aren't planning to change her name, are you?"

"No."

"Or her purpose?"

"No."

"Then the tag is accurate until something changes. You can get a new one engraved at any shop that handles subject matters."

"Thank you," Laura said.

Athena was the first to move, touching Hannah's elbow and pointing toward the door where the buyers entered.

A staff person met them there, stepped behind Hannah to scan the chip embedded in her back, examined the number

on her collar and unlocked the door for them.

As they made their way through the building, moving slowly to accommodate Hannah's restrained shuffle, Hannah stole quick glances at Allain, catching his eye once, wondering what the etiquette was for this moment.

She never returned the stares of the men and boys who used to look at her, before she'd been taken. She had no idea if it was okay to look at a boy whose family had just bought her. But she didn't care. The Petrosyan's awkwardness told her some of the rules were yet to be written, and she could make up some of them. She wanted to look at Allain, and to be looked at by him.

Twice more as they passed through the building, her chip was scanned, her collar read before she and the Petrosyans stepped into the bright afternoon heat.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 6: Hannah to the Petrosyans**

### **Athena Notices Something**

Hannah looked back, surprised at the size of the building that had held her. Mostly windowless, six stories tall, finished in gray, drab concrete, it was designed not to be noticed. Most of the people who drove by it day after day had no idea, she was certain, what the building held, the misery and the hope of thousands of lives behind the facade.

It had been a week since she'd felt the sun on her skin, and far longer than that since she'd felt it on her shoulders, her belly, her legs. Four Pillars had a community pool, and she'd been allowed to wear a one-piece to it. Otherwise, she had always been completely covered, indoors or out.

After a week's confinement, this felt like freedom, and it panicked her. Too open. Too exposed. Beyond the parking lot lay a busy road, cars whizzing by. People could see her, chained and underdressed. What if someone from church drove by? What if Mother were passing at this moment? She imagined the sudden reunion with her, in all its awkwardness, explaining to her mother that she was now a sex slave, had lost her virginity to a boy she would probably never see again, was forced to have sex with a second boy and two girls, had been tortured ...

"What's that?" Athena asked, startling Hannah out of her reverie as she ran her finger across Hannah's upper back, where the squares had been drawn.

"What's what?" Hannah asked, trying to sound casual, her nerves in a sudden jangling agony.

"There's writing," Athena said. "Like, squares."

"Oh," Hannah said quietly. "I don't know."

"Do they write on you in there?" Athena persisted.

“Yes,” Hannah said, searching her mind for some way to change the subject without making it obvious that’s what she was trying to do. There was nothing – nothing – she could think of to say. What words that would leave her mouth could possibly be of interest to the Petrosyans? What question could she possibly ask that wouldn’t seem impertinent?

“Why?” Athena asked. “What kind of things do they write?”

To Hannah’s relief, they reached a large, black SUV and Athena turned her attention to that, opening the rear door for her.

Hannah stopped and looked at Athena, shrugging. The running board was too high for her to reach with her foot.

Athena smiled wickedly and Hannah smiled back in relief, glad the girl was lost for now in the delight of something new, something that hadn’t gone to plan, however minor.

“She can’t climb in,” Athena announced. “Her chain’s too short.”

“Lift her in,” Ormek said impatiently.

“She’s too heavy,” Athena protested. “Can’t we just take her chains off?”

“Allain,” said Ormek, and his son, already seated on the other side of the rear bench, slid across. Hannah looked up at him and smiled, ready to be touched. She remembered that terrible moment Mr. Alvarez had lifted her into the truck, to be caged, and she reassured herself that this moment, while not perfect, was far better.

“Turn around,” Allain said gently. Hannah complied and he slipped two arms around her ribs, under her breasts, raising her into the vehicle. As he pulled her in, he rested his chin against her shoulder and breathed against her ear, in her hair.

He positioned her in the middle of the bench and leaned in front of her to fasten her seatbelt, and she smelled something sweet. Then she remembered being restrained for



punishment, padded arms around her like the seatbelt was now, and she winced and tried not to shudder.

She looked at Allain, hoping he hadn't sensed her recoiling, but he looked away, embarrassed perhaps by something. She looked down, observing that the wrap around her middle had slid down, exposing the top half of her pubic hair, and the fabric around her chest had been pushed up by Allain's embrace, one breast left bare. Hannah willed herself not to care, to pretend not to notice. If they were going to leave her chained, they were going to have to fix this. She hoped Allain would see. But, as Ormek started the car and began rolling through the parking lot, it was Athena who remarked on it.

"My God, Allain, all her clothes are askew," she said, reaching first for Hannah's bottom wrap. Hannah lurched up from the seat and Athena straightened it, then pulled the fabric down to cover her breast.

The family rode in silence and Hannah looked at the highway passing by. She was invisible in the middle seat and no longer afraid of being seen, comfortable now, settling into the first moments of something she'd been waiting for, wondering about for days. Soon she would see their house. She wanted to talk, she wanted them to talk. She wanted to know them.

"You said askew," she observed.

"Yeah," agreed Athena. "It means that, things were like, crooked."

"It's a crossword puzzle word."

"What do you mean?"

"I only saw it in a crossword puzzle. I never heard anyone say it."

Laura was the first to laugh, but Athena followed. They found what she'd said funny. She wasn't sure why, but she was glad.

Laura, sitting in the front passenger seat, twisted around to look into Hannah's eyes. Hannah stared back,

waiting as Laura drew in her breath, closed her eyes and opened her mouth to say things that were clearly difficult.

“How are you doing, Honey?” she asked.

“I’m fine,” Hannah replied.

“We know ... we know you’ve been through a difficult time.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Haven’t you?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“We want to make your transition, to our home, as easy as possible.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Thank you, Ma’am.”

“And to our family.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“You miss your mother.”

Hannah couldn’t tell if it was a question or a statement. She assumed a little of both. But her answer would be the same regardless.

“Yes, Ma’am, I do.”

“Do you know her ... current circumstances?”

“I don’t,” Hannah replied. “There’s a place you can go, though, online. Mrs. Alvarez went there last week a few times. Mother was in jail then, and you could look at her picture and the charges. She might still be in jail.”

“What was she charged with?”

“Disorderly conduct and resisting arrest. But it was just because ... because she didn’t want them to take me.”

“I’m sure that was very difficult for you.”

“It was,” Hannah said, nodding. “I cried, and it still bothers me.”

“I could look her up,” Athena announced eagerly, her phone already out. “What’s her name?”

“Athena,” Laura said, twisting further in her seat to look at her daughter. “No.”

Laura reached back to squeeze Hannah’s knee, and Hannah blinked away tears and moved to take her hand but, seatbelted and chained, she couldn’t, so she just smiled and blinked again and felt a tear roll down her cheek.

Laura reached into her purse, pulled out a tissue and handed it to Athena, and the girl put her phone away and dabbed clumsily at Hannah’s eyes.

Laura continued probing, softly, skillfully, eliciting from Hannah a narrative of her life, good and bad: Four Pillars, the marriage proposal from Mr. Johnson, her refusal and her mother’s desperate flight from all they had known, followed by a futile attempt to make ends meet, culminating a week ago in her financial dissolution and the acquisition of Hannah.

Like Mrs. Alvarez had when they talked, Laura focused on the hardship of Hannah’s later years, and Hannah didn’t mind admitting that she’d often gone hungry, owned very few clothes, even fewer that she actually liked wearing, wasn’t allowed to paint her nails or wear makeup, wasn’t allowed to talk to boys without Mother present.

Laura was not a person who would ever punish her, Hannah told herself. She was as sweet as anyone Hannah had ever known. She was a good person, and God had blessed her and her family with riches. And they were doing God’s work when they bought her, even if it was to use her for sex. Being owned by the Petrosyans seemed, at least so far, much better than starving with her mother.

## **Going Home**

Ormek said something Hannah couldn’t understand, and she looked toward his head, then noticed his eyes in the

rearview mirror, looking into hers. He seemed to have spoken to her.

“Pardon me, Sir?” Hannah asked.

“What subjects did you like to study? When you were in school?”

“Math,” Hannah said. “I got the best score of all the girls in sixth and seventh grades.”

“Not the boys?” Athena asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Were there only girls in your school?”

“No, there were boys too, but I don’t know if my scores were better than any of them. Girls weren’t supposed to know that.”

“You can help Athena with math,” Ormek said.

“Oh,” Hannah replied, and she laughed, suspecting he was joking. “No, Sir, I’m sure I couldn’t.”

“Yes you could!” Athena exclaimed. “I’m terrible and all my teachers are stupid.”

“I haven’t been to school in three years,” Hannah said. “I’ve forgotten everything.”

“School started two weeks ago, and I’m already lost,” Athena said. “I’m going to have you help me.”

“Will you do that for her?” Laura asked. “Will you try?”

They might not be joking, Hannah thought. So she was going to be used for sex and math tutoring. The implausibility of it all struck Hannah as another thing she must adapt to. Unless they were indeed having fun at her expense. She proceeded cautiously, offering what she hoped was a response that wouldn’t seem presumptuous: “I’ll do my best at whatever you ask of me.”

Laura beamed at her, but didn’t laugh, and Hannah believed she had said the right thing.

She turned to her left, to study Allain. He was looking out the window, as far removed from Hannah and from his family as if he were in another car. Was he nervous? Shy? Angry?

“I could help you with math too, Allain,” Hannah ventured.

He turned to her, his gray eyes lost in thoughts she couldn’t read, but then his face broke and he smiled, a genuine, even grateful smile. In that moment, Hannah thought later, she read whole chapters in the book of Allain. He was shy, and he lived in his own mind, as Hannah had been forced to do in her life with Mother.

“Allain’s studying medicine,” Laura said proudly. “He’ll start school next Monday.”

“Where are you in school?” Hannah asked.

“Corpus Christi.”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “You live there?”

“Just during the week,” Allain said, turning toward her and speaking quietly. He didn’t want to talk to her in front of his family any more than he had to, Hannah judged, even about simple matters.

“Allain comes home almost every weekend,” Laura said. “That’s when you’ll ... see him.”

Hannah turned this fact over in her mind, not sure it was good or bad news. A little of both, perhaps. She wouldn’t have to have sex with Allain twice a day seven days a week, something she had been particularly worried about. But for five days every week, she would be alone. What would she do? How would she pass the time?

They rode in silence, on one of the highways that led from the Dallas city center to the suburbs. Hannah welcomed the silence, imagining that all of them had too many questions to ask, so everyone was stuck. Her mind turned to the house where she was about to take up lodging, with two dining rooms and seven bedrooms – more than one bedroom per person. The question of which space there would be hers

hardly mattered. She had spent the last three years sleeping on floors.

They left the highway, drove a broad commercial avenue, turned off to wind along a narrow, tree-lined street where every house was, Hannah thought, strange and beautiful.

“Do you like Patchouli?” Athena asked, putting her hand on Hannah’s arm.

“The thing that smells?” Hannah replied. “I never—“

“No, the music!” Athena exclaimed.

“I never listen to music,” Hannah admitted. “It wasn’t allowed.”

“*I’m Gonna Stay?*” Athena asked. “You ever heard that one? *Your Heart My Hands?*”

“No, sorry.”

“Oh, God,” Athena blurted, dumbstruck. “I’m gonna make you listen to all my downloads.”

“After your studies,” Laura said.

Athena scowled at the back of her mother’s head, turned to Hannah and smiled in a way that promised Hannah, one way or another, music would come before schoolwork.

Ormek stopped at a large iron gate, lowered his window and Hannah heard the beeps of what she guessed was a keypad. The gate before them slid out of the way and Ormek proceeded, into a neighborhood of homes surrounded by walls, each supremely grand in its own way, brick and stucco and stone dwellings beyond anything she had seen anywhere except in pictures.

All the trees were small, and Hannah guessed this land had been a farm, or it had been a forest that was cleared so houses could be built. It all looked very new.

Hannah stared through the windshield and the side windows, wondering which house was hers. Ormek slowed beside a pink stucco wall and another iron gate, and it slid of

its own accord to let them in. Beyond stood a house of the same pink stucco, three stories, white stone arches above the doors and windows, a dark slate roof, geometrically precise hedges, a brick driveway.

Hannah drew in her breath, trying to take it all in, unable to.

“Welcome home, Hannah,” Laura said.

“What do you think?” Athena asked. “Kind of a dump, right?”

Hannah looked at her, unsure of her meaning. “It’s beautiful,” she said quietly.

Ormek drove into the garage, an enormous space with three cars and another SUV, and turned the engine off. Allain leaned across Hannah to undo her seatbelt, his shoulder against her left breast.

Athena clambered out on her side and turned.

“Toss her down to me, Allain,” she said. “I can catch her.”

Hannah found Athena’s joke funny and disconcerting at the same time, but she was glad when Allain wrapped his arms around her, helping him by scooting toward the door, unconcerned that her bottom wrap was sliding up again, exposing her.

Athena grabbed her legs, smiling at the continuing joke, guiding her as Allain lowered her to the floor.

The pavement was cool, and Hannah looked down at her feet, wishing she wasn’t chained. Athena, as she had before, straightened Hannah’s wraps.

“Athena,” Laura said, “show Hannah to her place and let her get settled in.”

Athena motioned Hannah to follow her, and the two girls trailed the family through the door that led to the kitchen. Inside, the family dispersed into the dark luxury that was the rest of the house, too much for Hannah to take in as she stared

after Allain, then followed Athena through a kitchen bigger than her last apartment.

When they reached the wall beside the refrigerator, Athena pushed a button and a door slid open.

“That’s an elevator,” Hannah observed.

“Yeah,” Athena agreed. “We’re going downstairs.”

“Where’s your room?” Hannah asked.

“Upstairs. All our rooms are upstairs,” Athena replied, guiding Hannah into the elevator. “If you go up one floor, you’ll be in the hall where everyone’s bedrooms are.”

Hannah looked up as the elevator dropped, as if she could see the bedrooms overhead.

“I’ll give you a tour,” Athena promised. “But Mom just wants you to hang out for awhile.”

The elevator door opened and Hannah followed Athena into a cool, dim space of rustic luxury. The walls were paneled in dark wood, heavy couches lined the walls, and Hannah spotted a sink, large TV and refrigerator in the gloom, the only illumination provided by a row of recessed lights in the ceiling and, further back, two wide, short window slits, set high in the walls, daylight leaking through.

Hannah glanced at the windows, saw that what she thought at first were window panes were actually bars, and hoped briefly that this would be where she was kept, in this whole area. But Athena flipped on the lights and Hannah saw to her dismay, against the wall opposite the windows, a pair of cages, thick metal bars on all four sides and another wall of bars between them.

“Why are there two?” Hannah asked.

“So you have two to pick from,” Athena said.  
“Choose.”

Hannah shuffled up to inspect the two cells. They were the size of prison cells, eight feet square, with a bed, a nightstand, a sink, a toilet and a small shower in each. Both were carpeted, one in beige, one in light blue.



“I was just joking,” Athena said. She pulled open the door of the cage with blue carpeting. “We want you in this one. The carpet’s newer.”

Hannah stepped in slowly, feeling the carpet under her bare feet, so thick it seemed to swallow her toes.

The door clanged shut behind her and she heard the clicking of a lock.

“Let me take off your chains,” Athena said. Hannah turned, glad to get rid of them.

Each cage featured what Hannah identified as two chaining ports, one at hip level, one at her feet, where someone could reach in to apply and remove her restraints. She stepped to it and Athena reached through with a key, opening each cuff with a small click. The wrist port wasn’t just an opening. There were brackets at the top and bottom that slid up and down, clearly designed to hold the wrists. Hannah wondered about their purpose, imagined it was something humiliating and decided not to ask.

Athena turned, hung the restraints on a peg set into the wall under the window. There were five pegs there, and Hannah guessed other things would be hung there, for her.

“Give me your clothes,” Athena said.

## **Settling In**

“Oh,” Hannah said. “I’ll be naked?”

“Yeah,” Athena replied without elaboration. “You’re used to that, aren’t you?”

Hannah took off her wraps and handed them through the bars.

“I guess so,” she said, looking down at her nude body. “It’s only been a week. Before that, I was always covered.”

“Do you like shopping?”

“Shopping?” Hannah echoed.

“For clothes.”

“I don’t know. I haven’t been shopping that much.”

“I get to take you. I get to buy you everything.”

“Why are there two cages?” Hannah repeated.

“In case we need to keep someone else here.”

“You’re buying someone else?”

“No, probably not. Not after you. But our friends might drop someone off or whatever.”

Hannah looked at the other cage, imagining someone in it, another slave. A door was set into the bars between the two cages, and that puzzled her.

“Why is there a door?”

“In case you and the other person are allowed to be together.”

“What do you mean?”

“You really don’t know what goes on, do you?”

“No,” Hannah confessed.

“It’s so you can do, uh, whatever with them,” Athena said, and she peered through the bars at Hannah, watching her face, clearly interested in how she would react.

The information startled Hannah, but it was no more surprising than anything else she’d been told over the last week, and she did her best to keep her reaction to herself.

“Who?” Hannah asked.

“Whoever. I don’t know.”

Athena’s phone vibrated and she answered.

“Hey, Beverly,” she said, looking at Hannah and smiling. “Yeah, we got her. I’m talking to her right now.”

Athena shook her head. “No, you can’t come over. Mom wants her to settle in first. Maybe tomorrow. I’m sure

she'd love to meet you."

Athena looked at Hannah again. "No, you can't talk to her," she said brusquely into her phone. "Hey, I gotta go, I still have to tell her stuff. What did we do in math today?"

Athena scowled while Beverly described the assignment, and then she said bye and hung up.

"Everyone's freaking out about you," Athena told her.

"What do you mean?"

"Everyone knows Mom and Dad had to borrow money to pay for you, so they know you must have been more than a million, and they want to see you."

"Oh," said Hannah. "That seems weird."

"Everyone always wants to see everyone else's people," Athena said. "We trade and stuff."

"What do you mean?"

Athena looked into her eyes, ignoring the question.

"You like it, don't you?"

"Like what?"

"Sex."

"Yes," Hannah admitted.

"What's it feel like?"

"You haven't done it?" Hannah asked.

"God, no," Athena said. "I'm 17."

"Okay."

"What's it feel like?" Athena asked again.

"It feels good, mostly. And then, this thing happens. It's called an orgasm, and it's, it's—"

"I know about that."

"You've had an orgasm?"

“Uh, yeah,” Athena replied, as if the answer were obvious, but then she blushed, and Hannah realized that Athena had just confessed to masturbating, and she was embarrassed by it.

“Can you look at my math book?” Athena asked.

“You were serious about that?” Hannah asked. “I thought you were making fun of me.”

“Just take a look at it,” said Athena. “If any of it makes sense to you, you’re smarter than me.”

“Okay.”

“So I’m going to leave, but I’m coming back,” Athena warned. “So listen for me. And we’ll all say something before we come in here, so you can stop or whatever, or tell us to come back later.”

Hannah looked at Athena blankly.

“If you’re using the toilet,” Athena explained. “Stuff like that. Or—“ she smiled wickedly, “if you’re getting off.”

“Getting off?”

“Yeah, rubbing it. Ringing your bell.”

Hannah understood now, more from Athena’s tone than her words.

“I don’t do that.”

“Yes you do.”

“How would you know?”

“All girls do it.”

“I never have. I never learned.”

Athena stared at her. “You know if you lie, you get punished, right? Like, lying is really, really bad. You never lie.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said with mock meekness.

“So tell me honestly. Have you ever masturbated?”

“No,” Hannah said, then paused to consider. “Well, I’ve touched myself, but it didn’t make me orgasm. Does that count?”

“I don’t know. Probably not.”

Hannah stared into Athena’s eyes, puzzled by the turn of the conversation, once again imagining herself a week ago, and how foreign this moment would have been to that Hannah of seven days past.

She had been surprised countless times in the last week, she thought, and the surprises were only beginning. But she would continue to adapt.

“Okay, I’m gonna get my book,” Athena said. “Be right back.”

Hannah leaned against the bars of her cage, peering after her, listening as the elevator opened and whisked her away, and then she turned to take stock of her cage.

Someone had folded a towel neatly and set it at the foot of her bed, with a smaller towel for her face, and a washcloth on top of it. She touched them, all made of a thick fabric nicer than anything she had ever used.

She opened the little nightstand, empty but for a box of Kleenex.

Next she turned to the toilet to urinate. If Athena walked in on her doing this, she wouldn’t care. But no one else, especially Allain.

Truly alone for the first time since Friday morning, she reached down and touched her vulva, running her fingers outside her folds, then between them, from her opening up to her clitoris and back again, slipping a finger inside herself, massaging her walls, feeling the silky fluid whose purpose she now understood.

Her mind turned to Taylor and the way he had made love to her, using his penis to fill her because it was his job to do so, but ejaculating inside her because he wanted to. If he were here now, she would immediately be on top of him, forcing herself down on him, welcoming him into her

chamber. She should be thinking about Allain, she knew, but she hadn't seen Allain naked yet, didn't know what Allain felt like. She loved the way his hair smelled, though. She imagined telling him that, the first time he took her.

"Hey!" a voice rang out from the direction of the elevator.

Hannah pulled her hand away from her sex, wiped and flushed in a near panic, then turned to the sink and washed, unwrapping a new bar of soap that smelled like a field of wildflowers. She looked into the mirror over the sink, surprised by the face that looked back at her, still beautifully made up by Delilah, a mask that wasn't, she felt, her at all. This might be the hardest thing to adapt to, she thought. Looking like this.

## **Math**

Athena arrived at the bars, a large book, paper and a pencil in her hand. Hannah took everything from her, studying the book's cover. It bore the title *Intermediate Mathematical Concepts*, and it had been decorated with formulae, geometric shapes, and a picture of a man from long ago, "Newton" written in fancy lettering beneath.

"Is it calculus?" Hannah asked.

"Some, at the end I think. How did you know?"

"Newton," Hannah said. "He invented calculus."

"How did you know?"

"It's a thing they told me, I guess, when I was in school."

"I have to know how to solve all the problems at the end of the third section. Of chapter 1."

"Okay."

"Dinner's at 6:30 tonight."

“I get dinner?”

“Um, yeah,” Athena retorted. “We’re not going to starve you. That would be a waste of a million and a half dollars.”

“Where will I eat?”

“With us.”

“What time is it now?”

“4:30.”

“I need a clock.”

“Okay.”

Hannah looked down at herself. “What will I wear?”

“Nothing.”

“Why?”

“‘Cuz it’s just us.”

“Why does that matter?”

“If we go out, we’ll dress you, or if someone comes over, we might too, but if it’s just us at home, you’ll be naked.”

“Why?” Hannah persisted.

“Partly, it makes you harder to steal, I guess,” Athena said. “But mainly it’s so you’ll stay used to it. There are lots of times when you have to take off everything.”

“When?”

“Lots of times.”

“Oh.”

“Is that freaking you out?”

“No,” Hannah said. “It just seems strange.”

“It would freak me out,” Athena confessed.

She pulled out her phone, tapped it. “Hey, what’s your mom’s name?”

“Martha Loughbridge,” Hannah said, spelling out the letters.

Athena worked at her phone as Hannah looked on, her heart suddenly in her mouth. It was last Thursday – five days ago – when Mrs. Alvarez had last looked up her mother, finding nothing new. Hannah wondered if there might be a new picture, or even a change of status. Mother should be getting a great deal of money very soon. What if she had used it to post bond, and had been set free? Would she look for Hannah? Would she find her? Hannah imagined her mother, driven by the same fury she’d shown when her daughter was taken from her, pounding on the Petrosyan’s front door, demanding her daughter’s freedom. The possibility terrified Hannah, for reasons she didn’t fully understand.

“I don’t know where to go,” Athena said. “Do you know what the website was?”

“No.”

Athena gave up and pocketed her phone. “Good luck with the math,” she said, leaving.

“Okay,” Hannah said, relieved, not quite ready for an update on her mother.

Hannah turned to her bed, sat down on the bright yellow comforter, set down the book, felt the firmness of the mattress, lay back and put her head on the pillow. She’d had a bed before she left Four Pillars, but it had been all pallets on the floor since then, and she reveled in the knowledge that she would sleep here tonight, on a normal mattress, in a cage almost the size of a room, with a normal toilet. She pulled the comforter and sheets down and slid her legs under them, drawing them back up to her waist. Then she placed Athena’s math book on her lap, turned to the first page and experienced a brief moment of euphoria. She was, at this moment, just another math student, back in school after a three-year absence. Her fraught new existence was forgotten as she worked through the logic of not completely unfamiliar mathematical concepts. She barely looked up, barely moved for two hours, so when Athena called her name from the



elevator, she moved stiffly, her neck tight, her legs complaining as she slid them to the edge of the bed and stood.

“How do you like the bed?” Athena asked when she reached the bars.

“It’s very nice,” Hannah said.

“Did you sleep long?”

“I didn’t sleep at all.”

“Hungry?”

“Yes.”

Athena held up a pair of shackles.

“I have to put these on you.”

“For my feet?”

“Yeah.”

“Why?”

“For now,” Athena said. “Maybe not always, but Mom wants you to wear them tonight.”

Hannah stepped to the bars and looked away as Athena fastened the cuffs around her ankles.

“They’re supposed to fit your measurements, same as your other chains,” Athena said. “How do they feel?”

“They’re normal,” Hannah replied, being intentionally vague. This was another disappointment. But her hands were free now, at least.

Athena unlocked the cage door and Hannah followed her to the elevator.

“I found your mom,” Athena whispered as they ascended.

## **First Dinner**

“Where is she?” Hannah blurted back, heart racing.

“I don’t mean I found her, like where she is. I just found her records.”

“What did it say?”

“She’s out.”

“Out?”

“Out of jail.”

“Oh,” Hannah said, surprised by the way this news made her feel, a combination of fear and hope and uncertainty.

“Don’t talk about it,” Athena said.

“What?”

“At dinner,” Athena said. “Don’t talk about it. I wasn’t supposed to look. You’re not supposed to know. Don’t tell anyone you know.”

“Okay.”

Hannah could smell dinner before the elevator doors opened, and when she followed Athena into the kitchen, she was struck by how different everything was from earlier, when she’d walked through it on the way downstairs. All the lights were on, bright as day, and the island in the middle of the room was loaded with food, a steaming casserole and a roast, salad, a loaf of bread. But Hannah’s eyes were drawn first to a black girl standing at the stove, stirring something.

The girl turned away from her work and looked at Hannah, and Hannah stared back. She was tall, elegant, her straight black hair tied in the back in a long ponytail. She was dressed like an old-fashioned maid, in black with white frills, her skirt stopping at mid-thigh.

And she was collared.

“Hi,” Hannah said, startled by the presence of another slave.

The girl just continued to stare, her opinion of Hannah or any other matter undecipherable.

“Think you can carry food?” Athena asked.

“Yes,” Hannah answered, tearing her eyes away from the other female. “Slowly.”

“Grab the bread,” Athena said, wrapping hot pads around the casserole. “It won’t break if you trip.”

The other slave turned back to the stove, but Hannah studied her again as she lifted the bread and followed Athena into the dining room, a grand space but, Hannah assumed, the smaller of the two rooms where meals were taken.

The rest of the Petrosyans were already seated, and they all glanced up at Hannah as she entered and set down the bread. She already knew them well enough to anticipate what she would find in each face: Laura smiled warmly, Ormek glanced at her respectfully and looked back down, and Allain met her eyes and held them for a long moment, until his gaze moved down to her breasts, then her hips and between her legs.

She was glad, at this moment, that she was naked.

“Sit here,” said Athena, pulling out a chair for Hannah. “The chair with the towel is the one you should always take.”

The empty chair next to Hannah was finished in blue silk in a pattern of flowers and vines, but a blue towel had been draped over hers, and she sat, her shackles ringing against the floor, while Athena and the black girl brought in the rest of the food.

The Petrosyans dug in, Hannah followed their lead, and for a moment, she was struck more by the novelty of dining with a family than by the peculiarity of her situation. Almost all her meals had been shared only with Mother for the last three years. Hannah could count the dinners with anyone else on one hand.

After a quick blessing of the meal, offered by Ormek, that did not sound as grateful as Hannah thought it might, Laura turned to her.

“Do you drink wine, Hannah?”

“No, Ma’am, I never have.”

Ormek uncorked a bottle and poured some into his and Laura's glasses, a dark red liquid that Hannah knew nothing about. Allain took it and filled his glass, and Athena took just enough to fill the bottom of her glass, then poured the same amount into Hannah's glass.

"How did you find your space, Hannah?"

"It's nice to have a bed," Hannah replied. She raised the glass to her lips, smelled the acrid fruit, tilted it and allowed a little to fall against her tongue. It tasted terrible. Like poison. Like something that was designed to make you sick. She set it down and wondered if she could ever touch another drop.

"She liked my math book so much she fell asleep on it," Athena blurted. "But she told me she didn't."

Hannah looked sharply at Athena, and the mysterious girl smiled back at her.

"I'm sure you were exhausted," Laura said. "We took you from a difficult place. It's one of the reasons we wanted you home today."

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am," Hannah said. "But I didn't really sleep."

"I gave her my math book," Athena asserted, "and when I came to get her, the book was open and her bed was messed up. So you can draw your own conclusions."

"I'm sure Athena can loan you a more interesting book," Laura said, adding proudly, "I believe she must have read a thousand novels, at every level. Some are very easy to read, though."

"She was supposed to work the problems," Athena said. "So no wonder she passed out."

"I finished," Hannah said.

"Finished what?" Athena asked.

"I finished the problems."

"No you didn't."

“I did.”

“How?” Athena demanded, narrowing her eyes suspiciously.

“Math.”

“You got all the x’s and y’s?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

“A few ways. But usually I made y equal 0 to find x, and then you use that to find y.”

“Show me.”

“Now?” Hannah asked, her mouth full of the best food she’d eaten since her last meal with Mrs. Alvarez. Or possibly ever.

“Okay,” Athena said. “After dinner then.”

Athena continued to stare at Hannah, so Hannah looked toward her plate, and then up at Allain, who was gazing at her as if he could see through her. She smiled at him and that seemed to wake him up. He smiled back and returned to his dinner.

The math had been easy, she thought, but it was something she had always been good at. At Four Pillars, under the instructions of Mr. Pascal, she was allowed to advance quickly through the chapters in her last year. He took her aside more than once to quietly praise her work. But he made it clear it would be better if she said nothing about her progress, especially to the boys. She only mentioned it to her parents once. Neither cared, because such skills were of no use to a girl.

The rest of the dinner conversation was led by Laura, who spoke of family friends, church news, and her children’s studies, but she regularly brought the conversation back to Hannah, continuing to raise questions about her life and her upbringing.

Just as dinner was ending, Athena got permission to be excused and rushed off to the elevator, returning quickly with her math book and the paper Hannah had worked out the answers on.

“Damn,” Athena said.

“Athena, that’s not—” Laura protested.

“She was telling the truth,” Athena said, and she held up the paper to show Hannah’s calculations, scribbled across the sheet. “She worked them all.” Athena flipped to the back of the book. “And she got them right!”

Athena narrowed her eyes at Hannah again. “Are you like, some kind of savant?”

“A savant?” Hannah repeated. “What’s that?”

“It’s like, a person who’s really good at something, but they’re, like, retarded or—”

“Athena,” Laura gasped.

“I’m not retarded,” Hannah said, her cheeks immediately burning, staring into Athena’s eyes. “I’m not retarded.”

“I didn’t say that,” Athena countered. Now it was her turn to blush. “I just didn’t expect that. You know. I just didn’t —”

The family looked on in awkward silence, and Hannah saw herself as they must, and understood Athena’s surprise. They bought her for her body, and her looks, and her assessment scores. Any other skill, particularly of the mind, was unexpected.

Torn between bursting into tears and the devilment of pride, she chose pride. She looked into each pair of eyes, willing them to see them as she saw herself, a bright girl who, through no fault of her own, had wandered through a darkness where she didn’t belong.

“Can she show me how she did it?” Athena asked her mother.

“For half an hour,” Laura said, past being surprised, her eyes nearly twinkling as she smiled at Hannah.

Ormek pushed his chair back, which seemed to be a signal of some sort. The rest of the family rose and the black girl in the maid costume appeared and began clearing the dishes. Hannah looked at her, but the girl did not stare back. Whatever interest she had earlier in Hannah seemed to have been spent.

“C’mon,” Athena said, motioning Hannah to follow her back to the elevator.

“Who’s that girl?” Hannah asked as soon as the elevator doors had closed.

“Raven,” Athena replied. “She belongs to Gramma, but we’re borrowing her for the night, because of you.”

“She cooks?”

“And cleans. And other things. I didn’t say you were retarded.”

“You kind of suggested it.”

“Whatever. I just didn’t think you’d be able to do math like that. Like, instantly. I sort of thought we’d learn it together, and you’d help me. Not already know it all.”

The elevator opened up to a large, plush area, at least double the size of the last apartment Hannah shared with Mother, couches against the wall, dark wood tables and chairs, a pool table, shelves with thousands of books.

Hannah shuffled through, her chains ringing lightly against the floor, and she looked longingly at the space, imagining herself here, reading in solitude.

“This way,” Athena said, leading Hannah down a long hall, doors on either side. She threw open the first door on the left and Hannah followed her, into the kind of bedroom she’d always dreamed of: pink walls, a queen-sized bed, stuffed animals, a huge closet, a desk and computer and books. On the walls, Athena had hung an eclectic range of posters, horses and dragons beside what Hannah guessed were musicians,

scowling men and scantily-clad women, both genders in makeup.

“I like your room,” Hannah said. “Want to trade?”

## **Math, then Downstairs**

Athena, about to sit down at her desk, turned toward Hannah wide-eyed. “You really surprise me, you know? You’re like, you just look at stuff, and then all of a sudden your mouth opens and these words come out.”

“Yeah,” agreed Hannah, stepping to Athena’s window, looking out upon a large backyard with a garden, a pool and a small woods still visible in the day’s fading light. “Show me my mother.”

Athena closed the door and pulled out her phone.

“Here,” she said.

Hannah took it, quickly scrolling through the data. It was mostly the same as before, her mother’s bitter face, basic details about her crime, but at the end of the document, it said that a bond of \$5,000 had been posted and Mother was free until her trial.

“Where is she?” Hannah asked, the lump in her throat quickly turning to tears she hadn’t expected.

“Don’t cry, don’t cry!” Athena whispered. “I don’t know where she is. If mom comes in she’s going to know we’re not doing math. Don’t cry!”

Mother has the money now, Hannah thought, working to calm herself. Enough to post bond. More than enough. But her wealth and her freedom had come at a terrible price: Hannah’s enslavement. If Mrs. Alvarez was sad about what she’d had to do to win her fortune, Mother must be in agony.

Hannah knew, as sure as the rising of the sun, that Mother would be looking for her. And now she had the resources to do it.



“Pull the covers down, and you can sit on the bed,” Athena said. Hannah obeyed.

“Nothing’s coming out, right?” Athena asked.

“What do you mean?”

“You’re not having your period? Or whatever?”

“No,” Hannah said, leaning forward to check. Her period was at least three weeks away, and nothing had happened in the last several hours to arouse her. Her vulva was dry, her lips tucked in, light pink and closed.

She raised her hand to her eyes, saw that her tears had mixed with her mascara and was staining her fingertips. As soon as Mother figured out where she was, she would come, pound on the doors, her educational ignorance combined with her desperation turning her into a punching fury.

With some effort, Hannah turned her mind back to Athena and, for the next 25 minutes, she patiently explained how she’d worked the first five problems. She wasn’t familiar with any of the math before she started, but the book explained it well enough that she was able to pick it up quickly. Athena, however, struggled to understand either the book or Hannah, and Hannah knew that, in math at least, she was simply smarter than Athena. She kept those thoughts to herself, a tutor who didn’t judge. A strange tutor, shackled and naked, in a bedroom in a strange new world.

Someone tapped lightly on the door.

“Come in,” Athena said, and Laura entered.

“Let’s let Hannah have some rest,” she said. “I’m sure she’s exhausted.”

“Hannah’s a genius,” Athena announced.

Hannah looked at the floor, pride mixed with the embarrassment of being talked about as if she weren’t there. She doubted Athena really believed she was a genius, but was just trying to make up for suggesting earlier she was retarded.

“I knew she was a bright girl the first time I saw her,” Laura said. “Hannah, has Athena given you a tour of the

second floor?”

“No, Ma’am.”

“I will tomorrow,” Laura said.

“Or,” she added absently, “maybe I’ll ask Allain to do it.”

Hannah imagined being alone with Allain and her heart skipped a beat. She was beginning to wonder if she’d ever get to be with him. She was no longer completely certain she had been bought for him. Perhaps Ormek would be using her? Or, unlikely as it seemed, Laura? Or Athena?

“Yes, Ma’am, that would be nice,” Hannah said.

“Shall I have Allain take you back to bed?” Laura asked.

“I can,” Athena said.

“Let’s let Allain do it,” Laura said, and she stepped away. Hannah watched her, guessing she was going to get her son.

Athena turned to Hannah, smiling slyly.

“Do you still like Allain?” she asked.

“Yes,” Hannah replied. “Do you think he likes me?”

“Yes,” Athena said. “Too much, probably.”

“What do you mean?”

Athena opened her mouth to speak, but Allain and Laura appeared outside Athena’s door, continuing a conversation that had begun out of earshot.

“Paulie and Jill are having some people over tomorrow,” he said. “I’d like to take her.”

“How late will it go?” Laura’s voice asked from farther down the hall.

“Not past midnight,” he said.

“Will there be drinking?”

“A little, like always.”

“I’ll have to talk to your father. But he’s probably going to say no. We want to give her until the weekend to settle in. Friday night, we’re all going to the Flannigan’s for their party. That would be best.”

“Okay,” Allain agreed, unenthusiastically.

He and Laura exchanged a few more words and Allain turned toward the girls, wearing just blue gym shorts and a white t-shirt.

Hannah rose.

“Allain will be taking you back to bed,” Laura said, “and we won’t be bothering you any more today.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Would you like a book, Hannah?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“What kind?”

“May I pick one out?”

“Of course. Allain, help Hannah with the books.”

Hannah took a step, stopped and turned toward Athena. She wasn’t certain if she should say thanks or just goodnight, but Athena didn’t seem to think words were necessary. She rose and gave Hannah a quick hug.

Hannah nodded and smiled and shuffled out, following Allain while Laura headed in the other direction, down the darkened hall toward what Hannah assumed was the place where she and Ormek slept.

“Where’s your room?” Hannah asked him quietly, her heart thumping in her chest. This is the first time she’d been alone with him, and she could think of only the stupidest question to ask.

“It’s down the hall,” he said, pointing vaguely. “I’ll show it to you tomorrow, but Mom says you have to go back to your, um, place now.”

“What do you call this room?” Hannah asked when they reached to space with the tables and chairs and books.

“The lounge,” he said.

“The lounge,” she repeated. “Are you really going to let me pick out a book?”

“Yes,” he said, and he stopped and looked at her, studying her face as she stared back. He seemed about to say something, but he closed his mouth and remained silent.

“Take as many as you want,” he said.

“What’s your favorite?”

“Oh,” he said, and he laughed. “I loved mysteries and fantasies when I was younger, but now it’s mostly biology.”

Hannah walked over to the shelf and, feeling supremely self-conscious, picked out two books without even reading the titles. She tucked them under her arm and joined Allain at the elevator, entering before him.

As soon as the door closed, she turned to him and looked up at him. He moved toward her, wrapped his arm around her shoulders and forced his mouth against hers. Their first kiss was almost violent in its intensity, his mouth open, his tongue forcing her teeth apart, breathing into her, his other hand reaching up now, to squeeze her breast, to stroke her nipple.

This is what Hannah had been waiting for, since the first time she’d seen Allain, or maybe since Mrs. Alvarez had taken her. Or perhaps all her life.

She let the books fall and grabbed Allain’s hand, holding it in place against her breast, arching her middle forward to force her clitoris against his leg. She felt his penis, aching hard, against her hip, and she knew that if he were nude, he would be in her now, her wet lips welcoming him, closing around him.

“I need to make love to you,” he said quietly into her ear, as if confessing something shameful, then he returned his mouth to hers.

The elevator door opened and Hannah reminded herself that this probably wasn't supposed to be happening, that Laura intended for Allain only to bring her downstairs, confine her and leave her there for the night. Was kissing Allain back a sort of disobedience? If he pulled down his shorts and entered her, would that be wrong?

He pulled away and looked at her with longing.

"Don't forget your books," he said, an ache in his voice. Hannah bent, gathered them without really being able to see them, and stumbled after Allain to her cage.

She opened the door herself, stepped in, set her books on her bed and turned to watch him close the lock.

Then he looked at her and she read his eyes and returned to him, kissing him as deeply as before, through the bars, her vagina yearning for him, her fluid gushing toward her opening.

He reached down, between the bars, parted her lips and gently touched her wet hole. Her hips immediately began rocking with a mind of their own.

"Tomorrow," he said, pulling away again. He knelt, unlocked her shackles and hung them on one of the pegs under the window.

With one last smile, he turned away, and she watched until she could no longer see him, profoundly frustrated, almost enraged with lust.

## **Raven at Night**

Still standing at the bars, she reached between her legs, felt her slit and caressed her clitoris. She didn't want her hand. She wanted Allain there, and she imagined briefly trying to work her way out of her cage, take the elevator to him, find his room and practice everything she had learned in the last four days. Instead, she threw herself on her bed and grabbed

her pillow, driving her face into it, cursing herself for her godless lust and her hunger and her helplessness.

Unable to sleep, unable to assuage her frustration, she lay there in the half light, losing track of time until a voice startled her back to the present.

“Hannah?” Laura said from the elevator. “We’re here.”

Hannah rolled off her bed and stepped to the bars, surprised by the intrusion.

Laura rounded the corner, Raven following her, her maid costume gone, her body completely bare. She glanced at Hannah briefly, a half-smile on her face. Hannah noticed first that she was allowed to go without chains, then her eyes went to her full breasts, at least C cup, and her hairless mound.

Laura opened the other cage door and Raven stepped in, immediately walking to the toilet to relieve herself.

“Thank you for dinner, Raven, it was very good,” Laura said, locking the door.

“Thank you very much, Ma’am,” Raven said, wiping herself.

“Would you like me to leave the door open between you?” Laura asked.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Raven replied, flushing her toilet.

“Hannah? Would you like that?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said reflexively, uncertain what she was agreeing to.

Laura handed a key to Raven and she used it to unlock the door between their cages, swinging it wide. She returned the key to Laura and Laura pocketed it and offered Hannah one more smile.

“Someone will come for you tomorrow after the sun comes up,” she said. “I hope you’ll sleep well.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you Ma’am.”

Laura left for the elevator, and Hannah heard her hit the light switches, plunging the room into near-blackness. Hannah felt her way back to her bed and sat down, looking in the direction of Raven.

“You cooked everything?”

“I did,” Raven said. “One of my talents.”

“It was very good,” Hannah said. “One of the best dinners I’ve ever had. Maybe ever in my life.”

“That’s sweet of you to say.”

Raven had a deep voice, strong and confident, her accent neutral, like all of the Petrosyans except Ormek.

Hannah could hear her moving, washing her face at the sink, sliding onto her bed.

“Have they owned you all your life?”

“Since I was seven, when my parents died in a plane crash.”

“Oh, I’m so sorry.”

“It’s fine. I didn’t like them much.”

Hannah listened in the darkness, wishing she could see Raven’s face. Was she being serious?

“How did you end up here?” Raven asked.

“My mother went broke. A week ago.”

“Well, you’ve been through some changes,” Raven observed.

Hannah laughed. “You have too. Just a long time ago.”

“My parents were rich. Dad was surveying a site for a new plant in Malaysia. That’s when they died, flying there. Then the state got all their money, and they wouldn’t let my aunt have me because she had a drug conviction, so they sold me off.”

“What would you be if you weren’t a slave?” Hannah asked.

“Alice.”

“Alice?”

“Yes, Alice. That was my name before Gramma bought me.”

“She changed your name?”

“Yes. From Alice to Raven.”

“Raven ...” Hannah repeated. “Because you’re—”

“Black,” Raven said.

“Does it bother you that they changed your name?”

“Depends on the name.”

“You like Raven more than Alice?”

“Yes, don’t you?”

“I do,” said Hannah, because any other answer would have been rude. In truth, she wasn’t sure. Both names were nice. But she didn’t want her name changed. She should always be Hannah.

“But what would you want to be, in your life?” Hannah asked. “Not just your name.”

“A teacher. What about you?”

“A wife,” Hannah said.

“That’s it?”

“I don’t know,” Hannah admitted. “It’s the only thing I’ve ever thought about being.”

Raven drew in her breath. “So, do you want to be together?”

“What do you mean?”

“Tonight. Now. That’s why Laura let me unlock the door.”

“Oh,” Hannah replied, “I didn’t know that’s why she did that.”

“You don’t want to?”



“I . . . I . . .” Hannah stammered. “I can. I like boys, though.”

“So do I,” Raven said. “But it’s been a week for me.”

“Oh,” Hannah said, not sure what she wanted to do, the place between her legs still wet and tingling, but all her lust focused on Allain.

“They worked you pretty hard in the stacks, didn’t they?”

“Almost every day,” Hannah said. “This morning too.”

“I understand.”

“Well,” Hannah stammered, “what would you want to do?”

“Just the usual,” Raven replied, and Hannah wondered again if she were joking or being ironic, or something else. “It would be nice to kiss, and it’s fine if that’s all we do. But I’d liked to be licked if you’re up for it.”

“Between your legs?” Hannah inquired.

“Yes.”

“I’m still getting used to that,” Hannah said, but she imagined having another body against hers, a mouth to kiss, even if it were a girl’s, and realized she preferred it to nothing, at least tonight.

Her eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness. Somewhere outside, a light burned, shining through the little windows at the top of the wall, casting faint shadows over everything. She could see the silhouette of the bars that held her, and when she looked toward Raven’s voice, she could just make out the girl’s form, lying on her side on her bed, the curves of her shoulder and hip a soft gray.

“Yes,” Hannah said quietly, surprised by the racing of her heart. After all she had done, why did this make her nervous?

She watched the form move, uncoil, rise and cross the threshold into her cage. She lay back on her bed, holding still as Raven reached her, bent to feel the edge of her bed, then put a knee on it and angled slowly down beside her.

“Do you want me to lead?” Raven whispered, her mouth inches from Hannah’s ear, her hand resting on Hannah’s belly.

“Yes, please,” Hannah whispered back.

Raven’s hand moved up, cupping Hannah’s left breast, and she felt Raven’s breath on her mouth and parted her lips, their first kiss light and brief, their second long and open-mouthed, tongues exploring.

Raven pulled away and squeezed Hannah’s breast to raise it to her mouth, taking her nipple in between her teeth and sucking hard, as if she expected milk.

“Uh, Jesus,” Hannah grunted, surprised by the way that pleasure and pain could meld together into something that was more than either, deliciously good, beyond pleasure.

They kissed again, Hannah running her hands across Raven’s body, feeling the curves and lines, the bones at her shoulders and spine, the soft places at her breasts and between her legs. Raven raised her leg, accommodating Hannah’s attention to her sex, and Hannah reached inside, between the moistening lips, feeling her partner’s warm honey, smearing it over her lips and clitoris.

“Me on top?” Raven whispered.

“Yes.”

Raven slid off the bed, stood and dropped back down, carefully positioning her knees at Hannah’s shoulders, thighs spread wide. Hannah opened her own legs in response, and Raven lowered her mouth, quickly finding Hannah’s lips and clitoris, licking from the top of her folds to her opening.

Hannah, well aware she was not being watched now, she was not being scored now, and was doing this in the darkness of night, grunted, rocked her pelvis and raised her

head without any hesitation, sliding her tongue along Raven's hairless sex.

She was getting used to the taste of a girl, she thought, even beginning to like it.

Raven's hole was wet, sweeter than Sam's or Elana's, and Hannah pushed her tongue inside, as far as she could get it, devouring Raven's honey while Raven rocked above her.

Hannah grunted and raised her hips, and Raven seemed to sense Hannah was ready, focusing on her clit, flicking it with her tongue, closing her mouth around it and sucking it in.

Feeling the orgasm building, Hannah did her best to reciprocate, applying everything she'd learned in the last four days – about herself and the two females she'd been with.

The girls came together, each rocking against the other's mouth, gasping out as intolerable pleasures wracked their bodies and minds.

"Oh, jesusjesusjesus," Hannah moaned, wrapping her arms around Raven's bucking waist, her own back arching involuntarily.

Nothing spilled out of Raven when she came, but Hannah, panting in the darkness, the girl's sex inches above her mouth, didn't think it would have bothered her. It was just another part of what people did together, she decided. Sexmind.

Raven moved over her again, slowly, turning to lie down beside her, her soft breath against Hannah's ear, and Hannah turned toward her, passed her tongue over Raven's nipple and kissed her on the lips, platonically, not interested in doing any more now, wondering if Raven were.

She closed her eyes and listened to the girl's steady breathing, taking stock of all that had befallen her in a week. Invariably, perhaps, she began wrestling with the question of Jesus again, offered a perfunctory prayer, and concluded that they needed to create a new sort of Christianity for this, that

nothing she'd read in the Bible or learned at Four Pillars seemed to apply to what was happening to her now.

But it wasn't wrong. She knew that. This isn't wrong.

## **Raven in the Morning**

When Hannah opened her eyes again, it was still dark, but she sensed that hours had passed. Raven had gotten up at some point and returned to her own cage, but Hannah could see her outline there, and the bars of the open door between them. She turned over, wrapped the blanket around her shoulders and fell back to sleep.

The next time she awoke, she raised her head, saw a glow at the narrow row of windows and knew it must be early morning. She could see all of Raven now, lying naked on her bed, her sheets kicked off, her ribs rising and falling.

Hannah crept to her toilet, flushed and slipped back into bed, hoping she hadn't awakened Raven. But she heard Raven sigh, heard the rustling of sheets, and then her voice, still husky.

"Sleep okay?" she asked.

"Yeah," Hannah replied, running through what they had done the night before. Were they lovers? Friends? How would a relationship like theirs be described?

"Raven?"

"Yes?"

"The first time I saw you, you just stared at me. In the kitchen. What were you thinking?"

Raven rose, moved to her toilet, looked over at Hannah.

"I was just wondering what all the fuss was about."

Hannah laughed. "Fuss?"

“Oh, you created a stir. Once they got your scores, it was Hannah this, Hannah that, gotta go buy Hannah before someone else gets her.”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “That’s kind of embarrassing.”

“Everyone wants to meet you. Everyone wants to see you.”

“Why?”

“It’s always a big deal when they buy someone, especially a recreational girl. And then, everyone knows they paid more than a million for you. They’re not supposed to know, but the word’s kind of getting out. Everyone’s phone was ringing while I made dinner, they finally had to turn them off.”

“That’s weird to think about,” Hannah observed.

“They’re going to show you off to everyone. You know that, right?”

“I guess,” Hannah said.

“You’re better than a car. You’re better than a nice house. A girl like you says rich like nothing else can. So they’ll take you everywhere. They’ll dress you up like a doll in public, and then they’ll strip you in private.”

Hannah rolled over to face the wall, her stomach churning. She closed her eyes and tried not to imagine what lay before her. She sensed for the first time stirrings elsewhere in the house, the faint sound of water in pipes, footsteps, a closing door.

Raven rose from the toilet and stepped through the door and over to Hannah’s bed, sitting at the foot.

“Don’t let it go to your head,” she advised.

“It’s all too weird to go to my head,” Hannah retorted. “I don’t even know what’s happening.”

“You’ll figure it out,” Raven said. “You’ll get used to it. And you’ll like it. But don’t ... but don’t—”

Raven shook her head, closed her eyes and drew in her breath, then turned her eyes to Hannah, and Hannah saw they were wet with tears.

“As soon as you think you’re one of them, they’ll break your heart,” she said. “Remember your place and it won’t hurt when they remind you what you are.”

Hannah heard the quiet bump of the elevator door. It was a subtle sound, but it meant a Petrosyan was coming, and she sat up in her bed.

“Hannah? Raven?” Laura inquired from just out of view.

“Good morning, Ma’am,” Raven said.

“Good morning, Ma’am,” Hannah echoed.

Laura rounded the corner, still in her nightclothes, a thick silk shirt in light blue that stopped at her knees.

“How was your sleep, Hannah?”

“Very good, Ma’am.”

“Did you girls get a chance to mate?” she asked, smiling.

Hannah looked down, glad it was still too dim for Laura to see her blush.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Raven replied. “Right after you brought me down.”

“What did you do?”

“Kissing and oral sex,” Raven answered. “It took about 30 minutes, and then we went to sleep.”

Hannah stared at her, first with a sense of betrayal, then remembering Raven’s words. They were not one of them. They were property. More valuable than a pet, of course, but not worthy of the respect they would give each other. Surely Laura would never ask Allain or Athena what they had done with a partner.

“Hannah,” Laura said. “Did Raven satisfy you?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied. She looked at Raven and smiled awkwardly, and Raven nodded back with an expression that, Hannah knew, was meant only for her, an expression that said this is how things were, that the Petrosyans had their ways and it was best to humor them.

“Raven belongs to my mother,” Laura said, looking into Hannah’s eyes. “We can borrow her two or three times a week, whenever you want her company. Would you like that?”

“Yes ... yes, Ma’am,” Hannah stammered. “Thank you, Ma’am.”

“We can also borrow a boy for you, now and then, when you need one. There are a few in the neighborhood you might like.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Laura beamed. “We are so pleased to have you.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Laura turned to Raven. “Are you ready to get breakfast on?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Laura turned to the pegs under the window.

“Where are your chains?”

“Athena put them in the pantry as soon as I got here yesterday.”

“Do you think Hannah’s shackles will fit you?”

“I think we’re the same size, yes Ma’am.”

Laura pulled Hannah’s restraints from the wall and Raven stepped up to the port, watching as Hannah’s chains were applied to her ankles, then looking over one more time at Hannah, offering another half smile that Hannah returned. This was a sort of language, she thought, a way of looking at each other that spoke volumes, that only subjects could understand, immediately comprehensible to anyone who had ever been owned.

Laura passed the key to Raven, and she locked the door between their cages.

“Someone should be down for you soon, Hannah,” Laura said, opening Raven’s cage. “You’ll want to bathe now.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Hannah wondered if Raven would be forced to make breakfast in the nude, and if she had been dressed for dinner last night because it was a more formal event. Raven had been brought to her cage last night without any chains. This morning, Laura chained her to bring her back upstairs. Perhaps the rules, about clothing and restraints, were arbitrary, subject to the whims of the family.

Hannah felt a slight pang when she realized she was being excluded from breakfast this morning, but she imagined it was less formal, family members just breezing through on their way to other things, school or work or errands. Allain was supposed to give her a tour of the house, and she pondered that, hoping he would come soon, and he would want her the way he had last night. She imagined hearing him at the elevator, appearing at her bars, and her empty stomach churned. She hoped she would be fed soon.

She was glad for the instruction to shower, as standing under the hot water took her mind off everything else, as it always did. She dried off slowly, rubbed her hair to dampness, then turned to the books she’d picked up the day before. One looked like a college biology textbook, the depictions on its cover of various creatures’ cardio-vascular systems all precise and meticulously labeled. The other book was a paperback, a novel with a boy, a girl and an old car on the cover. The title was “The Boy at the Drive-In,” and Hannah guessed it was one of Athena’s adolescent romances and she turned to the textbook first and lost herself in the science of breathing and blood.

“Hi,” a male voice said, and she started from her book and looked up to see Allain, Raven beside him, both peering in at her.

“Hey,” she said. “How was breakfast?”



“Darcy didn’t bring you any?” Allain asked.

“No,” Hannah retorted. “Who’s Darcy?”

“The maid,” Raven said, and she walked into her cage and sat on her bed, leaning against the bars, her feet still chained.

Allain, in the shorts and t-shirt he wore the night before, followed Raven into her cage, using a key hanging from his wrist to lock them both in.

### **A Visit from Allain**

As Hannah watched with a growing sense of both arousal and anxiety, he unlocked the door between the cages, stepped in and locked it back. She looked up from her bed at him, forgetting Raven now, and he stared back at her, the look in his eye something new, intense.

Slowly, he pulled off his shirt. He was well-built, fit, toned muscles under his pale skin.

Never taking his eyes off Hannah, he slid down his shorts, exposing himself to her, his penis quickly hardening.

Hannah, heart pounding, slid off her bed and approached him, wishing to her surprise that someone was there to tell her what to do. If he didn’t instruct her, she decided, she would run through the steps of yesterday’s assessment, and she moved to him, raised his penis and pressed it between their bellies, lifting her mouth to his.

He kissed her the same way he had in the elevator, hungrily and deep, and she answered him with her tongue and her mouth, drinking him in.

When he pulled away and looked into her eyes again, she sensed what he wanted next, and she dropped to her knees and made love to his penis with her mouth, licking the underside, wrapping her mouth around the tip, slowly allowing as much of the shaft into her as she could comfortably hold.

It was as large as either of the two penises she'd accepted at the stacks, perhaps larger, or at least longer, and she sucked and tasted while Allain stood there, his breath coming fast and sharp.

Hannah thought about Raven, sitting on her bed a few feet away, forced to witness in silence, and her mind turned briefly to the likelihood that Allain and Raven had done this, had been together. Hannah, lost in arousal, didn't care, at least not now, about either Raven's history or presence.

Hannah looked up at Allain, her mouth still coddling his member, and he looked back and whispered to her, "On the bed."

She slid her mouth back far enough to ask, softly, "How?"

"Hands and knees."

She stood, smoothed her sheets and dropped to her hands and knees, positioning her legs so that Allain could kneel between them. He was behind her immediately, parting her lips with one hand, guiding his penis up her hole with the other, first halfway, as if to sample her sheath, then all the way in.

"Oh, oh, oh," Hannah grunted, holding still while Allain settled into a quick rhythm, and then rocking back and forth subtly to match his thrusts. Along with her thick arousal was a conscious effort to become familiar with the way his sex felt inside her. As he drove in and out, she tightened, relaxed, tightened again, using her wet walls to gauge his tip, to sample the thickness of his shaft, to get a sense of the way he pushed, how hard he pushed when he put all of himself inside her body.

He was in her for no more than two minutes before she felt him tense, heard the orgasm building in his throat.

"Ahhh, ahhh, ahhh," he sighed, and she knew that he was squirting into her now, could almost sense the white cream flooding the depths of her chamber.

Spent, Allain stayed on his knees behind her, gently sliding his still-stiff penis in and out of her while she rocked. Then he was out of her, off the bed.

Fighting a desperate disappointment, Hannah turned to see him pulling up his shorts, doing his best to draw them over his wet penis. He pulled on his shirt and smiled at her – an embarrassed smile, she thought, as if this weren't exactly how he'd wanted things to go the first time they were together.

"I'll be back in about an hour to give you a tour," he said huskily, his eyes half-closed now, ready to go to sleep it seemed.

"I'd like that," Hannah said, masking her disappointment and uncertainty with flippancy, as she had many times before in the last week. "I hope you liked the tour of, um, my place."

He stared at her, his mind working through her words, as if he knew what she meant but couldn't believe she'd said it. Finally, he laughed, turned and unlocked the door into Raven's cage, locked it back, nodded to Raven and let himself out of her cage and toward the elevator.

Once Hannah heard the elevator door close, she rose and stepped to the toilet, wiping Allain's semen off, urinating.

Then she looked at Raven, a mute witness to what had just happened.

"Well done," Raven said, leaning back on her bed, legs crossed, her ankles still shackled.

"Well done what?" Hannah demanded.

"You gave him what he wanted. Exactly what he wanted."

"What did he want?"

"Wasn't it obvious?" Raven asked.

"Just that? Just to orgasm in me?"

"Yeah, for now. That's probably all he had time for."

"He's too busy to talk to me?"

Hannah flushed the toilet, drifted to her bed and sat down, passing a hand under her eyes to wipe away the tears collecting there.

“Please please please don’t cry, Baby,” Raven implored. “You’re going to get everything you want from him, I promise. Just not every time. Or not always when you expect it.”

“Why was he too busy this morning to do it right?”

“I didn’t say he was too busy, I said he didn’t have time.”

“I don’t see the difference.”

“Okay,” Raven said, “Athena left for school, Ormek left for the clinic, Laura told Allain to put me back in my cage as soon as I was done in the kitchen, and she headed up to take a shower. So I’m clearing dishes and Allain started helping me, which he never does, but it still took about 10 minutes, then he had to get me downstairs, get to you, get done and get back upstairs before Laura got out of the bathroom and suspected he’d been with you.”

“I don’t follow any of that,” Hannah admitted.

Raven rolled her eyes, but she smiled and Hannah suspected she was enjoying explaining how things worked in the Petrosyan household.

“Allain doesn’t want anyone to know he fucked you this morning,” Raven said. “Simple as that.”

“Isn’t that why they bought me?”

“Yes, but they don’t know about Allain, and he doesn’t want them to know.”

“Know what?”

“That he never stops. The he can probably cum five times a day. If he gets a chance, he’ll do you again this afternoon. And if he takes you to bed tonight, you’re not going to be able to walk tomorrow morning.”

“I might get to spend the night with him?”

“If Laura says so. But don’t be surprised if he plays it cool, you know? He’ll probably say something over dinner like, that maybe you could help him review some of last semester’s work, and you’ll end up in his bedroom, and you’ll stay.”

Hannah wanted it to be true, but the hurt was still there. The frustration lingered too, of being entered, stimulated and abandoned. She looked down at her opening and spread her lips. A shot of Allain’s white cream spilled onto her sheet.

“Are you going to masturbate?” Raven asked.

“I don’t know how.”

“Seriously?”

“I never learned,” Hannah admitted.

“Tell me you’re joking.”

“Mother was always there. I didn’t even know you could do something like that.”

“I could teach you. It’s pretty simple.”

“I’m going to learn on my own,” Hannah said. “I just haven’t been alone long enough to try.”

“Are you still frustrated?”

“Of course,” Hannah said, looking down at her vulva again. “It’s got a mind of its own.”

“I can get you there,” Raven said, leaning forward on her bed. “If you want me to.”

“Allain locked the door,” Hannah observed.

“I can do it through the bars,” Raven said, and she rose and knelt, her body at the edge of her cage.

“Do what?” Hannah asked, lost again.

“Come to the bars and spread your legs, and I’ll lick you.”

Hannah stared at Raven, trying to tell if she were being serious.

“I mean it. Think of it as payback for last night.”

“You don’t have to pay me back for last night. I liked it.”

“You don’t want me to?”

“No, you can,” Hannah said, reluctantly sliding off her bed, playing through the arguments for and against letting Raven do this. Her strongest argument against, that Allain might return, collapsed when she realized she didn’t care if he saw. If he were going to use her and leave, he couldn’t complain if she took care of her own needs some other way.

Certain now, her clitoris beginning to perk up with the memory of last night’s coupling, she stepped to the kneeling Raven, grabbed the bars, spread her legs and leaned her pelvis forward.

## **A Favor from Raven**

Raven started slowly, just the tip of her tongue against Hannah’s hair and clitoris. Hannah looked down and sighed, content to see herself as she was. This was obscene, as scandalous as anything she’d ever done to herself, or someone else had ever done, she thought, but this was her, and it was good. She looked down, watching Raven’s tongue extend, working down from the top of her slit to her opening, pressing between her lips to work the tip of her tongue into the hole.

“It doesn’t bother you?” Hannah whispered.

“What?” Raven asked, pulling away and looking up, her hand down at her own sex, massaging.

“Allain’s ... what Allain left in me.”

“No,” Raven said. “I like the taste.”

“Have you tasted it before?”

Raven returned her mouth to Hannah’s vulva, passing her tongue from opening to clit three delicious times before she leaned back to answer.

“Yes,” she said. “Does that bother you?”

“He’s had sex with you?”

“Yeah.”

Hannah felt herself tensing against Raven’s mouth, but if the girl noticed, she didn’t show it, continuing to service Hannah’s hole with steady determination as she worked her own parts with her fingers.

“Did he talk?”

“Sometimes yes, sometimes no,” Raven replied, pausing only briefly from her attentions.

Hannah decided it didn’t matter, that there was no reason to care, and indeed she didn’t. She’d had sex with two other boys in the last week, and Allain must have known and obviously didn’t care. Why should it be different for her? Jealousy in this world made no sense.

She chased all the distractions out of her mind and concentrated on letting Raven give her an orgasm, but she heard the quiet bump of the elevator door and turned briefly. Certain it was Allain, she thought about pulling away, reminded herself she wanted to be caught doing this and pressed forward as far as the bars would allow, surprisingly aroused by what was about to happen.

But Allain didn’t speak nor appear out of the corner of her eye. Instead, she heard more bumps, louder, as if things were being moved or dropped.

Wanting Allain to think that all her attention was on Raven, she looked down, so he would be forced to speak to her, or step beside her to get her attention, but she could no longer contain her curiosity and looked back just as a short, middle-aged Hispanic woman pushing a cart drew into view.

“Oh,” Hannah said, turning away from Raven, her face an instant crimson, certain she had been caught doing something terrible she’d be punished for. Or, at least, doing something appallingly shameful.

“Hello,” the woman said brightly. “You must be Hannah.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, relieved by the woman’s friendliness, but no less embarrassed.

“Hey, Darcy,” Raven said, standing. “Do you mind if we finish?”

“I need to get back upstairs. I’ll just be a minute or two.”

Raven stood and slipped her hands through the chaining port, and Darcy closed the brackets around her wrists.

“You too, Hannah.”

Following Raven’s example, Hannah put her hands through the port and allowed Darcy to lower the brackets, clamping her wrists tightly. Embarrassment gave way to frustration, the discomfort of the brackets around her wrists combined with an urgent sexual desire. Despite her inexperience in the matter, she felt she had been less than a minute from orgasm.

Darcy opened Raven’s cage first, changed the towels even though Raven hadn’t used them, scrubbed the toilet, wiped the sink and straightened Raven’s sheets.

“How old are you, Hannah?” Darcy asked, unlocking the door from Raven’s cage into hers.

“18, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

“Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

“No, Ma’am. Well, two half-brothers, but I haven’t seen them in years.”

“Did you go to school?”

“Yes, Ma’am, until I was 15,” Hannah replied, briefly enduring the discomfort of turning her head to address Darcy. Looking away from an adult who was speaking to her seemed rude, she thought, but Darcy had restrained her, so it was her fault. Hannah gave up trying to address Darcy directly, faced



the outside of her cage, casting an occasional glance to the side to look at Raven.

Finished with the cages, Darcy passed back through the middle door, locked it, left Raven's cage and locked that door too, then she released the girl's hands.

"Where were we?" Raven asked, returning to the bars to kneel.

Hannah rubbed her wrists, looked uncertainly at Darcy and moved halfway back to Raven, who was staring up at her expectantly, hand back at her vulva.

Darcy turned her back, pushing her cart past the cages, clearly unconcerned about what Hannah and Raven were doing. She was, Hannah told herself, no different from everyone else who had watched her have sex over the last five days, just there to get her job done. Hannah grabbed the bars, looked down at Raven and thrust her pelvis into her friend's mouth, smiling as Raven immediately cupped her tongue around Hannah's genitals.

Quickly resuming her progress toward orgasm, Hannah continued to rock gently against Raven's mouth when Darcy interrupted again.

"When will you start your period, Hannah?"

"Probably in a few weeks," Hannah said, trying to keep her voice steady.

"Do you use tampons?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"I'll drop off a few tomorrow."

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am."

Now Hannah's words were coming in short gasps, followed by steady grunts as she willed her body to climax. Darcy's questions were only a minor distraction.

"Here's a towel to wipe your vagina with," Darcy said, draping a small white cloth over the bars. "Please don't leak anything on the carpet or the comforter."

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am,” Hannah said, and then her breath came hard and fast as a wave of pleasure roared from her sex to the rest of her body. “Yeah, yeah, yeah,” she whispered. “Oh, god.”

Moments later, Raven brought herself to completion, groaning out as her fingers danced at her clitoris, her mouth still pressed between Hannah’s legs.

Finished now, Raven stood and closed her eyes, and Hannah knew she wanted a kiss and obliged her with a short peck, feeling self-conscious again in front of Darcy now that her raging sexmind had been calmed. She tasted herself on Raven’s mouth.

“Have you had breakfast, Hannah?” Darcy asked.

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, her voice thick. She grabbed the towel from the bars, stood with her legs spread, wiped her vulva and handed the towel back to Darcy.

“Would you like some?”

“Yes, please.”

Darcy departed with her cart and Raven rolled onto her bed, lifting up her elbows to look at Hannah.

“Is Darcy going to tell everyone what we did?” Hannah asked, sliding onto her own bed. She didn’t care, she just wanted to know.

“Why would she do that?” Raven asked.

“Well, Laura this morning, she asked you about, about everything.”

“Yeah, that’s what she does.”

“Why?”

“You know what they think of you?”

“No,” Hannah replied anxiously, suddenly terrified. Would the Petrosyans decide she was inferior after all? She imagined them sharing their misgivings with Raven over breakfast this morning.

“They think you have a higher sex drive than any of them, and they don’t want you to get frustrated.”

“Oh, no!” Hannah said, so stunned by the revelation she could think of nothing to do but laugh. “Why would they think that?”

“Well, your assessment score for one. That really impressed them. But kind of intimidated them too.”

“Okay,” Hannah said blankly.

“I’m just telling you so you’ll understand Laura’s questions. She wants to make sure you’re being taken care of. That’s why they had me spend the night. And they’ll be bringing boys to you, when they’re free.”

“Here? To my cage?”

“Yeah. During the week a few times. When Allain’s at school. And you can always ask for me, like Laura said.”

“Who brings you?”

“Gramma, usually. Laura’s mother.”

“Do they chain you?”

“Yes. Always in the car.”

“You don’t mind?”

“I do. But it’s worth it. I like you.”

## **Raven Departs**

Hannah looked at her, reminding herself she wasn’t a lesbian, but glad for Raven’s presence and the pleasure she brought.

“So you’re okay with all this?” Raven asked.

“All what?”

“Everything? Being owned? Being in a cage?”

Hannah looked down at the floor.

“I don’t know. Everything’s happening so fast. I feel like I can’t even keep up. I might hate it, but I don’t know yet.”

“You haven’t thought about trying to escape, have you?”

“No,” Hannah replied, probably more adamantly than necessary. She hadn’t, and if she did, she wouldn’t say a word about it. She remembered in sudden, vivid detail, her punishment from the day before.

“They turn an alarm system on at night,” Raven said. “If someone opens the door or the window without the code, the alarm goes off. And they have security cameras, and the alarm goes off if the cameras see anyone in the yard. And then, if a runaway is reported, the police start looking, and they’ll all get your picture and your chip number, and if none of them see you, you go into a database, and there are people who make a living just finding runaways, because the rewards are huge. And good luck getting your collar off. It takes an hour with a special kind of saw. So you’ll always be hiding. And then, if they catch you, you don’t just come home. It’s a minimum of a week at a place that does punishment. Seven days of it. They’ll do anything they want to you there. And then you come back here, or they sell you to someone else, and you’ll be a runaway from then on, so extra chains, extra cage time, and they’ll never trust you. And being stolen is no excuse. If you disappear, it’s your fault, even if someone grabbed you.”

As Raven talked, Hannah grew distraught to the point of panic, and she closed her eyes and rolled over to face the wall.

“Hannah?”

“I’m okay,” Hannah said. “It’s just hard to hear. People are so nice, and then so mean at the same time.”

“Make the most of the good times,” Raven said. “It’s how I get by. But it’s gonna be harder for you.”

“Why?”

“Because you were free until what, a week ago?”

“Eight days. Last Tuesday. But I wasn’t really free.”

“What do you mean?”

“Mother and I were really poor. And I was always with her. She watched me like a hawk. I couldn’t do anything. I’m not sure I could go back to that life, even if I had a choice.”

She rolled over, raised herself on one elbow and looked into Raven’s eyes, and the girl smiled back, but there was pain in the smile, the kind of suffering smile she had seen over and over, in the stacks, among the slaves, and even on the faces of the free people.

This is the way Mrs. Alvarez would smile, from now on, Hannah thought. It’s the way her mother would smile too. Hannah turned to the wall again and wept to herself. She knew her shoulders were shaking and Raven knew she was crying, and she prayed that Raven wouldn’t say anything, to her or anyone else. They could strip her, put things inside her, write down things about her, torture her, watch her have sex, send lovers to her cage and track her orgasms, but her pain would be her own thing, a privacy she would share only on her own terms.

Raven held her tongue, but when Hannah was done with her tears and sat up, the girl was studying her, staring at her between the bars. Raven raised an eyebrow in silent question. A single tear ran down her cheek and she wiped it away quickly.

A plate of food had been set on the floor, slipped through the lower chaining port, by Darcy presumably, while Hannah cried, and she rolled off her bed and sat down beside it, picking up what looked like sausage and eggs and other things wrapped in a tortilla.

“This tastes like your work,” Hannah said with her mouth full.

“Thanks, I guess. But Darcy helped.”

“It’s good,” Hannah assured. “Other than in the stacks, everything’s been good.” She took another bite. “Want to

know what my last meal was with Mother?"

"Yeah."

"An apple. Just an apple. To share with her. We took turns biting it. And then the people came and I didn't even finish."

Hannah's eyes filled with tears again, and Raven slid off her bed and crouched at the bars.

"Baby," she whispered. "Sweetheart."

Hannah looked up at her, still chewing.

"Promise me you're gonna hang in there," Raven whispered.

"I'm fine," Hannah said. "I'll be fine. Babies cry when they get born. It doesn't mean they want to go back to being fetuses."

Raven laughed and Hannah smiled back at her, mouth full of food.

Hannah and Raven continued to talk quietly, of their lives and their owners and their dreams, for another 30 minutes, until Allain appeared again, showered and dressed for the day, in navy shorts and a white golf shirt.

He held up a length of chain and looked at Raven. "Ready to go home?"

"Yes, Sir," she replied, but she stepped to the bars separating her from Hannah. "Are you gonna say goodbye to me?"

Hannah rose, moved to the bars, and Raven put her arms through, drawing Hannah close, offering her mouth. Hannah, seizing the chance to show Allain he wasn't her only lover, replied with a passion that wasn't entirely feigned, opening her mouth and sucking on Raven's tongue, her hips rocking subtly but, she knew, in a way that Allain would not miss.

"You hang in there," Raven said, pulling away, stepping to the chaining ports but continuing to smile at

Hannah.

Allain removed the shackles, clicked the cuffs around Raven's wrists and ankles, and opened her cage door.

"I'll be back in about an hour," Allain said to Hannah, looking at her for the first time, studying her. Could he tell she'd been crying? "I've just got to get Raven home. And then I'll give you that tour."

"Okay," Hannah said. She'd asked Athena for a clock and Athena had said yes, but there was no clock yet, and at this moment, she desperately wished she had one.

"See you Friday," Raven said.

"Oh, you will?"

"Big party. They're going to show you off. And I'll be there too."

"That will be nice," Hannah said, but she was certain it wouldn't be. She didn't want to be shown off.

"You make sure Athena buys you something nice to wear," Raven said, continuing to talk as Allain led her to the elevator. "You'll look good in black. Or red."

Hannah returned to her toilet as the elevator bumped and closed, then she sat on the bed and opened the biology book, leafing through to look at the pictures before she returned to the front page and read in earnest, losing track of time and place.

When she heard the quiet thud of the elevator, she assumed it was Darcy back for her plate, but she looked up and saw Allain, standing at the bars nude, his penis fully erect.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 7: Hannah in a Strange World**

### **The Tour Begins**

Hannah looked at Allain, startled but determined not to show it. He was just another nude boy, after all. She'd seen many. She rose, stepped to the bars, coming just close enough so that his tip was an inch from her belly button.

"You promised me a tour," she observed.

"I did," he agreed, and he retrieved her shackles from the peg. She moved to the chaining port and he fastened her ankles together and unlocked her door.

"I've already seen this floor," she said, choking the words out. Her vagina had quickly wetted itself, her lips and clitoris throbbing. If he asked her to talk, or to do anything harder than walk with him, she was going to falter.

He pressed the elevator door, allowed her to enter first. She turned to him, looked into his eyes, and then down at his penis. The elevator door closed and she lowered her hand to his middle, grabbing his shaft gently behind the head. He thrust toward her, pulled back and she massaged it lightly, then let go and leaned against the wall. He hit the button for the second floor.

"We're starting where the bedrooms are?" she asked.

"Yeah," he said. "My bedroom first."

"Okay," she said. "Is anyone else here?"

"No, everyone's gone."

They ascended in silence, walked in silence through the lounge, past the books and down the hall to Allain's room, the same size as Athena's but decorated for a boy, strange



posters on the walls of monsters and space soldiers, a desk and dressers in dark cherry, a king-sized bed against the wall.

He locked his door with a key, used a second key to unlock her shackles, and put her chains and both keys into his dresser drawer.

Then he turned to her.

“How do you want to start?” she asked.

Allain answered by pulling his covers down and turning to her, waiting for her to act. Did he want her to lead? She lay down on her back and motioned him to join her. He lay down beside her, and she rose up on one elbow, leaned over him and kissed him, her mouth wide open, her tongue licking his teeth, his tongue.

She reached down and touched his penis and it almost jumped in her hand. She didn't know if he wanted affection or foreplay or anything else, but if he were going to let her lead, it didn't matter. She wanted him up her slot now, and she got up on all fours, passed one thigh over him and sat on him, allowing his erection to press against her vulva.

He moaned and opened his eyes to look up at her, and she stared down at him as she reached behind, raising his penis up to the angle required for penetration, lowering herself down on it, sighing softly.

As soon as his tip was in her opening, the middle part of his body came alive, driving his cock deep into her. She held still now, staring into his eyes as he continued to move, bucking under her, gasping as she swallowed him again and again.

With every upward thrust, he pounded her clitoris, forcing a wave of pleasure through her enflamed loins.

“Jesus, Jesus, Jesus,” she grunted, the holy name just a sound now she couldn't stop making.

She felt his rhythm change and knew it was time, and she bounced against him hard and fast, her walls screaming.

They convulsed together, crying out as if they were in pain, Allain writhing below as the semen pulsed into her chamber, her own climaxing organ quivering around him.

“Ohgodohjesusohgod,” she panted. “Ohohohoh.”

As soon as his thrusting stopped, she dropped slowly down to him, kissing as hungrily as she had before, forgetting everything about her life except this, that she had just taken a beautiful boy inside her, that he had fed her hole, that they had cum together, that they were both, at this moment, filled with a rare, doubtless happiness.

She lifted herself, allowing his member to slide out and drop to his belly with a wet thud, and she rolled over to lay beside him, her mouth at his neck, her hand on his belly.

For a long moment, they lay together, merely breathing. And then he spoke her name, in reverent whisper.

“Hannah.”

His eyes were closed, a sort of grimace on his face. “Hannah.”

“Yes, Sir?”

“I love you,” he said. “I love you.”

“Oh,” she said, realizing these were the last words she expected to hear, and she knew instinctively they weren’t really true, even if Allain believed them.

“We just met,” she whispered back, softly.

“I’ve always known you,” he said. “I feel that. It’s like I’ve always known you.”

Hannah rose to her elbow again and took his jaw in her hand, turning his face to hers. He opened his eyes and looked at her with what she now understood as wonder. Not shyness. Not awkwardness. Wonder. That’s what he’d felt all along, why he could barely look at her in the showroom, why he could not speak to her in the car.

Briefly, she played out what might happen next.

“Free me then, and marry me,” she might say.

And Allain would agree. She knew that. In this moment, drunk with pleasure, under her spell, he would say yes. But then he might change his mind, or his parents might talk him out of it for any number of good reasons. Athena might be furious. Raven might never speak to her again. And they would all see her demand as, ultimately, an attempt to escape. A legal attempt, as far as she knew, and she probably wouldn't be punished for it, or sold to someone else, but if he eventually thought better of it and refused to take her hand, something would be broken, and none of them would ever trust her completely again.

Besides, did she want to marry Allain? She wasn't sure. They'd just met.

No, she told herself, no. He knew nothing about her, other than how she looked and how her vagina felt. Until he knew her, he had no business professing love, or any other passion beyond raw lust. And neither did she.

No.

"You've just made this the best day of my life," she whispered, adding, not insincerely, "I love you too, Allain. I have from the moment I saw you."

"In the showroom?" he asked, looking up at her, and she knew she'd broken the spell, at least for now, because she'd forced him to think about something real. He was done worshipping her at this moment, ready for a conversation. She sat up beside him.

"Yes, the first time everyone walked up to me," she said, looking down between her legs. "I'm leaking on your sheets."

"I hope you are," he said. "But for me, it was before the showroom. When Athena brought her phone back and we looked at your pictures. I knew then."

"I hate those pictures!" Hannah blurted. "I was crying when Burt took them."

"I couldn't tell," he said. "You looked strong. You looked like you didn't care that you were in a cage. You

looked like something wild.”

Allain sat up, crossing his legs, facing her, his penis still wet but resting now, pointing down.

“I didn’t know what was happening,” she said. “I still don’t. It’s all so different.”

“Are you okay, though?” he asked, and he put his hand on her hip, but not in a lustful way, just in the way that a friend would, and she was grateful for that.

“I think so,” she said. “Raven asked me the same thing. It seems like everyone’s worried about me. But my mother taught me to adapt. She said it was a virtue. She said it was Godly. So in a way, I was ready.”

“Do you like Raven?”

“Yes,” Hannah replied. “But that’s strange too. She’s like a friend, but then, we do things.”

“You had sex with her last night,” Allain noted.

“Well, I guess that’s part of the official record then,” Hannah retorted.

“I’m sorry,” Allain said. “We just want to make sure you have what you need.”

“And this morning too,” Hannah said.

“This morning?” Allain echoed, confused.

“We did it again. Or, she licked me anyway.”

“When?”

“After you did it to me. I was frustrated.”

“Sorry,” he said. “I just ... I couldn’t wait any longer. But I couldn’t stay.”

“She wanted to,” Hannah added. “I think she wanted to taste you.”

“I locked the door.”

“She licked me through the bars. I stood there and she ran her tongue over me.”

Hannah wasn't trying to get Allain aroused, but she looked down and saw that his penis was standing at attention again. Raven's warning was true.

She reached down and pinched his head.

"I can take you in again, I think."

## **A Dark Secret**

He looked at her and she knew that whatever spell she was casting over him had returned with a vengeance, his face tight with a sort of devoted angst.

This time, Hannah wanted him on top, so she lay back and spread her legs and he knelt between them, sliding into her, grunting out with a deep, primal pleasure, following his first thrust with a steady back and forth, pulling out until just his head was between her lips, then pushing back in, deep and hard. At the end of each thrust, he stayed in her for a few seconds, savoring the tightness of her walls, breathing into her ear, before sliding out again.

This orgasm, at least his third of the day, took longer than the others, and Hannah's sheath was throbbing by the time he burst into her, holding her and moaning as his sex danced inside her hole.

She wasn't going to cum this time, and she was glad when he rolled off, lying beside her and sighing quietly.

"Thank you," he said simply. "Oh, God, thank you."

Soon, Allain's slow, steady breathing told her that he had fallen asleep, and she lay still beside him and stared at the ceiling, at the dark crown moulding, at the posters and his desk.

Fifteen minutes later, he awoke with a start, she gazed at him, and he looked at her with a longing that couldn't be satisfied, because she had already done everything for him she could.

“Show me your house,” she said. “I want to see everything.”

“I’ll have to chain you.”

“I know,” she said, and his eyes hardened, briefly, and she knew that this was another way to break the spell, until he got used to her, until he understood that she was just another girl. Reminding him that she was property, and he needed to manage her like property, she thought, took away whatever aura of grace he saw around her.

“It’s not my rule,” he said, rising from the bed.

“Who makes the rules?”

“Mom and Dad,” he said.

“Will I ever get to not be chained?”

“Yeah,” he said, “probably. It’s just for now, at the start, while you get settled in.”

Allain moved slowly, retrieved his shorts and shirt from the top of his dresser, put them on, pulled her shackles and keys out of his drawer. She walked over to him and he restrained her and unlocked his door.

“Have you always lived here?”

“No, we moved here when I was five.”

“Where did your family get all their money?”

Allain laughed, knowing how impertinent the question was, but amused by her question far more than offended by it.

“Grand Daddy owned five businesses, so Gramma’s got a fortune, and she shares it, so Mom’s got a lot too. And then, Dad owns an orthopedic practice. Two offices, with 10 doctors. But still ...”

Allain, leading Hannah into the hall, pointed toward a door next to Athena’s bedroom. “That’s Mom’s and Dad’s room,” he said. “And that’s Dad’s office, there. And that’s Athena’s room. But you know that.”

“Yeah,” she said. “But still what?”

“They had to borrow half your price,” he said. “We’re not that rich.”

“Athena told me you have a mean room,” Hannah said, deciding that now was the time to resolve something that had been rumbling around the back of her mind since Athena mentioned it in the showroom.

“What?” Allain asked, turning toward her, an eyebrow raised.

“A punishment room. For me.”

Allain blushed, truly uncomfortable now, and he scowled.

“It’s not ... It’s not,” he stammered. “I don’t know why she brought that up.”

“I want to see it.”

“They put one in every house,” Allain continued defensively. “Okay? Every big house, built in the last 15 years or so. We didn’t have it built for you or something. It’s not for you. It came with the house.”

“I want to see it.”

She followed him to the elevator and he pushed the button for the third floor. They ascended in silence and arrived at a dark, plain hallway, like a hallway in any house, a picture or two on the walls, some simple chairs and a table that didn’t match, a bookshelf with books and things that were not books.

The air was warmer here, and Hannah guessed the hot air from the rest of the house rose to this floor, and they didn’t try to keep it as cool as everywhere else.

He stepped to the first door, opened it, motioned her to join him and flipped on the light switch.

Had she not been punished in the stacks, this might have been terrifying for her, but she was initially merely curious as she took in the windowless room.

Her eye was drawn first to the tiny cage in the corner, too small to do anything but stand within. Next, she studied a

heavy board, affixed to the wall with bolts, rings at the upper and lower corners.

A thick wooden post ran from floor to ceiling in the middle of the room, rings screwed into it at hip and shoulder level, as well as high overhead. On the floor against the side wall, another board lay, four more rings at the corners, its purpose obvious and horrible to Hannah.

A wooden cabinet next to the cage, no doubt stocked with whatever equipment was used here, completed the room. There were no pictures on the walls here. Nothing but white walls, a bright fluorescent light overhead, and things used to exact retribution.

She thought looking at this room would satisfy her curiosity, and perhaps address the anxiety she'd been feeling about it – albeit a minor anxiety, because she was certain she'd never do anything to be taken here.

But now, as she looked at the room built to inflict suffering on people like her, she felt anger, the same rage she felt before and after she was punished at the stocks. She turned on her heel and left, shuffling back to the elevator, pulling her shackles tight with every step, glad for the jangle she produced.

“Hannah?” Allain said, turning out the light and shutting the door. There was a panic in his voice, even a pain, and Hannah reminded herself that this was hard for him too, that relations between slaves and their owners would never be completely resolved, there would always be uncertainty and suffering, on both sides.

She looked back at him, hustling down the hall after her, offered him a half-smile and felt a twinge of sympathy.

“Are you okay?” he asked, putting his hand on her shoulder, as platonically as before.

“It's just hard to see,” she said. “I don't want to go there, ever.”

“No one wants that,” he said. “No one.”

“Has it ever been used?”



“Yeah,” Allen admitted, looking toward the elevator button, biting his lip.

“Who?” she asked.

His silence answered her question.

“Raven?”

He looked at her, into her eyes, in what she realized later was an act of profound courage. “Yeah.”

“What did she do?” Hannah asked, not wanting to hear the answer. Her eyes filled with tears, the pain for her friend immediate and overwhelming.

“She had a really bad day with Gramma,” Allain said. “It was last year, and she was going through some stuff, I guess. PMS and whatever, maybe. She did everything but punch Gramma, and that might have come next. So Gramma felt like she had no choice.”

“It had to be done here?” Hannah asked.

“She doesn’t have a room like this at her place. It’s too old. So Mom and Dad agreed.”

“Who ...” Hannah stammered, choking back her tears, terrified of the answer but forcing herself to ask it. “Who did it?”

“A guy. This guy Gramma hired. There are people that do this.”

“Just him and Raven?”

“And a witness.”

“Who was the witness?” Hannah demanded.

“Mom.”

Hannah fell silent, joining Allain in the elevator. He hit the button for the second floor and descended. In her mind, she saw sweet Laura Petrosyan, watching dispassionately as Raven was tortured. Perhaps she was chained to the post, or to one of the boards, forced to lie on her back, or to stand, with

her arms and legs splayed, while she was prodded with something terrible.

Allain drew in his breath, a sad sound that Hannah knew was full of regret, for what was done to Raven, for the fact such things could happen at all, and for the loss of the magic he'd felt with Hannah in bed less than an hour ago.

"Mom hated it, okay?" Allain said quietly. "She cried after Raven went back home. She cried in her room, but I heard her, and she didn't come down for dinner."

"What did they do to her?" Hannah asked. She allowed her tone to veer into accusation, and she didn't care.

"I don't know."

"What did they do?" Hannah repeated.

## **Makeup**

"I don't know," Allain said again. "I swear. It took an hour, that's all I know. I never asked Mom. I never asked Raven. It's none of my business."

The elevator opened on the second floor, but Hannah stood still, leaning against the wall, staring at her feet, slowly working through what Allain had told her, imagining the terrible day that began with Raven's recalcitrance and concluded with a punishment so awful it left Laura weeping on her bed.

And yet, Hannah chided herself, what did she expect? This is how things worked. It had already been done to her once, and she'd signed an agreement yesterday accepting that it could be done again.

"I hope you won't ask her about it," Allain said quietly. "It's not something you should bring up. I mean, it's not considered polite to ask. And you kind of have a habit of ..."

“Habit of what?” Hannah demanded, but she was done thinking about this. There was nothing else to be said. “Habit of what?”

Allain searched her face, at first in distress, but when he looked in Hannah’s eyes, he sensed that she was ready to move on.

“A habit of saying things,” he said. “Of asking things that aren’t, that aren’t ...”

“Aren’t what?”

“Exactly, um, kosher.”

Hannah laughed. “Well, you bought me,” she observed. “So I guess you’re stuck with it.”

Allain left the elevator, holding it open for her although he didn’t need to, and Hannah followed him to an open doorway at the other end of the lounge, away from the bedrooms.

“This is where we throw parties,” he said, turning on the lights and welcoming Hannah into a large, windowless space with a big screen at one end, chair and couches along the walls, a small sink and refrigerator by the door.

“You’re still leaking out of me,” Hannah said, looking between her legs, a string of semen rolling down the inside of her left thigh.

“Does it bother you?” Allain asked, turning to look at her, smiling, worshipping, clearly stunned anew at this creature who, by virtue of births to the right families, had been brought into his life.

So it was that easy, she thought. Any time she wanted Allain under her spell, a frank reference to sex would work. She imagined the many things she could say – a request for a certain position, a comment about how he felt inside her, a report about his fluids – that would make him hers again, at least for that moment. Boys, she suspected, were easier to get into sexmind than girls were.

Just imagining her words made her aching sex tingle, and she turned her mind to other things, to the tour as he walked her through the rest of the house, the formal living room, the gym, the second dining room, just as grand as she'd imagined, big enough to seat dozens, beautiful paintings on the wall – a still life, a landscape, a fox hunt.

He showed her all the stairs – the wide, sweeping staircase by the front door, the plainer flights deeper into the home, to the basement and the floors above. For her own safety, Allain told her, she wasn't ever to take the stairs when she was chained unless the elevator was broken, and at those times, she must wait for someone else to help her.

The tour finished outside, around the pool, past the gardens and into the cabana, all surrounded by a high wall that hid her and her nakedness from the neighbors.

Back in the kitchen, Allain allowed Hannah to take what she wanted from the refrigerator and the pantry, another surprising luxury. She made a sandwich and grabbed a banana and allowed Allain to deposit her back in her in her cage so he could run errands.

Glad for the solitude, she ate lunch and read the biology book first, then the novel, which wasn't terrible after all.

Two chapters in, she heard the bump of the elevator.

"Hannah? It's Athena. And my friend, Jessica."

Hannah rose from the bed and stepped to the bars as Athena and another girl rounded the corner.

"Hello," Hannah said, first looking at Athena, then at her friend, red-haired and freckled.

The girl stared back, unable to conceal her surprise.

"You're naked?"

"She has to stay nude," Athena said. "I should have warned you."

"Why?" Jessica asked.

“It’s just a rule. I guess it makes subjects harder to steal, or for them to escape. Or something. But you’d never try to escape, right, Hannah?”

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah said.

“So, anyway, she’s a genius,” Athena said. “Hannah, we want to make you up.”

“What do you mean?” Hannah asked.

“We’re going to put makeup on you. For Allain.”

“Okay,” Hannah agreed, still puzzled.

“You’re going to spend the night with him tonight,” Athena said, smiling lecherously. “So we’re going to make you irresistible to him.”

Hannah nodded, realizing that Athena had no idea that she and Allain had already been together three times, and he seemed to find her sufficiently irresistible sans makeup.

“That would be nice,” Hannah said, playing innocent, glad she had wiped herself thoroughly several times since Allain had put her back in her cage.

“Jessica’s family doesn’t own anyone,” Athena said. “So she wants to see what it’s like. She said she wants to chain you.”

“God, Athena!” Jessica protested, blushing deeply.

“You did!” Athena countered.

Jessica looked at Hannah, apology in her eyes. “I was just curious ... about everything.”

“It’s okay,” Hannah said, unconcerned about who put her restraints on.

Athena grabbed the shackles from the peg and handed them to Jessica. “These go on her feet.”

Hannah stepped to the chaining port and waited while Jessica fumbled with the cuffs, closing them carefully around her ankles, looking up as if she needed Hannah’s approval.

“You did fine,” Hannah said obligingly. Athena unlocked her cage and she followed the girls to the elevator and up to Athena’s room.

“How was school?” Hannah asked.

“Terrible,” Athena said, breezing into her bedroom, tossing her book bag onto her bed. “But math went a little better, thanks to you.”

Athena turned on her radio, and a girl’s crying voice against a fast-paced beat filled the room. Athena directed Hannah to a stool before the vanity in her bathroom, and the girls studied her face and talked incomprehensibly about how best to make her impossibly alluring to Allain.

“Did Allain give you a tour of the house?” Athena asked.

“Yes, he did,” Hannah replied. “And the yard.”

“Oh my God,” Athena said. “Did he try to kiss you? I bet he did. I bet.”

“You’ll have to ask Allain,” Hannah replied.

“Oh, that means yes,” Athena exclaimed. “Is he good? Is he a good kisser?”

Hannah just stared into the mirror silently.

Athena, wearing her frustrated curiosity in her eyes, looked into the mirror until Hannah glanced up at her. Then she smiled, wickedly again.

“Did you kiss Raven?”

“Yes.”

“Was she a good kisser?”

“Very good.”

“Did you do anything else with her?”

“I thought everyone already knew about that,” Hannah replied.

“I heard Mom saying something to Allain, but I didn’t hear the words.”

“Your mom didn’t want you to hear?” Hannah asked.

“She doesn’t care.”

“They why didn’t you ask her?”

Athena just looked without emotion into Hannah’s reflection, and Hannah understood that the question was stupid, at least to Athena, that there were certain ways that sex could be discussed in the Petrosyan household, and certain ways that it couldn’t be, and Hannah needed to learn a whole set of unwritten rules about this. Allain’s sexuality was tacitly understood, if underestimated. Athena’s sexuality was, most likely, still so hidden that she could express carnal curiosity to no one but Hannah.

“Do you really want to know?” Hannah asked.

Athena continued to stare, struggling with how to answer.

“Yes,” Jessica blurted.

Hannah looked up at Jessica’s reflection, saw that both girls were staring at her tensely, waiting for her next words.

“We licked each other,” Hannah said. “Between each other’s legs. Raven got on top, and we licked until we both had an orgasm. At the same time. It didn’t take long.”

For a moment, Hannah’s words hung in the air, all three girls still, only the sound of the radio filling the silence. The moment ended, and Hannah guessed that, at least for now, their curiosity had been sated. More than sated, perhaps.

Athena and her friend set to work, tentatively at first but gradually returning to their natural state. Applying and removing and reapplying every shade of lipstick and blush and eyeliner Athena owned, giggling and continuing a steady patter, they achieved a passable representation of Delilah’s work. Hannah, able to watch the foreign beauty of her made up face materialize before her eyes, did her best to memorize the steps, the order and the final shades and tools.

A new song blared from Athena’s radio, most of the words incomprehensible, but “sex machine” clear in the

chorus, repeated a dozen times, by a female lead, male voices providing varied harmonies.

Athena and Jessica sang along, leering at each other as they repeated the phrase, their faces tight with that tension between lust and propriety, and after they looked at each other, they would look at Hannah and sing it into her ear, and Hannah understood that they were wrestling with some of the same things she was, that they had the same confusing sensations and urges as she did, and they were just as perplexed by them, and she knew that, in a way, they were envious of her, because she could have sex with anyone, in any way, without shame, and it was a freedom they desired.

Her makeup finished, she looked innocently up at Athena, then back into the mirror.

“Do you think Allain will like me?” she asked, smiling as her strange likeness smiled back.

“He’ll have to,” Jessica said. “Are you German?”

“German, and English, maybe some Dutch.”

Once they’d finished with her face, Athena turned a bottle of scent against her middle finger, dabbing it on the back of Hannah’s neck, along her collar bones. The smell was strange and compelling, a mix of something used to clean things, and something from the woods, and something from the body.

Done making her alluring, they ordered her to the bed to work on math. Hannah sat with her back to the headboard, crossed her legs and pulled the sheets up around her hips, hiding her chains and her sex, and set the book in her lap, working through the next set of problems and explaining the solutions.

Jessica stayed for dinner that night, surprised anew that Hannah was forced to dine naked with the family. Allain sat beside her, giving his regular seat beside Athena to Jessica, but he remained reserved in front of his family, barely speaking to Hannah, rarely looking at her. But once or twice,



when no one was looking, he patted her leg, or put his bare foot against hers, and the touch thrilled her.

Dinner, prepared by Darcy, was fish and vegetables, with white wine this time. Athena poured Hannah some without asking if she wanted it, so she made herself drink it, all of it, finding it a little easier to swallow than last night's red.

## **A Night, and the Morning After**

Hannah wasn't returned to her cage that night. After dinner, Allain brought her to his room and she settled on his bed, stacking up pillows behind her back, covering her chains and her middle with his sheets, as she had in Athena's room. With the door open, he chatted with her politely, told her about his life, the many adventures, and the occasional disappointments as well, of growing up wealthy. He asked her about her days at Four Pillars, listened as if he really thought it was interesting, showed her the books he'd bought for his final year at the University of Texas, Corpus Christi.

Athena and Jessica stopped by to ask Allain what he thought of their handiwork, and he praised their efforts but, to Hannah's private delight, told them she was just as pretty without makeup.

Laura stepped in to make sure Hannah was still pleased with everything, and Hannah assured her she was while she looked into Laura's eyes and saw a little of the pain there, still lingering, of the things she'd had to do in a world where humans could own other humans.

"Thank you, Ma'am," Hannah said, "everything is very nice here, and you are a very sweet family."

Laura beamed as she always did. "Athena and I are going to get you some things to wear tomorrow night."

"Yes, Ma'am."

“There’s a party Friday night. We’ll be introducing you there. Everyone wants to meet you.”

“Yes, Ma’am. That sounds nice.”

Laura departed with one last smile at her son and his girl, but Allain continued to talk to her, waiting until the other bedroom doors were shut and the house had gone quiet to lock his door and remove Hannah’s shackles.

She went to his bathroom to relieve herself, and when she returned, he was already nude, standing by his bed, waiting for her.

“Will you go slow?” she asked, pressing her belly against his and smiling. “I’m still sore from earlier.”

“Yeah,” he said, and they dropped to the bed and tangled their bodies together for almost an hour, kissing, licking, touching and finally, joined at the hips, copulating, Allain gently rocking over her until he’d delivered a fresh jolt of semen to her sheath. Done, he turned around and rolled his tongue between her legs until she came with a series of quiet grunts.

He told her he loved her again, she said the same and they fell asleep, her with her arm around him, as happy as she ever imagined being, married or otherwise.

She awoke early the next morning, the light of dawn barely breaking through Allain’s curtains. She went to the bathroom, emptied her bladder and slipped back into bed, watching the day break. She listened for signs of life, heard a distant kitchen sound, water running somewhere, and remembered that she was happier than she’d ever been.

She looked at Allain’s clock, saw that it was after 7 a.m., and considered waking him before she thought better of it. Twenty minutes later, she heard a door open in the hall, Athena shouted something and Allain stirred and rolled over, looking at her.

“Hi,” she said, trying to be only friendly, not seductive, not quite ready to make love with Allain again.

“Hey,” he said, rolling out of bed, his penis erect.

“Don’t worry,” he said, following her gaze to his middle, “it’s just because I need to pee.”

She laughed, surprised by yet another thing about a boy’s biology she hadn’t known.

Done in the bathroom, he threw on a fresh t-shirt and pair of shorts, opened his drawer and pulled out her shackles.

She slid her legs out from under the sheets and raised them one at a time as Allain restrained her.

“I might need to take you downstairs,” he said, looking into her eyes apologetically.

“To my cage?” she asked, emphasizing the last word, not making any attempt to conceal her disappointment. She had been thinking, at least in the back of her mind, that she and Allain would continue to be together always, from now on – today, tomorrow, perhaps forever. She had thought they were lovers. He was reminding her they were not, and it hurt.

“I’m sorry, Hannah,” he whispered. “I need to take care of things today, boring things, for school.”

“When will I see you again?”

“Definitely tonight.”

“Oh,” Hannah said quietly, and for the first time in her life, she felt her heart break, the hopeless emptiness that follows the discovery that one’s affections won’t be equally reciprocated.

She looked away, fighting back her tears, while Allain unlocked the door and crossed the hall, knocking on his parents’ bedroom door.

Hannah heard Laura’s muffled voice: “Hey?”

“Did you want Hannah?” he asked.

“Yeah, thanks,” she said.

Allain returned to Hannah.

“Looks like you’ll be helping Mom first,” he said, and he kissed her, oblivious to her pain or deciding not to

acknowledge it, and she looked at him without smiling. She walked across the hall to the bedroom door where Laura and Ormek slept, and knocked quietly. Laura opened it a crack and peered out, motioning Hannah to step in.

Laura was nude except for a necklace and her rings, and Hannah glanced quickly over her body, surprised by her appearance. For those who could afford it at Four Pillars, Hannah knew, plastic surgery was common after the child-bearing years, but was never openly acknowledged, just something she heard her parents mention now and then when they thought she wasn't listening. She suspected Laura had gotten some work done as well, her flat belly and perfectly round breasts more like a girl half her age.

"I need you to carry some laundry down to Darcy," Laura said, pointing to the closet. "Empty both hampers, put everything into the cart."

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah said, walking into a closet that, like most of the rooms in this house, was bigger than her last apartment.

"Did you sleep well?" Laura asked as Hannah filled the cart with the Petrosyan's washable finery.

Hannah knew Laura was curious about what she and Allain had done. Did Allain satisfy her? Did she satisfy Allain? But she didn't dare ask, and Hannah didn't dare say anything that might find its way back to Allain.

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied, grateful for the distraction of a little housework. "Where shall I take the cart?"

"Did Allain show you the laundry room? In the basement?"

"Yes, Ma'am."

"Take it there, then come to the kitchen and let Darcy feed you."

"Yes, Ma'am."

Hannah, finished emptying the hampers, pushed the cart out of the closet and into the bedroom. She looked toward

the bathroom, saw Laura at her vanity, applying makeup.

She continued to stare, uncertain if she should just leave or let Laura know she was going, when a naked male appeared at the bathroom door, rubbing his scalp with a towel.

Ormek stopped, lowered the towel and looked at her, his slender, well-formed body no less attractive than Allain's, his penis in profile. If he was embarrassed by being seen in the nude, it did not show. He simply stared at her, expressionless.

Laura turned from the mirror, looked at Hannah as well, then at her husband, then back to Hannah. Nothing was said, either by mouth or by eye. They might as well all have been looking at nude sculptures in an art museum.

Hannah, unsure if this were awkward or just something else that happened, looked away and ambled out of the room, shackles jangling as she pushed the cart down the hall to the elevator.

This was the first time she was allowed passage through the house unescorted and, even though she was still restrained, it was a freedom she reveled in briefly.

Dropping past the kitchen in the elevator, she heard clattering, and Athena's voice.

Had Athena or Allain ever seen their parents nude? she wondered. Probably not, she guessed. Were there other things that only she would be privy to?

She pushed the cart into the laundry room, stopped and looked down, returning to the question of Allain, suddenly overwhelmed both by disillusionment and anger at herself. Raven had warned her not to forget her place, but she had. In the midst of yesterday's trysts with Allain, she had believed he loved her, and she had fallen for it. She had, worse, believed she had some control over him.

She was connected to Allain – strongly connected – only through her vagina. When they were not engaged, she would mean nothing to him. He was, she reminded herself, content to sentence her to a day in her cage while he ran errands for his own purposes.

She folded her arms, looked down at her naked body and the chains that joined her legs together, and felt sorry for herself, until a tear dropped onto her forearm, gray and dirty with the makeup Athena and Jessica had applied yesterday.

She would cry later, she told herself, and she wiped her eyes with a paper towel and took the elevator back up to the kitchen.

Darcy was at the stove, Athena standing at the counter in the middle of the kitchen, eating, when Hannah entered.

“Hey,” Athena said, her mouth full of food. “Darcy made egg sandwiches, and they’re awesome.”

Hannah accepted a sandwich and stood across from Athena, expecting to be interrogated about last night. But Athena didn’t want to talk about Allain, apparently, or even hint at it. Her focus was on her classes, a math test coming up, and the shopping they would do that night.

“I’m going?” Hannah asked.

“Yes, we have to fit you.”

“Naked?”

“Yeah. They have to measure you.”

“The whole time?”

“No, you’ll go in your wraps.”

“Chained?”

“In one way or another, probably.”

## **A Kiss**

Hannah, who had been imagining herself being paraded around a shopping center in the nude, was glad to have that anxiety reduced, at least somewhat. But another quickly replaced it: Mother.

Unlikely as it was, what if Mother saw her at the store? What if she resumed the panicked rage of that moment

her daughter was taken from her, fighting anyone who stood in her way? Unless they carried industrial strength tasers, neither Athena nor Laura would be any match for her.

Hannah was not confined after breakfast. Instead, as the Petrosyans made their way through the morning and out the door, Hannah helped Darcy in the kitchen, with the laundry, and then in the grand dining room, where silver needed polishing.

Hannah was more grateful than Darcy could have imagined for the distraction of work, and she did her best to serve ably, in the hopes this would be a regular calling.

As they labored, the woman maintained a steady patter, talking about the Petrosyan's likes and dislikes, neighborhood gossip, state and national news, and the goings-on of her own family. Darcy seemed to sense that Hannah didn't want to talk about herself, asking very few questions about her.

By early afternoon, Hannah was ready to be alone, and she thanked Darcy for caging her and removing her shackles. She showered, dried off, sat on her bed and returned to her books until she could read no longer, then she rose and paced, leaned against the bars, looked at the sky through the thin strip of window, wishing someone would come for her.

The sound of the elevator, and Athena's welcome voice, told her the boredom was over, at least for today.

"Got a clock for you," Athena announced, and she set it on the end table under the windows, plugged it in and adjusted the time to 4:30.

"Where did you get it?"

"I found it in my closet. I have a better one now."

"Thanks."

"What did you do with Allain last night?"

"You'll have to ask Allain."

"Did you have sex?"

“That’s for Allain to say.”

“He won’t tell me.”

“You asked him?”

“Of course not!”

“I’ll tell him to tell you then,” Hannah offered.

“Don’t you dare!” Athena nearly shouted.

“It’s okay,” Hannah assured. “I’ll just tell him you want to know what he did with me. I’m sure he’ll be glad to talk about it over dinner.”

“You bitch!” Athena hissed, her face reddening, and Hannah realized the girl was truly upset. Even in a family that had just bought a sex slave, sex was not something one talked about over dinner. Or probably ever.

Hannah smiled, not at all worried about Athena’s offense. A little discomfort, she thought, was a small price to pay to enjoy the benefits of a slave.

Athena looked at Hannah, her composure regained, the wicked smile returned to her face.

“Jessica wants to be with you.”

“Is she here?”

“Upstairs. In my room.”

“If she wants to be with me, she’s in the wrong part of the house.”

“Do you want to be with her?”

“Sure,” said Hannah. “She’s nice.”

“Do you know what I’m talking about?”

“Yes,” said Hannah, playing dumb. “Jessica wants to be with me. So she should come downstairs. Then she can be with both of us.”

“Oh my god, you have no idea!” Athena exclaimed in delight. “I mean, she wants to have sex with you. That’s’ what I’m talking about.”



“Oh,” Hannah said, as if only understanding Athena now. “Why?”

“I mean,” Athena confessed, “she doesn’t really want to have sex with you. At least, that’s not what she said. But she’s been talking about you all day, like what you did with Raven. And everything.”

“Okay,” Hannah said, considering the discussion concluded. “Want to talk about math?”

“If I brought her down, would you do it? With her?”

“If you told me to,” Hannah replied. “I have to do what you say. You own me.”

“You’re not mine,” Athena said. “You’re Mom’s and Dad’s. And Allain’s.”

“I can be yours too.”

“Are you coming on to me?” Athena demanded with a startled laugh.

“What does that mean?” Hannah said, pretty certain she knew what it meant.

“You want to go down on me.”

“I’ll do whatever you tell me to,” Hannah said. “Like math.”

“Okay,” Athena said, smiling nervously. “If I bring Jessica down here and tell you to do her, you will?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Athena went to the elevator and Hannah returned to her bed and her books, glad for Athena’s interruption, and not particularly concerned whether Athena brought Jessica to her or not. Sex had become simply a thing one did. It had taken her eight days to adapt to something that was before now utterly incomprehensible.

When Mother finally found her, this would be part of the reckoning – not just what she had become, where she was confined, how she was chained – but what had happened in

her mind, how it had changed from what it was when Mother last saw her.

Jessica has a mother too, Hannah realized with a start. Probably a father. Would they approve? Were there rules about being with another family's slave? How old was Jessica? A series of horrible possibilities flooded Hannah's mind, of Jessica's parents finding out what had happened, of storming over to confront Ormek and Laura, and of everyone confronting Hannah, accusing her of corrupting an innocent young girl. The fact Athena had brought Jessica to her for that purpose would be irrelevant. At 18, Hannah was a woman in certain ways, Jessica and Athena still girls. And Hannah was a slave. If anyone suspected she had exploited a vulnerable, free girl, she imagined, the punishment would be swift and severe.

She remembered the song from yesterday, where the singer kept saying "sex machine." It was supposed to be a funny song, she thought, and the idea of a person being a sex machine was funny too. Until the person who was supposed to be the sex machine hurt someone, or offended a parent.

Hannah struggled with what to say to Athena, should she actually return with Jessica, but when the elevator bumped and Hannah went to her bars, only Jessica appeared.

"Hey," Jessica said, smiling, as if there was some joke only they knew about.

"Hi, Jessica."

Hannah leaned against her bars and looked into the other girl's eyes. She was more made up than yesterday, and Hannah wondered if she'd been working on her face, using Athena's makeup, while Athena talked to Hannah in the basement.

"How was school?"

Jessica took in a breath, ignoring the question.

"Did Athena say ... about that thing?"

"I don't know," Hannah said, raising an eyebrow and pretending she didn't understand.

“About,” Jessica stammered, “doing things?”

“Like what?”

“I told Athena ...” Jessica continued, her voice shaking, and Hannah knew this was hard for Jessica, harder perhaps than anything she had ever done before. Hannah suspected Jessica was trying to figure something out that went well beyond Hannah, and Hannah needed to treat it seriously or risk humiliating Athena’s friend.

“She gave me your keys,” Jessica said, reaching her hand into the pocket of her skirt. “So I could ... so we could ...”

“They’re not really my keys.”

“I mean, the keys to your ... place. Here.”

“Do you want to have sex with me?” Hannah asked.

Jessica just looked through the bars at her, eyes wide, as if the most obvious question was the worst thing to utter.

Hannah waited for Jessica to answer, but she said nothing.

“What would your parents say?”

Judging from Jessica’s reaction, this was the second most obvious, terrible thing to ask. She simply looked at Hannah, as hurt and frightened as if Hannah had bitten her. But eventually, as Hannah waited patiently, she found the courage to speak again.

“I just want to kiss you for now. Okay? Just that?”

Hannah turned toward Jessica, her body against the bars, waiting. Jessica bit her lip and stepped toward her, reaching into Hannah’s cage to put her arms around Hannah’s waist. Two inches shorter than Hannah, she tilted her head up, raised her mouth, and Hannah brought her mouth down, forehead against the bars, meeting the girls’ lips, pressing against her, both mouths closed.

Jessica tilted her head back, looking at Hannah, uncertainty in her eyes, and then she pressed forward again,

her mouth open this time, and Hannah reciprocated, accepting Jessica's tongue into her mouth, licking it with her own tongue, sucking on it, then sending her own tongue past Jessica's lips.

Jessica dropped one hand to Hannah's buttocks, caressing, while the other rose up Hannah's back, to the small sore where her chip had been inserted, then to her collar, tracing the edge of the metal, playing against the letters and numbers carved into it.

Jessica sighed out a quiet "oooooh," and Hannah assured herself that this was all that Athena's friend wanted, just a quick, minor bout of affection, the unearthing of one small piece of the puzzle of desire and longing and adolescence, and the paths one must negotiate among the stations of madness to reach adulthood.

The next time Jessica pushed away, there were tears in her eyes, and she smiled, but in a tortured way, departing wordlessly for the elevator.

Hannah smiled as well, certain she had done nothing wrong. She imagined the meeting with Jessica's outraged parents. She would sit there, shackled and nude, and look at them with complete innocence. If they didn't want their daughter kissing a slave, they shouldn't allow her to spend time in a home where one was kept.

## **To the Mall**

Hannah was not invited upstairs before dinner, but dinner was early, and casual, just Laura, Athena, Hannah and a casserole, and then Athena disappeared and returned with Hannah's blue wraps and full chains.

Hannah put the wraps around herself this time, fastening them tightly around her breasts and hips, and then she held her hands out and allowed Athena to cuff her wrists and ankles.

Forced by the chain running between her legs to hold her hands down, she grabbed the hem of her lower wrap, determined not to let it slip up around her waist this time.

They reached the mall in less than 15 minutes, making small talk on the drive about Hannah's day, Athena's schoolwork, Allain's return to the university. Laura told Hannah that Darcy had appreciated her help, and Hannah promised she would help Darcy again, anytime.

At the mall, Athena, driving under Laura's patient supervision, headed to a ramp that led under the huge complex of stores and restaurants that comprised one of Dallas' finest shopping destinations.

An older man waited at the bottom of the ramp, and he smiled when Athena stopped beside him, and leered through the window at Hannah, showing several missing teeth.

"He'll be taking you, Hannah," Laura said.

The man opened the door and Hannah scooted out, allowing him to help her to the floor.

He pulled a long chain off a low shelf, raised it and fastened it to the ring in her collar with a quiet, locking click.

Despite her efforts, her lower wrap had slipped up again, but she still felt less vulnerable with it on, even if it were around her waist, so she looked down and watched him unsnap it, and then her upper wrap, with a growing sense of anxiety.

The man handed the wraps and a large metal card to Laura.

"We'll see you upstairs in just a minute," Laura promised, and the SUV sped off.

"This way, Miss," he said, touching her elbow, leading her around a wall to an enclosure of white tiles where two other girls, similarly restrained, stood with their backs to her, their leashes secured to rings set in the wall. Each girl had been positioned over a drain, and Hannah was led to a third drain, her leash secured to the wall.

Two female workers, presumably employees of the shopping center, stepped up to the first girl. One bore a hose, the second a bucket, and the latter girl raised a sponge, dripping with suds, and applied it to the back of the first slave girl.

The girl had apparently been through this before, bending, standing straight, bending again, opening her arms and spreading her legs as far as her restraints would allow as the worker scrubbed her belly, her breasts, under her arms and up her legs. The wash concluded with the slave bent over, her leash swinging between the wall and her collar as the worker sponged thoroughly between her legs.

The worker with the hose rinsed her off, the slave girl gasping, and Hannah assumed the water was cold and braced herself for what was to come. Slaves were washed this way to protect the clothes they would be trying on, she surmised with disappointment. Were free store patrons scrubbed before they put on the clothes they were interested in? She was certain not. Did they really think all slave girls were filthy?

When Hannah's time came to be bathed, she did her best to cooperate, opening her limbs and, at the end, bending over like the two girls before her to have her anus and vulva washed. The hosing that came next wasn't as cold as she'd expected, but she cried out when the spray struck the small of her back, more in anticipation than shock.

Looking down at her hands resting on her knees, she noticed that she was trembling and knew it wasn't just because of the cold. This was just shopping, she reminded herself, and she was about to have her own clothing again, for the first time since Mrs. Alvarez had stripped her. But being chained by the neck, like a pet, was another unexpected and jarring humiliation.

She had already adapted, she reminded herself. She would adapt again.

The soapy water in the bucket bore a scent, of rose petals and something antiseptic, and it clung to her skin and

filled her nose as she was rinsed and the workers rubbed her and the other girls dry.

Their leashes were released from the rings and a padlocked together, and one of the workers grabbed the chains and led them to the elevator, moving slowly as they shuffled awkwardly behind.

“What are they getting you?” one of the slaves asked as the elevator rose.

“Everything, I guess,” Hannah replied. “They just bought me.”

“I’m getting van Minske,” the girl said proudly.

Hannah knew van Minske must be an exclusive brand, but it meant nothing to her and she chose flippancy, her most reliable means of dealing with anxiety of late.

“Van Minks?” she said. “Like, stuff made out of minks?”

The other slave girl choked out a guffaw. “Minks!” she shouted. “Oh my god, van minks!”

The worker, her hand still grasping the padlock that joined the three girls together, chuckled but said nothing, and Hannah wondered if she’d said the funniest thing any of them had heard all day.

The elevator door opened into a short hall. Hannah and the other girls passed through it and into a large, bustling room that reminded Hannah, at first glance, of the showroom where the Petrosyans bought her.

About a dozen females and one male were leashed to rings set into the top of waist-high posts distributed evenly through the room, and Hannah and the two other girls were walked to their own stations and secured.

Closest to Hannah, a store employee measured a girl while a middle-aged man and woman, presumably her owners, chatted about what to buy her.

At other stations, racks of clothing had been wheeled in, owners and salesclerks looking on as slaves slipped in and

out of panties, bras, dresses, jeans, shoes, shorts, bikinis. The room was full of noise, voices extolling the virtues of this or that fit or fashion, slave girls looking down with what Hannah could only interpret as joy over the garments they would be forced to wear.

Hannah paid particular attention to the boy, handsome and dark-skinned, who went from nudity to black tie and back again under the attentions of two girls little older than she. He didn't smile, but maintained a satisfied dignity that she assumed was how boys normally reacted to new clothing.

He glanced at her as one of the girls straightened his bow tie, staring into her eyes until she looked away, embarrassed, remembering that she was nude.

A single set of glass doors served as the only entrance to the room other than the elevator, and Hannah could see two shoppers through it, picking through a rack of skirts. The chance that Mother could find her here, would ever see her, were vanishingly small, she estimated, and yet she continued to stare through the doors, half expecting to see Mother, wearing the same deadened expression she had in the mug shot, turning her eyes to Hannah and suddenly exploding with the same rage and terror of that awful morning.

Hannah shook off the thought, turned her mind to Laura and Athena and guessed that they were already finding things for her. Her relief was almost palpable when Laura appeared, handed something to the girl who operated the doors and entered, Athena in tow.

Both bore armloads of merchandise, and Athena nearly ran through the room to her, holding up her finds.

"You are going to die when you see what we got for you," she announced breathlessly. "Some new stuff just hit from Bogata!"

Athena pulled out a key and unlocked Hannah's restraints.

"Why are your chains wet?" she asked, hanging them on a hook set into the post.



“They washed me in the basement,” Hannah replied.

“You had a take a shower?”

“Well, more like a sponge bath, and then a hose. But yeah.”

“These might not be your size,” Laura said, holding up a handful of panties, “but let’s see what fits.”

Hannah slipped on and off what seemed to be a dozen pairs while Laura and Athena supervised. Four pairs made the cut, all beautiful, in cream, black, red and blue, each with a little tag listing a price of more than all the clothes Hannah had ever owned.

Next came bras, shorts, tank tops, t-shirts, sandals. For anything pulled over her head, she moved close to the post so that her leash would lie flat between her breasts. She lost track of time, of where she was or who was there, sampling a flurry of things unlike anything she had ever worn, or been allowed to wear.

The pile of garments that would become Hannah’s grew steadily beside her feet, and she allowed herself a silent moment of pleasure that she didn’t think Jesus would begrudge her.

“Hello, Darling,” an owlish woman said as she approached the three women, staring at Hannah and smiling.

A tape measure was draped around her shoulders, and she pulled it off and nodded to Laura and Athena, who stepped back in unspoken understanding.

“Let’s start with your bust. Arms up.”

## **A Stack of Clothes**

Hannah complied and the woman wrapped the tape around her breasts at the nipples, writing down the number on a little note pad, along with the figures for her back from

shoulder to shoulder, neck below her collar, waist, hips, thighs, inseam, feet.

“You are a sweetheart,” she cooed. “What can we get for you today?”

Laura, with a few enthusiastic interruptions from Athena, began speaking what was essentially a foreign language, rattling off what Hannah guessed were brands and designers and styles and cuts. She recognized the words for colors – Laura seemed particularly interested in black, blue and red – and heard her say “van Minsk” more than once.

Hannah looked at the slave girl who’d first mentioned that brand, and who was now regarding her body, with obvious delight, wrapped in a beautiful sun dress, and she felt a deep regret for what she’d said earlier. Clothing, she realized now that she was getting the best the world had to offer, was a profound and respectable pleasure. Not as good as good sex. But better than bad sex. Better than when Allain came to her cage yesterday morning and wordlessly ejaculated up her vagina from behind. Not nearly as good, however, as yesterday afternoon. Or last night.

She vowed to herself that she would never again make fun of another slave for taking pleasure in getting something new to wear.

The woman departed with her list and Laura and Athena surveyed the room, whispering to each other about the others there. They seemed to know half of them, at least by sight, and some of their slaves as well.

As Hannah followed their gaze, more than a few eyes met hers, both slave and free, and she wondered how many of them knew the Petrosyans and that she was their new girl.

“That’s the mayor’s brother-in-law,” Athena whispered, pointing to a man who stood back and nodded while the woman with him helped a slave girl into a skirt. “He bought that girl in a city auction for, like, \$300,000, which was less than half what she was worth. The mayor swears he didn’t get him a deal, but he’s admitted to borrowing her. Huge scandal.”

Hannah nodded, hoping no one was talking about them.

“Oh, and that boy over there, see him?”

“Yes,” Hannah said, trying to sound like she was noticing the boy for the first time.

“That’s Ramone, with Bethany and Sonja. The Abercrombies bought him a couple of years ago, for their daughters.”

“Their daughters?” Hannah repeated.

“Yeah, three girls,” she said. “I mean, it’s not like that. I don’t know ... I don’t know what they do with him. Dress him up a lot, though. God, he’s beautiful.”

“We’ve thought about mating him with you,” Laura said. “Would you like that?”

Hannah turned to Laura, puzzled, studying her.

“Would you like him brought to you?” Laura elaborated. “Once or twice a week?”

The owlsh woman returned, pushing a clothing rack loaded with merchandise, enough clothing that Hannah imagined she’d be trying things on until next week.

By the fourth dress, she was getting used to changing with a chain at her neck, and she allowed herself to revel in this strange new joy, especially when something she liked got put in the buy stack.

Two bikinis, a pair of jeans, a cocktail dress, a sun dress, and three gowns, black, white and red, so beautiful she had trouble breathing when they were on her.

She was slipping the third gown over her head when the Abercrombies walked up, Ramone nude again, leashed and chained hand and foot.

Laura and Athena said hello to Ramone and greeted the two girls with kisses on either cheek.

“This must be Hannah,” said one of the Abercombie daughters. “I’m Bethany.”

She offered her hand and Hannah took it, surprised at how awkward she suddenly felt. She greeted Sonja next, but no one was introducing Ramone. Instead, all turned their attention to Hannah's clothing, waiting on the rack to be purchased, and they all slipped into their shopping dialect again.

Hannah, unable to join the conversation, stole a quick glance at Ramone and saw he was staring back at her again.

"Hey," she said quietly.

"Hi," he said, barely smiling, and his eyes wandered her length, from her feet, up her legs to the hair between her legs, to her belly and her breasts and finally back to her eyes.

"They were talking about you ..." Hannah began, immediately regretting her choice of words. She knew she was blushing and couldn't help it.

"What did they say?" he asked, and he looked at the sisters who owned him and stepped closer to Hannah.

She could think of no answer, so she just stared at him, first at his eyes, and then down at his hands, cupped around his penis. Her mind, finished trying to come up with an answer to his question, imagined the things she might say and do to provoke an erection. She wanted to see his penis in its inflamed glory, and she also liked imagining his having to walk through the fitting room in a state of embarrassing arousal.

Where did this evil in her come from? she wondered. Why was she thinking any of this? She looked at Ramone, from his feet to his eyes, as he had done to her, and imagined his smoky flesh against hers, and she noticed the heat blooming between her legs and was glad her arousal didn't show the way a boy's did.

"Hannah?"

Hannah imagined Ramone coming to her, dressed in the tuxedo he'd just been fitted for, her in her cage, dressed only in Athena's makeup.

"Hannah?"

Someone was speaking. Hannah looked up, saw that the voice was coming from Laura, and Bethany and Sonja were smiling at her, studying her too.

“Yes, Ma’am?” Hannah stammered.

“Do you think you’d like to have Ramone visit you?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, looking back at Ramone, pretending that she didn’t understand what Laura was proposing, that Ramone would come over and they would talk or read a book together, or play a game.

Athena pulled Hannah’s chains from the hook on the post and Hannah looked down absently as they were applied. One of the clerks released her leash from the post and padlocked it to Ramone’s, and the women of the Petrosyan and Abercrombie families left through the glass doors while Hannah and Ramone were walked to the elevator.

“Were you being honest?” he asked her as they shuffled together. He had a hint of accent, and Hannah wondered if he was another illegal who had been captured by the authorities, assessed and judged too valuable to be sent back to his native land somewhere south of Texas. How much had he sold for? she wondered.

“About what?” Hannah asked.

“Being with me.”

“Yes,” she said.

If the girl leading them cared that they were talking, she didn’t show it. She hit the button to call the elevator, then drew out her phone and tapped it with the same hand that held their leashes.

“What do you like?”

“What do you mean?” Hannah asked, suspecting she already knew.

“What would you let me do to you?”

“Everything,” she said.

The word just came out, of its own accord. Her heart was pounding, the blood rushing in her ears. Something strange was happening to her.

The elevator door opened and the girl led them in.

“Tell me,” he said. His hands moved at his hips, his chains jangling quietly, and Hannah looked down and saw the tip of his penis, emerging between his fingers.

“I would want that in me,” she whispered, looking at his middle.

The elevator door closed and Ramone’s penis continued to grow, as thick as any manhood she had seen or accepted.

“Could you hold it?”

“Yes, Sir,” she replied, barely speaking. “It might take a few minutes for me to get around it, though. Would you be patient with me?”

“Yes,” he promised with a sigh, and she felt his aching desire as if it were her own, her throat closing.

“Not here,” the girl leading them said, tugging at their leashes, looking into Hannah’s eyes, then at Ramone’s penis.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah choked, wondering if she or Ramone would be punished for what had just happened.

No, she quickly concluded, they had done nothing wrong. She was following the strange rules of a strange new world that had chosen her, had taken her forcibly and made her part of it. There was nothing to be sorry for.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 8: Hannah Imperiled**

### **A Dark Revelation**

“Did you like Ramone?” Laura asked on the drive home, turning in her seat to look at Hannah, restrained in the middle of the back seat.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said evenly, hoping the lust of moments ago wasn’t obvious. She wondered what would happen if she lied and said she didn’t like Ramone. Would they force him on her anyway?

Back home, her wraps were removed and she was walked straight to Allain’s bedroom. He was on his bed, turning the pages of a textbook, but he tossed it aside and rose to greet her, nude, still in full chains, as Athena deposited her on his threshold.

“Where are her shackles?”

“Downstairs.”

“Can you get them?”

“No,” Athena replied tersely. “Just lock your door and take all her chains off.”

“Fine,” Allain said, and he shut the door in Athena’s face as if irritated, but then he turned to Hannah and smiled.

“Did you get nice things?” he asked, retrieving the key from his dresser and unlocking her cuffs.

“Yes, Sir,” she said quietly, remembering the sting of being abandoned by him that morning. “How was your day?”

“Terrible.”

“Why?”

“I missed you,” he said. “You’re the only thing I thought about. All day.”

His words might have stirred Hannah's heart before this morning, but now she heard them through a filter of doubt. Sometimes, she reminded herself, she would be his dearest lover. And sometimes, she would be an inconvenience worthy only of her cage.

She looked up at him, blankly, glad despite her misgivings that they were lovers again, however briefly.

He stepped to her and wrapped his arms around her waist, lowering his mouth to hers, and she kissed him back, with all the passion she had ever felt for anyone. There was an essence to Allain, more than a certain smell or feel, something indefinable about him that she was growing accustomed to, that stirred up the recent memories of intense pleasure in all their glory, that aroused her now.

Her mind turned briefly to Ramone, and how quickly her desires had turned to him. She felt no guilt now, however, as she put her arms around Allain and continued kissing. This is the way they had made things.

Allain's hand traced her hip to her front, his fingers brushing against her pubic hair, then down her slit to her lips, from her clitoris to her opening, and she parted her legs, glad to be explored there.

She heard voices in the hall, Laura's and Athena's, and Allain pulled away from her and looked at his door.

The knock he seemed to be expecting came a few moments later, a light tap and Laura's voice. "Allain?"

Allain sighed with frustration and unlocked and opened his door.

"Athena needs Hannah's help in her bedroom," Laura said, perhaps not noticing the bulge in her son's shorts. "Can you put her shackles back on?"

"They're downstairs," Allain said. "Athena brought her in her travel chains."

"Hannah," Laura said, looking into the girl's eyes. "Can you help Athena?"



“Yes, Ma’am.”

“And you’ll stay with her, and do as she says?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Laura gestured down the hall, and Hannah left Allain’s room unchained and followed Laura’s finger to an open bedroom door down the hall.

This new freedom, trivial as it was, meant a great deal to Hannah. She was still nude and collared, but after two days, she’d earned enough trust from the Petrosyans to walk – at least briefly – through their home unfettered.

Athena was waiting for her, a collection of bags and boxes scattered around her feet, in a bedroom Hannah hadn’t seen before, as nice as all the others. It was a girl’s room, with a white four-poster bed overlaid with a comforter in pastel plaid, and a matching dresser and desk, paintings of flowers and animals on the walls. The bathroom, visible through the door near the bed, was finished in pink tile.

“Whose room is this?” Hannah asked.

Athena closed the door and turned to her.

“Yours.”

“No it’s not,” Hannah asserted. “I sleep downstairs.”

“Sometimes, you might get to stay here. That’s why we’re putting your clothes here.”

Hannah, stirred beyond words by this new revelation, by the possibility that such a place could be hers, to sleep in, to live in, looked at the window and fought tears.

Embarrassed by her emotions, she knelt and picked up a bag, peered in and drew out the little black dress.

“When can I stay here?” she asked, her emotions settled for now.

“When you’re good,” Athena said.

“I *am* good,” Hannah asserted. She turned to a narrow door, guessed correctly it was an enormous closet, walked in

and hung the dress up.

“No you’re not,” Athena retorted.

Hannah turned and looked sharply back at the girl, the first sense that something was wrong roiling her stomach.

“You would know,” Hannah said lightly, picking up another bag, this one holding one of her beautiful gowns.

“Oh, I know,” said Athena.

Hannah stared at her, waiting for her to speak.

“Those marks on your back,” Athena whispered. “On your shoulder. Remember?”

Hannah’s mouth went dry, her vision narrowing until it focused solely on Athena’s left hand, holding a pair of red panties.

“They tortured me,” Hannah choked.

“They punished you.”

“Yes,” Hannah agreed. “It hurt.”

“I asked you about those marks,” Athena said. “On the way to the car. Do you remember what you said?”

“I didn’t explain,” Hannah confessed. “I lied. I lied to you.”

“And to everyone. Allain, and Mom and Dad.”

Hannah bit her lip, struggling not to cry out in shame. But Athena was whispering. She was the only one who knew, and she didn’t want anyone to find out, at least not yet. Why?

“How did you know?” Hannah asked.

Athena turned to the dresser and pulled the top drawer open. “Let’s put your panties in here.”

“Okay,” Hannah agreed.

“I looked it up. They put squares on your back, and then when they hurt you, they mark them off.”

“Yes,” Hannah said quietly.

“Why?”

“I got accused of trying to escape.”

“No!” Athena said, her eyes wide with surprise.

“It wasn’t that,” Hannah added quickly. “There’s no way you could, from there. And I never even thought about it, if you could. But I said something to someone. About trying to escape when they first took me from my mother. And that’s not allowed. So they punished me.”

“What did they do?”

“Touched me with this thing.”

“What thing?”

“I think it was electric, and it hurt, and I passed out once.”

“Where did they touch you?”

“Back, breast, belly,” Hannah said, and her eyes filled with tears.

“Did you scream?” Athena asked, the trace of a smile playing across her face. Hannah at this moment hated Athena. More than anyone or anything. Ever. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and glared.

“Yes,” Hannah said. “All the girls did. Are you going to tell?”

“Not if I don’t have to.”

“What do you want?” Hannah demanded quietly, picking up a bra and putting it in the drawer next to her panties.

“You have to do my homework.”

“No,” Hannah said.

“You have to. Your handwriting’s enough like mine. You can do everything. You’re a genius.”

“No.”

“I’ll tell Mom and Dad you lied. And you tried to escape.”

“I won’t do your homework,” Hannah said. “I’ll help you with it, and anything else you want. Anything. But I can’t do that.”

“Think about it,” Athena said. “I’ll give you a few days.”

The girls continued putting away Hannah’s things in silence. For Hannah, it was a slow torture, seeing a room that might be hers but might never be, touching beautiful clothing she might never be allowed to wear, because she was a liar, and she wasn’t worthy.

“Do you like not being chained?” Athena asked.

“Yes,” Hannah answered, trying to read the other girl’s mind. Why would someone want to cheat in school? Cheating was an act of despair, of giving up, of accepting that you weren’t smart enough and never would be.

But then, her brother was on his way to being a doctor, while Athena struggled with math Hannah found simple. There was a bitterness to Athena, a pain that Hannah hadn’t recognized until now. Suddenly, she felt very sorry for the girl.

Athena wadded up the bags and smiled.

“I could have done all that myself,” Athena said. “But I told Mom I needed you, ‘cuz I wanted to talk to you. About our deal”

“We don’t have a deal.”

“Do you know what the punishment is for lying?”

“No.”

“They’ll put eight little squares on your back. Eight.”

“Okay,” Hannah said, trying to control her voice, trying not to imagine suffering through eight jolts with that horrible device. “I only got three last time.”

“I know.”

“Ready to go back to Allain?”

“Yes.”

“He’s done it to you, hasn’t he?”

“What do you think?”

Athena smiled lecherously. “I think he did. More than once.”

Hannah smiled back in a way that said yes without making it official.

“What did you do with Jessica?”

“Didn’t she tell you?”

“She says you just kissed.”

“That’s true.”

## **A Jealous Lover**

Athena opened the bedroom door and gestured for Hannah to follow her. “Back to Allain,” she whispered.

Allain’s door was open and Hannah moved to it quickly, reveling anew in her unchained freedom, shutting down the parts of her mind that were worried about what Athena had said. She was going to be with Allain again, and she needed to give him her full attention.

He was at his door before she reached it. He threw it wide for her, shut and locked it and stripped, his penis still erect, bouncing with his movements. Hannah smiled and took it loosely in her fingers, caressing it, then she knelt and accepted it into her mouth, tasting it, licking it, pulling it in as deeply as she could stand, almost to her throat.

Allain pulled away from her, turned off the light and led her to bed, the only illumination now a nightlight in the bathroom and a dim glow through the curtains.

She sensed he wanted her to lead again, and she obliged him, following the same pattern as yesterday,

mounting him, devouring his penis with her vagina, sliding up and down on his pole while they both grunted quietly. She was getting a sense of how his body worked, and used that knowledge now to string him out, to make sure he didn't cum too quickly. When his breath came faster and his hips began rocking, stabbing into her female slot, she slowed, working only his tip with the mouth of her sex until he calmed, then plunging down for another round of grinding pleasure.

Only when she felt her own climax building did she allow him his release, sliding her sheath up and down his member with a fast, steady rhythm, pressing her clitoris against him on every down thrust, milking him, feeling the explosive pulse of his shaft as she welcomed his white cream into her body, her mouth tightening, her hips quivering with a mind of their own.

Her orgasm complete, Allain gasping quietly in the dark beneath her, she dropped down on him, kissing his mouth, his neck, his ear while she held her lower half in position, her hole still wrapped tightly around his maleness.

Now, their breathing slowed and their bodies relaxed, Allain's penis softened and dropped out of her body.

"Hannah," Allain whispered.

"Yes, Allain?"

"I don't know what's happening."

"We just finished having sex," she offered helpfully.

"Not making love?"

"Making love too," she agreed.

"I love you."

"I know," said Hannah. "You said that yesterday. I love you too."

"You don't understand."

"Maybe not," Hannah agreed, and she slid off to lie beside him, her arm across his chest.

"My heart is breaking," Allain said.

“Who broke your heart?” Hannah asked, not sure what else to say, confused anew by Allain.

“You did,” he said.

“We just met,” Hannah protested. “I haven’t had time to break your heart.”

“You met Ramone today. When you were shopping.”

“Yeah,” Hannah agreed.

“You’re going to ... be with him.”

“I guess so.”

“Do you want to be?”

Hannah fell silent, surprised that the conversation had gone this way, considering her answer carefully before she spoke.

“It’s the way things are,” she said. “Your mother wants me to be with him, while you’re at school. Your family bought me, and this is how it is.”

“No,” Allain protested weakly.

“How did you know I met him?” Hannah asked, hoping to steer the subject to something else.

“Athena texted me, when you were driving back from the mall.”

“Oh.”

“She said you smiled at him. You wanted him.”

“Why would she say that to you?”

“Because she’s evil.”

Hannah laughed into Allain’s ear, and she put her arm around his waist and pulled him close, kissing his cheek.

“She said she could tell you wanted him,” Allain whispered, unconsolated.

“I was being polite. He’s a slave.”

“Do you love him?”

Hannah laughed again. "How could I love him? I just met him. And he belongs to the Abercrombies."

Allain sighed and turned his face away from Hannah, toward the window.

"When do you leave for school?" Hannah inquired.

Allain sighed again. "Sunday night."

"When will you be back?"

"Friday night."

"Can we spend all our time together?" Hannah asked. "Until you leave Sunday night?"

"Yes," Allain said with surprising certainty.

"All day tomorrow?" Hannah pressed.

"Almost," Allain replied. "I might have to go somewhere."

"You could take me."

"I'd have to chain you."

"I know."

"Maybe. If Mom says okay."

"Where would we be going?"

"To pick up some stuff I need for school. From a family friend."

"I want to go."

"You hate your cage that much?"

"No," Hannah answered. "I want to be with you."

Allain turned back to her and hugged her, and Hannah knew that, for now at least, he was at peace with her, and with whatever feelings her fraught existence had conjured within him, and she knew he would be needing her again, tonight, soon, and he'd probably want her to yield to him for their next round, flat on her back.



For another hour, they whispered together, made love again, talked quietly, and finally fell asleep. The next morning, they woke together to the sounds of the rest of the family stirring, talking in the hall, shutting doors.

Hannah rose first, went to the bathroom while Allain threw his curtains wide, welcoming in the first light of a new day, and then he shackled her and sent her across the hall to Laura, who had her match Ormek's socks and put them away. Ormek was in the shower so she didn't see him naked this morning.

Done in the parents' bedroom, she made her way alone to the kitchen, where Darcy was making breakfast and Athena was already halfway through the meal.

After breakfast, Athena, book bag over her shoulder, brought Hannah down to her cage.

"Have you thought about our deal?" she asked, kneeling to remove Hannah's chains.

"No," Hannah replied. "And it's not a deal until we both agree on it."

"I think it's already a deal."

"It's just an idea," Hannah countered. "When we agree, it will be a deal."

"So you're going to agree?"

"No," Hannah replied. "I was just saying what a deal was. Helping you cheat is another way of lying, and I don't want to be punished."

"You can't be punished if you don't get caught."

"If you get caught, everyone will know it was me that helped you, even if you never tell."

"I think you're smart enough to keep me from getting caught."

"I can't help you on the tests. Don't you have tests?"

"I'll learn from the homework after you do it."

“You can’t learn it without doing the homework. That’s what homework’s for.”

Athena, at last exhausted by Hannah’s logic, looked at her with annoyance.

“Mom says I have to let you use my makeup.”

“That’s nice of your mom.”

“Do you have any idea how to put on makeup?”

“I tried to memorize what you and Jessica did. So maybe.”

“Mom says you should shower now, and then she’ll come get you and bring you up to my bathroom.”

“Okay.”

Athena turned to leave, and Hannah leaned against the bars.

“Athena,” she said. “Thanks. For letting me use your makeup.”

“Whatever,” Athena replied, adding at the elevator. “Mom bought it all for me, so it’s really hers.”

### **To Dr. Brierson’s**

In the shower, under a stream of water stronger and warmer than it needed to be, Hannah pondered Athena, and she found now both sympathy and humor in the girl’s situation. Athena hated school, she wasn’t good at it, and unless Hannah could help her with it, all her family’s new slave meant to her was a new set of chores.

There was, perhaps, a way to help her that would seem like cheating to her that still forced her to learn something. Hannah would try that first, she decided, and she towed off, sat on her bed and turned her mind to Allain. She looked down, saw that his semen was still leaking from her vagina onto the sheets, and she thought about their next time together,

wondering if it would be this afternoon or not until nighttime again.

With nothing else to do, she picked up the science book and read, until she heard the little bump that told her Laura was there. She rose and went to the bars.

“Hannah?” Laura queried before she came into view. “Are you ready to go upstairs?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Laura appeared, still in her bathrobe, applied Hannah’s shackles and opened her cage, then turned to the peg under the window to grab her full set of chains.

“Did Athena tell you what you were going to do today?”

“Yes, Ma’am, put on her makeup.”

“Yes, because you’re going to visit some friends with Allain,” Laura said, escorting Hannah onto the elevator. “Did he tell you about that?”

“He said he needed to pick up some things for school from someone, and I might get to go along.”

“Yes, that’s the Briersons. They asked Allain to bring you. Dr. Brierson wants to meet you.”

Allain’s bedroom door was open and he was sitting on his bed with a stack of books and papers scattered around him.

He looked up and smiled at Hannah, then looked at his mother expectantly.

“I’m taking her to Athena’s vanity,” Laura said. “Can you supervise? I need to get dressed and get out the door.”

“How do you want her dressed for Dr. Brierson?” Allain asked her, rising from his bed.

“Whatever she wants to wear,” Laura replied, handing Allain the chains Hannah always wore in the car. “It’s all in that bedroom now.”

Grabbing a book, Allain escorted Hannah across the hall to Athena's vanity, and she covered the bench with a towel and went to work, doing her best to remember the steps.

"You know I'm not going to supervise, right?" Allain asked.

"That's fine. But you're not going to leave, are you?"

"No, I'll be at Athena's desk. Just call if you need anything."

Athena's vanity was littered with what seemed to be hundreds of small tubes and bottles and pots, and Hannah despaired that she could get anything accomplished with them, but she pressed on, picking up one item after another, studying them, sorting them, trying to remember or ferret out their purpose.

"What are the Brierson's like?" Hannah asked, carefully lining her eyes.

"They're nice," Allain replied. "Dad bought Dr. Brierson's clinic from him five years ago, and Dad offered less than some of the other people, but Dr. Brierson chose him because he liked him. So we're very good friends, and he's going to give me some models I need for one of my classes this fall."

"Models?"

"Anatomical," Allain explained. "Sinuses, ear, throat. They have tons of parts I have to memorize, much easier to do that if you have something to hold, instead of looking at a book."

Allain paused.

"But they're a little weird ... about certain things."

"What do you mean?"

"They own some . . . they have some subjects, and you'll probably see them. And it might be a little different. And Dr. Brierson asked to meet you. I'm not sure why."

Hannah decided not to pursue the topic. Thirty minutes later, she was ready to show Allain her work.

“Am I finished?” she asked.

He stepped in, stood behind her, pulling her long hair behind her shoulders, then he pressed his hips against her back and she could feel his penis hardening.

“I wish we had time to play,” he said. “You’re beautiful. Let’s get you dressed.”

In the bedroom that Hannah was told might one day be hers, Allain removed her shackles and she donned a pair of white panties and a white bra, then light blue shorts and a pink tank top. The black sandals, soft leather, were the nicest things she had ever put her feet into, and she turned to Allain and fought the urge to cry with gratitude.

“Look okay?”

“So nice,” he agreed.

He had tossed her chains onto the bed, and now he picked them up and looked at her apologetically.

“I know,” she said, holding out her hands.

They took the BMW, the first car Hannah had ever been in with only two seats. Allain drove more quickly than his sister, but more confidently.

They talked first about Athena, and about the concern her lack of academic dedication was causing her parents, and then Allain turned to her, his eyes invisible behind a pair of dark sunglasses.

“You’re not always going to be chained to ride in the car,” he said.

“When?” Hannah replied.

“When Mom says.”

“She decides everything?”

“Mom runs the house; Dad makes money, but Mom’s in charge.”

“Do you know what she’s waiting for? About me?”

“Not really. She just needs to trust you, I guess. And that will take time.”

Hannah looked out the window, staring at the streets and the free people on them, and remembered with a sudden, sick horror the conversation with Athena the night before. Eventually, she knew, Athena was going to tell Laura about the marks on Hannah’s back, and her lie about them, and Laura’s trust would be reduced, if not destroyed. She might spend the rest of her life in chains.

Allain left the city limits and made his way down a long country road, slowing at what looked at first like an empty field. He turned, picked his way over a gravel path, reached an elaborate brick gate and proceeded through it and down a narrow, paved lane amidst a forest.

As they cleared the woods, a home of breathtaking beauty appeared, more a palace than a dwelling, made of stone and slate and, Hannah guessed, copper on the domes that topped its two rounded towers.

“It’s a castle!” Hannah exclaimed.

“The Briersons are really rich,” Allain said, pulling up beside the fountain at the end of the front walk. “Dr. Brierson owns some medical patents.”

The huge front door, with mythical figures carved in oak, opened as they approached. It was so old looking that, Hannah imagined, it must have been brought from someplace else, perhaps a castle in Europe.

A dark-haired woman in her 30s, nude except for her collar and pubic hair, appeared at the door and looked at them both solemnly.

“You are Allain Petrosyan?” she asked.

“Yes,” Allain said.

“And Hannah?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said.

“Come in.”

Hannah entered first and gazed in wonder at the vast hall, a grand staircase in the middle, paintings and sculptures and carved furniture on display along the walls.

“Would you please remove her chains?” the woman asked, shutting the door.

Allain obliged and Hannah, glad to be free of her restraints, wondered what would happen if she attempted to run away now. If she succeeded, they’d probably just write a check to the Petrosyans for their loss. But she had at this moment no desire to escape.

“You can hand your clothing to me,” the woman said.

Hannah stared at the woman, uncertain of her meaning.

“Please give me your clothing,” the woman said, looking directly at Hannah.

### **Dr. Brierson’s Offer**

Hannah, confusion turning to panic, looked at Allain imploringly. She wanted him to turn around and leave immediately. Or put her chains back on and just tell her to wait in the car. But he merely shrugged.

Hannah undressed slowly, starting with her shirt and bra, hoping someone would tell her to stop, but neither the woman nor Allain did. She kicked off her sandals and slipped out of her shorts and panties, handing each item to the woman, who folded them and tucked them under her arm.

She had been nude in front of dozens of people, she reminded herself, hundreds if you counted everyone in the stacks, but this felt different. In the most beautiful house she’d ever seen, in the presence of the richest people she’d probably ever met, she was not fit to be clothed in anything but her collar.

She remembered the trick she had taught herself, to see her body as another girl's, and she went there in her mind, to a place where her physical form was one person, and Hannah was watching safely from somewhere else.

"Dr. Brierson is this way," the woman said, turning. Hannah followed and Allain put his hand on her shoulder and squeezed, and she returned to her body to feel his sympathetic touch, and then she exited again.

The woman led them down an ornate hall and into a dark room of oak paneling and velvet furnishings. Hannah followed the sound of a man's voice and spotted him, gray-haired, trim, mustached, with a military bearing, perhaps in his late 50's. Dr. Brierson occupied a large, velvet chair in the corner, his legs crossed, talking on his phone.

"Francis, I'm going to have to hang up, I've got visitors," the doctor said, looking up and smiling. He put his phone away and stood. "Allain, how are you?"

Hannah held back as Allain stepped forward to shake Dr. Brierson's hand.

"Thanks very much for the mo-" Allain began.

"Don't mention it," Dr. Brierson interrupted. "Glad someone's using them again. Give me your car keys, we'll put everything in the trunk."

Dr. Brierson handed the keys to the woman. Hannah watched her leave the room and wondered what her life was like. Was she used for sex? Was she always free of her chains? Were there any other slaves in the home, and were all of them required to be nude?

"Have a seat," the doctor said, and Allain took a chair while Hannah continued to stand at the edge of the room, glad to be invisible.

Dr. Brierson was drinking something dark from the largest wine glass Hannah had ever seen, swishing it and smelling it and sipping, and he poured some for Allain, which he barely sipped, just to be polite, Hannah thought.



For the next 15 minutes, the two men talked about medicine and education and the state of healthcare while Hannah tuned in and out, sometimes looking at the pictures and the fish and the animal heads on the walls, sometimes glancing at Allain. But she turned her attention fully back to the men, listening apprehensively when she sensed the conversation concerned her.

“And you brought her home when, Monday?”

“Tuesday,” Allain said.

Both were staring at her, and Hannah looked into each pair of eyes, trying to appear brave.

“How much was she?”

“I’m not sure,” Allain replied.

“750?”

“More than that, I think,” Allain stammered.

“More than a million?”

“I’m not sure,” Allain replied. “Possibly.”

Hannah was certain Allain knew what his parents had paid for her, but revealing the number was most likely bad manners. Why was Dr. Brierson bringing this up?

“Come here, Hannah,” Dr. Brierson said, motioning her over.

Hannah, her heart thumping with sudden, unexpected misgivings, approached the doctor slowly.

“Kneel,” he said. “Open your mouth.”

Hannah obeyed and he ran his finger along her teeth, top and bottom, pressed down on her tongue and peered into her throat, then ran his wet finger along the bridge of her nose, along her cheek and jaw line.

Each time he exhaled, she smelled what he was drinking, a heavy, sweet odor that was strange but not unpleasant.

“How old are you?”

“18, Sir.”

He lowered his hand to her breasts, raising each, pinching her nipples.

“Stand up and turn around.”

Hannah glanced at Allain, but he was staring at the floor, his hands clasped together, white knuckles revealing what she guessed was mortification.

Hannah stood and turned.

“Hands on your knees.”

She bent, reminding herself this was another girl’s body when Dr. Brierson reached up to her sex, parted her vaginal lips, tugged at them, searched her folds for her clitoris.

“More than a million, easily,” Dr. Brierson mumbled.

She heard him lick his finger, and he slid it up her vagina. “I understand your mating scores were very good.”

Hannah, lost as to what to say back, knew she was blushing a deep crimson, her forehead wet with sweat.

“Isn’t that right?” he persisted.

“I was told ...” Hannah began. “I was told I did okay, Sir.”

Dr. Brierson laughed. “And modest too.”

“On Tuesday,” Dr. Brierson intoned, and Hannah sensed that he had turned back to Allain, even though his finger was still probing the mouth of her hole. “On Tuesday, the City of Dallas issued a tax stamp for a female subject who sold at a price of one point five million dollars.”

He paused, grabbed his drink with his free hand, swished it, sipped it, set it down again.

“Was that this female?”

Allain coughed. “I don’t know, Sir,” he said.

Dr. Brierson laughed and withdrew his finger from Hannah’s sheath.

“I know it was! I know it!”

Allain chuckled nervously and Hannah straightened, crossed her arms and looked down, hoping the ordeal was over.

“You tell your father, Allain,” the doctor said quietly. “You tell your father that I’ll pay him a quarter million dollars for nothing more than the right to bid on whatever this girl issues. And if she gives you a female, a million more, as soon as she comes home from the hospital. A million more.”

“Yes, Sir,” Allain agreed.

“Have you thought about breeding her?”

“Pardon me, Sir?”

“Have you thought about breeding her?”

Dr. Brierson reached up and ran his finger along the little mark on Hannah’s arm where the birth control tab had been inserted.

“When was this put in, Honey?” he asked.

“About a week ago, Sir,” Hannah replied. “Saturday, I think. Or Friday.”

“Tell your dad to call me,” Dr. Brierson said, standing and shaking Allain’s hand to indicate the meeting was over.

Allain thanked Dr. Brierson again for the models, and the naked slave woman appeared and escorted them back to the front door, where Hannah was allowed to put her clothes on and Allain returned her to her chains.

They settled into the car in silence, and neither spoke for the first five minutes of the trip back home. Hannah willed herself not to cry, but only because she couldn’t reach her eyes to wipe them.

“Are you upset?” Allain finally asked.

“No,” Hannah replied, not completely dishonestly. Her feelings were too complex to be summed up by a single word.

“Did what Dr. Brierson say bother you?”

“I thought I was just going to meet a friend of yours. I didn’t know he was going to ... to poke at me and talk about breeding me.”

“I didn’t know either.”

“You said he was a little weird. About subjects.”

“He, uh, breeds people. It’s what he does in his retirement.”

“And sells them?”

“Yeah.”

“So he wants to get me pregnant to sell my children?”

“I guess so.”

“I wouldn’t like that,” Hannah said firmly. “I know I have to do what you say. But I wouldn’t like that.”

“I know.”

“He’s using other girls? For that?”

“Yes.”

“Where?”

“Downstairs.”

“How many?”

“I don’t know. Maybe five.”

“You’ve seen them?”

“Yes.”

“He gave you a tour?”

This was another revelation to Hannah, another subworld of the great, strange overworld of human ownership she had first encountered only the previous week. She didn’t know how much more she wanted to know, but she allowed Allain to speak.

“Dr. Brierson wanted my dad to go in on it with him. Like, to invest. Dad said no, so Dr. Brierson had me come

over, didn't say what it was about, but once I got there, he talked to me about it, like maybe I could change Dad's mind. So he brought me downstairs, to see."

Allain paused, looked at Hannah, and she looked back.

"It wasn't terrible. They were living okay. There's carpet, and nice furniture, and great food. They're allowed outside sometimes. They talk, they can be with each other, they even have a computer."

"Were they in cages?"

"Not all the time."

"Chained?"

"Not always."

"Were there any children?"

"Not yet," Allain said. "He was just starting up then. But two girls were pregnant."

"Are there any children there now?"

"I don't know."

Hannah suspected Allain knew more than he was saying, but she let the matter drop. A million terrible things could happen to her – or to anyone, really – and worrying about them all would do her no good. In the end, she continued to believe, Jesus would look out for her.

"Are you going anywhere else today?"

"Just staying at home," he said. "I've got a lot of review to do. Summer made me forget everything."

"Is that what all those books were for?"

"Yeah."

"Can I study with you?"

"Yes," Allain said, and he reached over and squeezed her hand in a way that suggested he might want to take a break with her at some point, and she was glad.

## The Letter

Laura was waiting for them when they walked from the garage into the kitchen, and Hannah sensed that something was wrong.

“Hello, Hannah, how was your visit at the Briersons?”

“Just fine, Ma’am,” Hannah lied.

“I need to speak to you about something, Hannah. Allain, I need to take Hannah downstairs for a few minutes.”

“Sure,” he said, and he glanced quickly at Hannah and she stared back, her heart pounding. Had Athena talked? Or had Dr. Brierson made an offer for her the Petrosyans couldn’t refuse?

She shuffled to the elevator, rode down in silence with Laura and stepped to her cage. Laura locked her in, removed her chains and hung them on the peg.

“Now your clothing.”

Hannah stripped, wishing she didn’t have to part with everything so soon. Laura set everything on the table and returned to the bars.

“We got a letter in the mail today, Hannah.”

“Yes, Ma’am?” Hannah replied, her anxiety mounting.

“From your mother.”

“Oh!” Hannah blurted. “Oh, from Mother. Oh!”

“I’m going to let you read it,” Laura said. “You do want to read it, don’t you?”

“Yes, Ma’am, very much,” Hannah said, and she felt a mix of new emotions bubbling up, feelings she had fought with and kept at bay for more than a week, sympathy for the woman who bore and raised and lost her, worry and anxiety over her mother’s fate, and fear of how Mother would react to Hannah’s new life.

Laura pulled a folded piece of paper out of her skirt pocket.

“I’m going to let you read it, and then we’ll need to talk about it.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah agreed, taking the letter from Laura’s hand and turning to her bed. She pulled the covers up to her waist, unfolded the paper and spread it on her lap. It was written in Mother’s perfect print, each letter formed with the care she was taught before her tenth birthday. Cursive was considered immoral for girls in the community where she grew up, so she never learned it, but she printed impeccably.

“My Dearest Hannah,” the letter began, “I am very proud of you. I understand that you’ve been staying with a good, Christian family since you had to leave me. I wish to be reunited with you as soon as possible.

“I am well. I will be able to say more about my situation when we are together. An angel has entered my life and has performed several miracles. I am truly in the hands of Jesus!

“I have a space I can share with you, which is nicer than our last apartment. I look forward to having you back with me.

“Please write me as soon as possible. I can probably have you picked up if you will provide your address.

“With all my love, Mother.”

Hannah read the note three times over, each time growing more distraught. By the third reading, she was weeping in earnest, and she staggered to the toilet and grabbed a handful of tissue to wipe her eyes. The makeup she’d applied earlier that day was rolling off in earnest, and she didn’t care.

“Is your mother’s letter upsetting you?” Laura whispered.

“Yes ... Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

“I’m so sorry. I was afraid that might happen. Can you tell me why?”

“A lot of reasons,” Hannah said, collecting her thoughts.

“She expects you to move back in with her.”

“Yes, Ma’am. I don’t think she understands what ... what I’m doing.”

“Yes, Honey,” Laura said, looking at Hannah sympathetically through the bars.

Mother had lost touch with reality, Hannah thought. What she had been through was so terrible she was no longer understanding what had happened.

“Would you like to write her back, Hannah?” Laura softly asked.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“We’ll need to read what you write. And you can’t provide our address.”

“I understand,” Hannah replied. “I just want to meet with her. That’s all the letter will say. I can’t say what I need to say in a letter.”

Laura looked at the floor, saying nothing.

“Ma’am?” Hannah said, not willing to be denied. “It’s in my contract. A meeting with her is in my contract.”

“I know,” Laura said, looking annoyed as she stared into Hannah’s eyes. She pondered for a moment, and her expression softened. “We can do the clinic next week, and you can probably meet her there.”

“What’s the clinic?”

“They’ll look you over. Health exam, and they might do some tests, and some other things.”

“Where is it?” Hannah asked.

“Downtown.”

“What’s the address?”

“I’ll have to get it.”



“We’ll put the address in the letter,” Hannah said.  
“When will I go?”

“I’ll need to schedule you. Maybe Wednesday and Thursday.”

“I’ll stay overnight?”

“Yes.”

“If we send the letter Monday, when will Mother get it?”

“Tuesday, I think,” Laura said.

Confronted for the first time with the actual logistical difficulties of meeting mother, Hannah became overwhelmed again, and she raised the tissue to her eyes and wept quietly. Too much could go wrong, she thought. The letter might not even reach Mother, or Mother might not be able to get a ride to the clinic, or the schedule at the clinic might change, and Hannah would wait for her mother at whatever kind of place the clinic was, and Mother would never show.

Hannah pulled her sheets up to her breasts and stared at the bed in the other cage, where Raven had slept, and she forgot everything for a time. Finally, she looked up, at the window on the far wall, clouds gathering there. Then she noticed Laura, still at the bars, waiting for something.

“Will you be okay, Hannah?” Laura asked.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, wishing she could cry without making everyone worried about her mental stability.

She looked out the window again, then back at Laura.

“Ma’am?”

“Yes, Hannah.”

“May I see Allain?”

“Would you like me to send him down for you?”

“Yes, Ma’am. Thank you, Ma’am.”

The clock Athena had given her said 11:45 when Laura left. It took three minutes for Allain to arrive at

Hannah's cage and shackle her.

He and Hannah grabbed sandwiches from the kitchen before they slipped into his room, both settling on his bed, Allain with his books and Hannah with pen and paper.

"Mother wrote me a letter," she said.

"Mom mentioned that," Allain said, looking at her curiously. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"Only a little," she said. "I'm just worried, because it was strange. I think something bad is happening to her, and she doesn't know. She expects me to live with her, but it's not, it's not ... I'm not sure I'll ever get to see her."

Hannah's voice cracked but she was determined not to cry again, and she fought her emotions as she studied Allain's reaction.

There was little to discern in his face, however. His eyes registered sympathy, but nothing else. What, after all, could he say? What could anyone say? She'd been taken from her mother, the separation might be permanent, and all of it was at the discretion of the Petrosyans.

But Hannah kept her thoughts to herself as she returned to the blank piece of paper in her lap and struggled with what to write. The second paragraph, where she told her mother where to be and when, would be easy, but she'd started the first paragraph five times and scratched each out in frustration. She needed to hint to her mother that things were not as she believed them to be, but she couldn't be explicit. That would have to wait until they were together, if they ever were.

After 30 minutes of futility, Hannah heard a knock on the door. It was Laura, and she opened the door to tell Allain that she was having lunch with friends and would be back around 4.

"Hannah, do you have everything you need?" she asked.

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied, wondering what Laura would have said if she'd demanded something to drink.

## Athena's Demand

Allain shut and locked the door and returned to the bed, but he slid his books and notes onto the floor, and he reached over and put his hand on Hannah's belly, and she was glad for the excuse to do something new. She pressed his hand against herself and kissed him until he pulled away to undress and get her key. He removed her shackles and they made slow, rhythmic love for an hour, each gasping out their orgasms into the other's ear.

After sex, Allain closed his eyes while Hannah lay beside him quietly, her arm across his chest, until he awoke and smiled at her. They sat up, Allain leaned off the bed to grab a book, reading it beside her, naked. Hannah picked up a fresh sheet of paper and, this time, as Allain leaked out of her and onto his sheets, the words to Mother flowed.

At 4, Athena knocked on the Allain's door.

"Yeah?" he queried.

"I hope Hannah's in there with you, because she's not in her cage."

"She is," Allain said. "Do you need her?"

"Yeah, like in 5 minutes."

"Uh-huh."

Hannah's heart sank, but she dared not tell Allain why she was afraid of Athena. He kissed her cheek, wrapped his arms around her and put his mouth on her shoulder, pressing his teeth against her skin.

She sighed into his hair, as if in lust, but making love now wasn't something she wanted or they had time for, and she allowed him to shackle her and she walked dutifully down to Athena's room. The door was open and she was at her desk, a book open, sheets of paper on her bed.

"Math first," Athena announced, pointing to her bed.

“I need a towel,” Hannah said.

“On your period?”

“No,” Hannah said.

Athena looked at her, first into her eyes, then down to her middle, her face slowly registering understanding. Hannah found Athena’s reaction to the request interesting, for reasons she couldn’t name.

“How was school today?” Hannah asked lightly, folding the towel and setting herself down on it, bunching up Athena’s pillows behind her back, pulling the sheets up to her waist.

“So-so.”

Hannah made quick work of Athena’s relatively minor math assignment, helped in no small part by Athena’s growing comprehension.

“This is getting easier for you,” Hannah observed.

“Maybe,” Athena replied, rummaging through her school bag, drawing out a single sheet.

“Now this.”

It was a writing assignment for Athena’s advanced European history class. The teacher wanted at least five pages on any topic related to 19<sup>th</sup> Century French politics.

“Okay,” Hannah said, raising an eyebrow.

“So, are you going to write it?”

“It has to be researched,” Hannah said, stalling for time. “It says you can use the internet. I don’t know how.”

“You know how to use the internet,” Athena said, laughing. “You know you’re not supposed to lie.”

“I have never used the internet,” Hannah replied, making no effort to conceal her annoyance. “Mother wouldn’t have allowed it. And we never had a computer, anyway. We barely had enough money for food.”

Hannah, looking into Athena's eyes, saw her features soften almost imperceptibly, and reminded herself that Athena wasn't evil, just young and frustrated and trying to get some benefit from the family's new girl.

The paper wasn't due for two weeks, Hannah noted, enough time for her to figure out what to do.

"May I keep this?" she asked.

"Yeah," Athena replied, smiling conspiratorially. "And we have some books in class I can bring home."

"Does it have to be typed?"

"Yeah."

"I don't know how to type."

"Tell me what to type, then."

"Okay," Hannah said. "Maybe."

"Do you want to go back to Allain?" Athena asked, and she smiled wickedly and looked at Hannah's lap.

"If you don't need me anymore."

"Would you do it again?" Athena asked.

"Do what?"

"You know."

"Oh, you mean have sex with Allain?" Hannah asked. She had spent the last day thinking about how to respond to Athena's nosiness, and she'd decided being direct was the best approach.

Athena stared at Hannah, the color rising in her cheeks.

"Do you think I should?" Hannah asked. "I can tell him you thought it was a good idea."

"No you won't!" Athena said venomously, but the fear in her face quickly made way for a sly look Hannah knew from experience should be feared.

“So,” she said casually, “you visited the Briersons today?”

“I did,” Hannah replied.

“Did Dr. Brierson try to buy you?”

“No,” Hannah replied.

“Does he want to make you have babies?”

“Yes.”

“You know what for, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Hannah replied, and she knew the color was now rising in her own face.

“Tell me.”

“To sell them.”

“Did you tell him yes?”

“That’s not my decision,” Hannah said, stating the obvious.

“Do you want to do that?”

“No.”

Athena, satisfied that she’d make Hannah sufficiently uncomfortable, rose and stepped to her door.

“Okay, you can go back to Allain now. I’m sure he misses you.”

“I’ll leave the assignment here,” Hannah said, laying it beside her on the comforter. “Or Allain will wonder why I’m carrying it around.”

“Yeah,” agreed, Athena.

“I’ll tell him you were asking about him,” Hannah promised, not quite done picking on Athena, and she crossed the hall to Allain’s open door. He was dressed again, back on the bed, and Hannah took her place beside him and returned to the letter she’d written to mother, still finding it good.

Red wine was served with dinner that evening, and Hannah realized she liked the smell much more than the taste, but the taste was not as terrible as before.

Allain sat beside Hannah, his usual distant self, but she was glad to have him there, and to feel the bump of his foot more than once.

Most of the evening's conversation concerned tomorrow night's party. Which families were going, and whom they were bringing, was of particular concern, and it became obvious to Hannah that they wanted her seen there, that she was to be shown off. Athena seemed to want something more, though, referring to it in veiled language Hannah wasn't sure about.

"Let's start her off in the little black dress first," Athena proposed. "And then the blue gown! No way she doesn't get the highest bid."

"We're not doing that," Laura said quietly. Athena scowled at her mother and, a second later, smiled at Hannah.

The matters of greatest importance to Hannah – if she would be nude, if she would be chained or caged, if anyone would want her to bend over for an inspection – weren't addressed, and she chose not to ask. If that had to happen, she would go outside her body again, she told herself, and watch herself as if she were one of the rich people there.

"Oh, and now you're famous, Hannah."

"What do you mean?" Hannah asked, accepting Allain's help as she learned to cut a steak, which she quickly decided was the best meat she'd ever eaten in her life.

"I took a picture of what you did to my makeup and posted it to Look."

"What's Look?"

"It's a place where you put pictures up, so your friends can see."

"What did she do to your makeup?" Allain asked.

“She organized everything,” Athena said. “Lipstick in one row, perfectly straight, by color; eyeliner in another row, and blush, rouge, sparkles, all in their own little departments. I got 34 “wows” and 12 “nices,” and three people said they want you to do the same thing for them, including Betsy Charlemagne, and I think she was being serious.”

### **Talking Through a Tryst**

Hannah spent the night with Allain again, made love twice, and in the morning, she ate with Athena in the kitchen and did chores with Darcy until Allain brought her back to her cage. He looked at her apologetically, explaining that he had another round of errands to run, and she pouted on principle, but she didn’t mind. She didn’t want to be prodded by any more of his friends, and she was ready to be alone. But she told Allain to bring her another handful of books from the library, and he returned with an adult mystery novel, a book about the solar system, a picture book about cats.

Athena had dropped off the assignment sheet and two books about French history, however, and that’s the first thing Hannah turned to, poring over stories of intrigue and violence and upheaval until she almost felt that century like she’d lived it herself. The contours of the paper she could write for Athena emerged quickly in her mind, and she briefly imagined indulging the girl before she dismissed the idea as both wrong and dangerous. Eventually, it would get out that Hannah had been helping Athena cheat, and then both of them would be in trouble. Athena would lose privileges. Hannah would be tortured.

At noon, the elevator bumped and Darcy appeared, pushing a cart.

“Hungry yet, Hannah?” she asked.

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Let me change your sheets first,” Darcy said, and she stood at the brackets. Hannah, annoyed by another of the many



indignities of not being fully trusted, stepped over to the bars, slipping her hands through the slots.

“Someone’s coming to make you up at 2,” Darcy said, securing Hannah’s wrists.

“To make me up?” Hannah echoed.

“For the party tonight,” Darcy said. “Going to be quite a production.”

Darcy entered the cage and stripped Hannah’s bed.

“Do you wipe yourself after Allain’s been inside you?” Darcy asked.

“Yes, Ma’am, I try to.”

“You’ve put some stains on the sheet that might not come out,” Darcy said, holding up the fabric. Hannah glanced over quickly, noticed the pale white offal of her time with Allain, and felt a sudden, deep annoyance.

“I was bought so Allain could put that in me,” Hannah said sharply. “If he puts more in me than I can hold, some will spill out. And that’s not my problem.”

Darcy laughed. “Yes, Ma’am!” she exclaimed. She finished in Hannah’s cage, shut and locked the door and released Hannah’s hands.

“I’ll have your lunch in a few minutes,” Darcy said. If she were offended by Hannah’s outburst, she wasn’t showing it.

Hannah returned to her bed, drew her fresh sheets up to her breasts and wrapped her arms around her legs so she could hide her face in her knees.

This was about Athena, she realized. The stress the girl had put in her mind was coming out in sudden, unexpected ways. Still, Darcy had no business complaining about soiled sheets, and Hannah would not apologize for what she’d said when Darcy returned with lunch – if Darcy ever did. Perhaps the maid would let her starve.

But Darcy did make it back, with a sandwich, apple and cookie. Hannah ate the sandwich and cried over the apple and remembered Mother and her letter and realized there were many things tormenting her right now.

Hannah showered, looking down at her body and wondering how many more people were going to see her in the nude, how many would want to poke and prod her and talk about her as if she were livestock.

Washed and feeling a little more positive, she returned to her books, losing track of time until 1:30, when the elevator bumped again.

“Hannah?” Allain called.

“Hey, Allain!” she responded, and she went to the bars.

He was in shorts and a t-shirt, and he pulled them off as soon as he came into view, his penis quickly hardening.

He unlocked the door to the other cage, locked it back, and then unlocked the door between the cages, and Hannah watched his passage with a new sense of disappointment – he didn’t trust her enough to enter her cage directly.

Hannah set her books on the floor and, assuming Allain was in a hurry, got on her hands and knees in the middle of her bed, parting her legs obediently.

“This needs to be a little quick,” Allain confirmed, and he knelt behind her and felt her vulva to make sure she was wet.

Her honey had started flowing as soon as she’d heard Allain’s voice and, satisfied she was adequately lubricated, he spread her lips and eased the tip of his penis into her sex.

“Did you get your errands done?” Hannah asked.

“Yeah,” he replied a little shortly, either distracted by the sudden pleasure of entering her, or surprised by the question.

“Where did you have to go?” she asked, arching her back and rocking her pelvis to help him work his way inside

her body.

“Maldives,” he grunted, pushing the full length of his penis into her chamber. “A computer store. For a new battery for my laptop.”

“I’m going to be made up at two,” Hannah said. Her own voice came labored now, but she was going to keep talking, she decided. She wasn’t going to let Allain reduce her to a hole. If he weren’t going to make love to her, whisper about his love for her, kiss and touch and fondle her, he was at least going to have to talk to her.

“Someone’s showing up then,” Hannah added, sliding forward and pushing back, trying to establish a rhythm as Allain moved slowly in and out of her sex. “To make me up.”

“That’s what ...” Allain said, pausing to gasp, “... that’s what Mom told me.”

Hannah fell silent, allowing herself to enjoy Allain for a moment. Even this kind of sex was delicious, she realized, her walls screaming around Allain’s member.

His thrusts were coming faster and deeper now, his breath in short pants, and she knew he was about to cum.

“Try to keep it all in me,” she said.

“Wh ... why?” Allain croaked.

“I got in trouble with Darcy for spilling on my sheets,” Hannah said.

Allain took in a breath and uttered the first syllable of another sentence, either a statement or a question, but he could wait no longer and his next sound was a quiet animal grunt, the orgasm running through his body, forcing jets of cum into Hannah’s soaked chamber.

“Aaah,” Hannah cried quietly, surprised by how hard he was pushing, so delighted by the feeling of being repeatedly impaled she almost climaxed as well.

But Allain, after a few more thrusts meant only to drain his penis, pulled out of Hannah, left the bed and, with the

click of keys in locks, passed back through the cage doors and to his clothes.

Hannah, deeply frustrated, went to the toilet and wiped.

Allain, his still-erect penis awkwardly lodged in his shorts, stepped to the bars. Hannah rose to meet him there, smiling through her disappointment, reminding herself that they would have more time tonight.

“Are you going to masturbate?” he asked.

“I don’t know how.”

He looked at her in surprise. “I thought they’d teach you that.”

“They didn’t.”

“Isn’t it just touching?”

“Yeah, I guess,” she said.

Allain reached through the bars, one arm around her shoulders, the other to her middle. She spread her feet and he pressed his fingers against her vulva, parting her lips, wetting his finger in her hole and sliding it up to her clitoris, making quick, tight circles around it. Her body responded with its own mind, her hips pushing forward against Allain’s hand, her breath shallow and quick.

She was almost complete when the elevator bumped and Laura’s voice rang out, “Hannah?”

Allain pulled away with a look of panic in his eyes, and Hannah grimaced back at him, her frustration at a fever pitch.

“Hey, Mom,” Allain said, adjusting his t-shirt so it covered, just barely, his erection.

“Oh, Allain, I thought you were still upstairs,” she said, looking no less disconcerted than Allain. If she had come down five minutes earlier, she would have caught her son in the act – an event, Hannah suspected, that would have caused horror for them both.

Recovering from her initial surprise, Laura smiled at Hannah. "I've brought someone for you," she said.

## **To the Party**

Another figure rounded the wall that hid the elevator from Hannah's eyes, a girl in tank top and shorts, unchained but with a metal collar around her neck.

"Delilah!" Hannah exclaimed.

"Hannah!" Delilah shouted back,  
"Ohmygodohmygodohmygod!"

She brushed past Allain, slipped her arms through the bars and hugged Hannah with all her strength. "How have you been doing, Babydoll?"

Hannah, her sexual frustration overwhelmed by a new round of emotions, blinked back tears and pressed her face between the bars and onto Delilah's shoulder.

"Delilah did such a beautiful job with you at the, at the, where we met you, Hannah," Laura said, "we had to have her back for tonight."

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am."

Allain excused himself with a quick, rueful glance, and Delilah looked on with disappointment as Laura knelt to shackle Hannah.

By the time she and Delilah had reached the bedroom that, according to Athena at least, might someday be Hannah's, Hannah was happy again.

She settled into the chair at the vanity in the pink bathroom and looked into her face, most of the makeup she'd applied yesterday faded or wiped or cried off.

Delilah had brought a cart of supplies and she started by washing around Hannah's eyes.

“How have you been, Sweetheart?” Delilah asked, and Hannah knew she wasn’t just making conversation.

“Mostly good,” Hannah replied.

“Did they see those marks?” Delilah asked, and she ran her finger across Hannah’s bare shoulder.

“One of them did.”

“Did they know what they were for?”

“One of them did.”

“What did they say?”

“She wants to make a deal.”

“Oh, Honey, please don’t tell me you’re being blackmailed.”

“I am,” Hannah replied quietly, surprised at how quickly Delilah had gotten to the root of her biggest crisis.

“Oh, Hannah, no no no,” Delilah murmured, and she leaned over and held her head against Hannah’s, as if she thought she could pass her comfort directly into Hannah’s mind through her skull.

“She just wants me to do her homework,” Hannah said, and she laughed, suddenly seeing how ridiculous it all was. “To write a paper and things.”

“Are you going to do it?”

“No,” said Hannah. “I can’t. I’ll just get in more trouble. But I have a plan, sort of.”

Delilah spent two hours on her artistry while she and Hannah talked about everything: the cruelty of the stacks, some of the people who had passed through them, Delilah’s life as a transgender female slave, and Hannah’s life so far with the Petrosyans.

A little after 4, Delilah unveiled her creation, first to Laura, waiting in her bedroom, then to Athena in hers, then to Allain with his books in the living room, and finally to Ormek,

home early from the clinic, as he stepped into the kitchen from the garage.

Everyone approved, of course, Laura expressing her appreciation with a hug for Delilah, then for Hannah.

Hannah had forgotten Delilah's unique talent for making her up, and she glanced at herself in every mirror she passed by, not in vanity so much as curiosity, trying to reconcile the exotic being she saw with the girl she knew herself to be.

Laura paid Delilah in cash and she left alone, in her own car, a privilege Hannah found remarkable.

At five, Athena brought Hannah back to the bedroom to put on panties and the little black dress they'd bought her the previous night, then she was chained and bundled into the back seat of the SUV, Athena on one side, Allain on the other.

More of Hannah's clothes had been bagged, and Athena slid them into the rear of the vehicle.

Everyone had dressed up, Laura and Athena in formal gowns, Ormek and Allain in suits and ties.

"You look very nice," Hannah whispered to Allain, and he smiled at her and looked out the window.

On the 20-minute drive to the party, Allain remained distant while Athena chatted enthusiastically about the evening's gathering, ticking off all the families that would be there, listing by name parents, children, and subjects as well. She mentioned Raven and someone named Uncle Bear, but Hannah was too anxious to pay much attention, conjuring in her mind any number of possible indignities awaiting her this evening. The fact Dr. Brierson wasn't mentioned was no relief. Anyone there, she knew, could demand to inspect between her legs, in front of everyone else, and she'd have to comply.

After a few miles on the highway, Ormek steered into a neighborhood of homes that were comfortable but not stately, and when he parked in front of a very common home of dull red brick, she almost blurted that they might be at the wrong address. Everyone else seemed confident this was the

right place, however, and Athena helped Hannah onto the street, retrieved her extra clothing from the back of the SUV, and the family made their way past a long line of parked cars.

In a driveway two houses ahead, a group of boys were playing basketball, and they stopped as soon as they spotted the Petrosyans. Hannah thought at first they must know Athena or Allain, but when she looked at them, she noted that all eyes were on her, and she saw herself as they must see her, beautiful and chained, like a strange, exotic bird in a cage. She felt pride at first, quickly followed by a terrible, indefinable shame, because she knew they knew why she'd been bought. But she was surely not the only slave they'd seen pass in restraints that evening, she told herself. Had she ever been in the presence of humans in bondage, she realized, she would have stared too.

The last of the neatly-trimmed yards abutted the corner of a high wall covered with ivy, and Hannah guessed correctly that this was where they were going, that the hosts of tonight's party dwelt behind this barrier.

Ormek stopped at a small door set into the wall, pushed a button, said his name and the door beeped and opened for him.

Hannah passed through behind Athena and before Allain, entering a rough-hewn, open-air structure with a fireplace and benches, heavy beams overhead. A girl stood discreetly beside a post there, and she pulled her phone out and held it briefly against Hannah's back, where the chip had been embedded. Different as this was, Hannah was reminded of the girl at the stacks, who guarded the door to the salon.

Beyond the little structure, set upon the green grass, tables had been laid out with white tablecloths and weighed down with wine and punch, fruit and cheese, in a yard that swept up to a mansion of light gray brick and dark gray stone, blooming flowers around the foundation, trees and benches and a gurgling fountain across the grand façade. This was the house Hannah had expected.



Almost 100 people were scattered across the grounds, Hannah estimated, well-dressed men and women, free servants and collared slaves, the latter of two classes: those who were here to work, tending tables and carrying trays, and those, like Hannah, who were here to be seen, to be shown off, to bring pride to their owners.

“Just shackles for now,” Athena said, and Hannah scanned the slaves as Athena switched out her restraints, securing her ankles together, wadding up her full chains and slipping them into her purse.

The male workers were all in white tuxedos, the females in black maid costumes, the kind Raven was wearing the first time Hannah saw her. Five boys, 10 girls, she estimated, and then another 20 slaves there just for show, their clothing as varied as that of their owners – pastels, black tie, a maroon sundress, a bright white gown with a navy sash.

Hannah spotted Raven as soon as she looked for her, and Hannah was relieved to see that she was there for show, not for work, beautiful in a green dress and a yellow belt.

She waved at Hannah, grabbed the elbow of a plump older woman standing beside her and pointed, and both made their way across the grass to the Petrosyans, Raven doing her best to keep up in her shackles.

Laura and Ormek stepped to the front of the family and stopped, standing almost at attention. Athena and Allain took places behind their parents and Hannah stood behind them all, guessing that a greeting protocol was about to be observed, and she would be last. This must be Gramma, Hannah realized, Laura’s wealthy mother, Raven’s owner, the woman who’d sent her slave girl to the Petrosyan’s mean room for punishment.

And yet Gramma seemed inescapably likeable, her smile bright and her eyes crinkling almost closed as she greeted first her daughter and then Ormek with a kiss on either cheek. Next she hugged Athena and Allain, with a quick encouraging word to each.

Hannah stood still, waiting until Gramma turned the full light of her attention on her.

“And who is this precious little jewel?” she asked, stepping up to Hannah with her hand out.

“I’m Hannah, Ma’am,” Hannah answered, struggling for what to say next.

“I’m Canda Dupre,” she said. “And I am altogether charmed.”

“It’s a delic—“ Hannah stammered, the right word vanishing from her tongue just before it could be spoken, “it’s very nice, delic— delightful to meet you.”

Gramma looked at Ormek, her face distraught. “Did she say delicious?” Gramma queried. “Did she say it’s delicious to meet me?”

Hannah blushed and prayed that now, at last, God would take her away forever, never to make a fool of herself on this planet again.

Ormek looked on with a nervous smile, so Gramma turned back to Hannah and laughed, a loud, uproarious explosion that Hannah knew meant her latest blunder was merely amusing. Gramma hugged Hannah and Hannah hugged her back, almost swooning with relief.

Gramma stepped back and grabbed Hannah’s wrists. “Let’s visit again a little later,” she said, turning to Ormek. “I’ve got someone you need to meet.”

While Hannah and Gramma were getting acquainted, Raven had been greeting the Petrosyans, and she and Athena were in mid-hug when Gramma turned back to her.

“I believe you’ve met Raven, Hannah?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, and she and Raven smiled at each other as if they shared a secret that no one else knew, as if the fact they’d spent a night caged together, copulating, wasn’t common knowledge.

Gramma turned and sped off and all the Petrosyans but Athena hustled after her. Athena was apparently to be in

charge of both slaves, but she stepped a few yards away and began poking at her phone, leaving Hannah and Raven to celebrate their reunion with a small degree of privacy. Raven slid gracefully up to Hannah and the girls embraced.

### **Raven's Boyfriend**

"How have you been, Sweetheart?" Raven asked, kissing Hannah's bare shoulder.

"Okay," Hannah said. "Mostly okay."

"Athena?" Raven asked her quietly, with a glance toward the girl.

"Yes," Hannah whispered, not daring to say more.

"Fight fire with fire."

"How do I do that?"

"That's all the advice I've got," Raven admitted quietly, "but I'm sure you'll think of something."

Raven smiled, stepped back, looked Hannah over, and Hannah's mind went involuntary to what had been done to her friend at the Petrosyan's, the punishment she'd suffered while Laura looked on.

Perhaps Raven could read her mind, and her face clouded briefly before a new thought brought her back to the joy of this evening's gathering.

"Wanna meet my boyfriend?" she asked.

"Your boyfriend?" Hannah repeated, raising an eyebrow. "You have one?"

"Kinda."

Raven turned to Athena and spoke with mock formality:

"Ma'am?" she asked.

Athena looked up.

“Please, Ma’am, may we go inside?”

Athena nodded, returned her eyes to her phone and began drifting across the yard, toward the house.

Hannah did her best to glide over the lawn the way Raven did, taking quick, short steps that belied her restraints. Indeed, Raven’s behavior was indistinguishable from that of any free girl there as they made their way up to the house. She grabbed a glass of white wine, handed a second to Hannah, greeted everyone she knew, slave or free, with a one-handed hug and a kiss on the cheek, and she introduced Hannah over and over as simply the Petrosyan’s new girl, as if she were a daughter who had arrived this week fully-grown.

Another girl stood vigil at the door of the great home, holding her phone up to Raven’s and Hannah’s backs for a quick scan as the price of admission.

The house was refreshingly cool and astonishingly well-appointed, dark woods and silk furniture, and a chandelier over the foyer that looked, to Hannah, like a small glowing, upside-down city. Somewhere deeper into the house, a string ensemble played something quick and complicated that Hannah guessed was Mozart.

Athena following absently, Raven grabbed Hannah’s hand and led her up the staircase to a broad landing. Hannah hoped she wouldn’t get in trouble for not taking the elevator and did her best to keep up, rattling after Raven to the top of the stairs and down a long hallway toward an open door and men’s voices.

Raven darted in and Hannah followed, despite her fears of what might happen here. She rounded the door in time to see Raven draping herself across a couch and the lap of a man in his late 30’s, reaching up to wrap her arms around his neck.

Bearded, with thick black hair to his shoulders, he wore a dress shirt but no tie or jacket. Something about him looked wild to Hannah, or even a little mad.

He kissed Raven and looked up at Hannah, and the conversation stopped while the other men gathered there, five or six of them, followed his gaze.

“I brought Hannah,” Raven announced, and Hannah smiled at the man and looked around the room, spotting Allain holding what looked like a metal mug and standing beside a long, high counter that Hannah realized was a place where drinks were served.

A bar, inside a house.

The man on the couch kissed Raven again and lifted her by her shoulders to remove her from his lap, then put his hand on the arm of the couch and, with a grunt of effort, slowly rose to his feet.

“Come here, Hannah,” he said. Hannah approached him slowly, self-conscious about her shackles, hoping no one was going to demand she strip.

“Everyone calls me Uncle Bear,” he said, offering her his hand. “Even people who ain’t niece nor nephew.”

He smiled at her, and she saw Gramma in his face, the way his eyes crinkled with amusement when he looked at her.

“I could pretend you’re my uncle,” Hannah said, “if that would make things easier.”

He laughed like Gramma too, amused far beyond what Hannah expected.

“What did I tell you, Bear?” Raven exclaimed from the couch, and Hannah realized people had been talking about her, about the things she blurted that were just this side of rude. Feeling awkward again, Hannah sipped her wine, sweet and bitter at the same time, and she looked down, not aware Allain had sidled up beside her until he put his arm around her waist.

She looked up and he kissed her and Uncle Bear sat back down, as if ceding authority over Hannah to Allain, and she wondered if Uncle Bear might end up being someone else who expected to have use of her, when Allain was at school.

From that thought, she quickly reached a new conjecture, that Uncle Bear was off a bit, probably didn't own a clinic or do anything else that made him independently wealthy. But he was Gramma's son, and Laura's brother, and he would be taken care of all his life. He probably lived at Gramma's, and Raven had been bought for him and they were, as much as was possible in this strange world, boyfriend and girlfriend. But he could dally with Hannah, in the same way Allain could with Raven.

Knowing she might be expected to service it, she could not help but look over Uncle Bear's body. He followed her eyes, smiled again and pulled up the left leg of his trousers, revealing a metal post and ankle joint.

"North Korea," he said. "Didn't look where I was stepping."

"Yes, Sir," Hannah said, and she added that piece to the puzzle of this man. He had been grievously wounded in North Korea, where there had been a war her parents had talked about when she was eight or nine. America and its allies had won, and it was all considered something to be proud of, but Hannah knew many had died, on both sides, and many more injured, and she imagined that his wounds ran deeper than the physical. She looked into his eyes and saw the pain behind the smile.

"I'm very sorry, Sir."

Hannah looked around the room again, into the eyes of the other men there, all younger, like Allain, all staring back at her, as if waiting for her to say something else funny.

"Hannah," Allain said, "have you ever had beer before?"

"No, Sir," Hannah said, "Mother wouldn't allow it."

"Would you like to try some of mine?"

"Is that what that is?" Hannah asked, and she studied what Allain held, a pewter mug carved to look like a castle, with windows and an arched doorway engraved into it, topped

with a hinged lid that looked like a shingled roof. “Why are you drinking out of a house?”

Allain laughed and his breath smelled like something strange, earthy and raw, different from wine but at least as bad.

He held the mug out to her and she took it by the handle, handing her wine to Allain so she could use both hands to open the strange little roof while she raised it to her lips.

She tried not to smell the liquid beneath her nose, tilting the mug and allowing the golden fluid into her mouth. She swallowed it quickly and looked at Allain with a grimace, her face provoking another round of laughter from everyone. She had to do very little, she was starting to realize, to amuse people.

“What do you think, Hannah?” Allain asked. “Want me to pour you your own stein?”

“No, Sir,” Hannah replied, returning the beer and taking back her wine. “It’s very terrible, Sir.”

And so Hannah passed the next hour, invited by Uncle Bear to sit with him and Raven on the couch, Allain standing beside her while Uncle Bear held forth on current events, war, politics, and the uneven treatment veterans received from a society that wasn’t as grateful as it should be.

He was the oldest man in the room, but his authority extended beyond that, an apparent command of facts and a confidence with them that Allain and the others deferred to.

For a time, Hannah forgot that she was a slave, that she was shackled, that she was used for sex, and she lost herself in Uncle Bear’s words, the wine she forced herself to drink, the presence of Raven, whose role in her life was strange but welcome.

When Athena appeared, Hannah returned to her present life.

## **The Effects of Wine**

“Hannah,” Athena said at the door to the room.

“Yes, Ma’am?” Hannah replied, rising quickly.

“It’s time for dinner. We need to get your gown on.”

Hannah stepped over to Athena, expecting to be led to another room, but Athena walked in bearing the long blue gown.

“Turn around.”

Hannah obeyed and Athena unclasped her black dress, unzipped it and slid it down, leaving Hannah in just her white panties.

Hannah knew she was blushing and that every man in the room must be staring at her, so she kept her eyes on the floor as the black dress clumped around her feet.

“Arms up,” Athena commanded, bunching up the gown over Hannah’s hands and letting its luxury fall and envelop her. She adjusted it at Hannah’s hips and breasts, grabbed her shoulders and turned her toward the couch.

“What do you think, Uncle Bear?”

“She looks good in everything,” he replied. “Or nothing.”

Hannah looked up at him but did not smile, not sure she liked what he said. Allain stepped up beside her and offered his arm, and she took it and walked with him, Athena tagging along behind, back down the hall and to an elevator, tucked away in a nook past the second-floor landing.

The elevator dropped to the ground floor and opened to a grand banquet room, two long tables with seating for more than 100 people. Half the throng was already at their places, collared slaves next to their owners as if all were equal, working slaves and free employees also equally occupied, refilling wine glasses and delivering salads.

Ormek and Laura were with Gramma and Uncle Bear at the table that seemed to be reserved for the older generation,



although Raven was there too, sitting at Gramma's right and doting on the woman as if they were blood relations. She pointed to something on Gramma's plate, said something that Hannah could not hear but made Gramma laugh, and Raven put her arm around the woman and leaned over until their heads touched

Hannah sat at the second table with Allain and some of his friends, who constantly glanced at her until she looked back. Would they stare if Delilah hadn't done her work? Was a little paint truly that powerful? Athena found a group of girls her age several places down, and the meal progressed from one fabulous course to the next. Hannah again forgot her shackles, trading words with Allain and his friends about things she knew, but people seemed the most amused when she confessed ignorance about something the rest of them were well aware of. The conversation turned often to alcohol, music, movies and celebrities, and Hannah did her best to be clever without being ridiculous. Allain was much more comfortable here with her, and that helped.

Hannah's wine was topped off more than once as she slowly sipped, still finding it unpleasant but not as bad as Allain's beer, and she began to feel the kind of dizziness and mental slowness that accompanied the flu. Someone would say something to her, and she'd hear it and formulate a response and then she'd have to work to engage her mouth.

"How long will dinner last?" she whispered to Allain, and she looked at him and focused on his eyes, slowly.

"The wine's getting to you, isn't it?" he asked, ignoring her question.

"I think it is," she said after a pause. "What's wine supposed to do to you?"

"Make you like you are right now," he said. "Like you're not sure what you're looking at."

"I'm looking at you," Hannah protested, and she stared at Allain's shoulder, focusing all her attention on it, and she poked it with her finger. "You you you."

“You’re not going to get sick on me, are you?” Allain asked.

“Is that supposed to happen?” Hannah asked, looking back into Allain’s eyes and realizing she wanted to be with him tonight, in bed with him, and she thought about the things they would do together until she heard laughter and looked up. Everyone within earshot was listening to her.

“Pay attention to something else,” she demanded.

A free girl across the table from her covered her wineglass with her hand to keep the slave girl from refilling it, and Hannah realized she had that option, so by the time chocolate mousse arrived, she was returning to her normal state, discovering that lust did not dissipate with a return to sobriety.

She looked at Allain again, trying to express with her eyes what she wanted, and he smiled at her and patted her leg.

“Feeling okay?” he asked.

“Yes, Sir,” she replied.

Allain looked at her, then over his shoulder and his smile faded. Laura had joined them, standing behind Hannah’s chair.

“How is dinner, Hannah?” she asked.

“Wonderful, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

“Hannah,” Laura said, and her smile faded as well, “We’re going to need you to do something tonight.”

“Yes, Ma’am?” Hannah queried, and her stomach began churning, because of the wine or the dinner or something else.

Laura looked at Allain. “Dr. Pravadeh insisted,” Laura said to him.

“I thought we weren’t going to do that,” Allain said quietly, his mouth a tight, unhappy line.

“Hannah,” Laura said, “you probably won’t be coming home with us tonight.”

“Where will I be going?”

“I’m not sure,” Laura said. “With whoever contributes the most.”

Hannah just looked up at Laura, lost.

“Explain it to her,” Laura said, and she squeezed Allain’s and Hannah’s arm and stepped away.

Hannah looked at Allain, waiting for him to speak.

“It’s like an auction,” he said. “It raises money, and you’ll get some.”

“An auction?” Hannah said, focusing on that word.

“You’ll go to the highest bidder,” Allain said, and Hannah saw pain in his eyes, and embarrassment. “Just for tonight.”

“Oh,” she said. “Is this what Athena was talking about? Bidding?”

“Yeah, but Mom didn’t want that for you. Neither did I. But Dr. Pravadeh gives Dad a lot of referrals, and he probably said Dad really needed to do this.”

Hannah, as she often had in the last two weeks, fought with her emotions until they were tamped down. Someone was going to rent her, for the night, and she would have to take care of them, and have sex with them probably, no matter who they were.

Hannah felt eyes on her, looked up and caught Athena staring at her victoriously, and she remembered that she hated Athena because Athena was uniquely awful.

Within a few minutes, an older, distinguished man stepped to the front of the room, introduced himself with a name that meant nothing to Hannah, and announced that the results of tonight’s bidding would benefit a homeless shelter that took in abused women and their children.

Hannah ticked bitterly through the ironies of that statement, that girls who were less desperate than she had been were benefitting from her rental, that those gathered here

could care about one kind of oppressed person while another kind was being auctioned off, that these people cared about anyone at all who wasn't wealthy and powerful. Would the shelter know how the money had been raised? Would they accept it if they did?

And yet, a part of her was curious about where she would end up, who would place the winning bid for her.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 9: Confessions of a Slave Girl**

### **The Auction**

“Morgan,” the man called.

A tall, red-haired girl in a maid costume stepped from the back of the hall, walked up to him and turned to smile at the room while he scanned the chip in her back.

To Hannah’s surprise, the man did not start barking out numbers. Instead, everyone looked at their phones. Allain set his phone on the table and the girl’s picture appeared, just her face and bare shoulders, but Hannah knew there were other pictures of her, of all her body, in the nude, and Allain or anyone else could see them, and read her measurements, her scores, her weight, her history as a slave.

Numbers flashed quickly beside the girl’s face, 250, 500, 750, and Hannah realized these must be bids, being entered by the people here, on their phones.

The bidding stopped at 2,500, and the girl returned to her station by the wall.

Two thousand five hundred dollars for a night with a girl, Hannah thought.

One by one, the man called up the slaves, some guests of the party, some who had served tonight, mostly female but a few males as well. Hannah watched with Allain as the faces and the numbers scrolled by, thousands of dollars for most of the girls, in the high 100’s for most of the boys.

“Hannah,” the man called. Allain squeezed her hand as she rose and she smiled back at him weakly, because she had wanted him tonight and she wanted him to know it.

Feeling desperately self-conscious, well aware of the clanking chains she had been able to forget most of the

evening, Hannah stepped up to the man, turning and trying to smile while he pressed his phone to her back.

Hannah scanned the room, wondering who was bidding on her and who was reading about her, or studying the images of her nude, caged and crying.

The man stood beside her, holding his phone close to his face so she could not see it, but she heard a soft “huh,” and wondered if that meant the bids were climbing, or if they weren’t progressing at all. She was grateful for this, at least, that her value wasn’t being announced to the room.

“Go back to your seat,” the man said quietly, touching her on the shoulder, and he seemed disappointed, so she trudged back, certain no one had bid for her. She felt both relieved and humiliated, but she knew her data included the fact she had been a slave less than two weeks.

Back at her seat, Allain grabbed her arm and squeezed again, and she wondered if he was disappointed in her, thought less of her, or was simply grateful she’d be coming home tonight.

She looked at Athena, hoping her poor performance had wiped the smile off the girl’s face, but she was looking, if anything, more pleased. As soon as she saw Hannah looking at her, she rose and stepped over.

“Highest bid so far,” she whispered, putting her hand on Hannah’s shoulder and looking at Allain.

He looked back at his sister blankly, but Hannah knew he wasn’t happy.

“Did someone bid for me?” Hannah asked.

“A lot of people did,” Athena said, quietly again, and Hannah suspected all of this was supposed to be discreet, that everyone knew everything via their phones, but talking about it, acknowledging it openly, was bad manners.

“How much?” Hannah whispered into Athena’s ear.

“Seven thousand five hundred,” Athena replied.

“Who?”

“It doesn’t say. But they’ll come get you in a few minutes.”

“Oh.”

Hannah turned to the crestfallen Allain. “I’m sorry,” she said quietly, and he looked into her eyes and smiled slightly, his disappointment eased a little perhaps by her sympathy.

“Will I see you tomorrow?”

“Yes,” he replied, “but I’m not sure when. It’s up to, to them.”

“You got \$750,” Athena said.

“You said \$7,500,” Hannah countered.

“Yeah, you get 10 percent of it.”

“What do you mean?” Hannah asked, lost.

“The shelter gets half, okay?” Athena said. “Mom and Dad get the other half. And they’ll give you 10 percent of the total bid. So you have \$750 now.”

“You mean, money?” Hannah queried.

“Yes,” Athena replied, sounding exasperated now.

“What would I do with money?”

“Spend it.”

“How?”

“Buy things,” Athena said, and there was understanding in her laughter. “We’ll let you do that. I mean, you can’t just buy anything you want, but you can get plenty of stuff, for yourself.”

Raven and two more girls were auctioned off, the man announced total shelter proceeds of \$37,000, everyone clapped and the grand affair was over, people standing, talking, plates and silverware being cleared.

“Hello, Hannah,” said a woman’s voice behind her chair. She turned in her seat and looked into the eyes of a short, husky woman in a grey gown. Hannah guessed that she

was at least 40. A man stood beside her, more like 45, and Hannah smiled politely and rose, noticing then the freckled boy who stood behind them, with wavy, strawberry blond hair and piercing blue eyes that studied Hannah intently.

“I’m Betsy, and this is Peter,” the woman said. “We’re the Helmands. And this is Alex.”

Hannah shook everyone’s hand and stood silently, sensing an awkwardness. But that was their problem, not hers.

“We’ll be taking you home tonight,” the woman said. “Would you like that?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, confident any other answer would be unacceptable, surprised at how hard everyone tried to make it seem that everything about this was consensual.

“So we need to ... to get you ready ... to go,” the woman said, and she reached into a small, bulging purse and pulled out a set of chains.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, holding her hands out, reassured when she looked around the room that she was not the only one submitting to restraints, that at least a dozen slaves were being chained or, already cuffed, were being walked out of the hall. She spotted Raven just before the girl left the hall, being led out by an older couple.

These were the same sort of chains the Petrosyans put on Hannah when they took her in the car, handcuffs and leg irons joined by a third chain.

The woman cuffed Hannah’s wrists, bent to chain her ankles, and Athena, waiting eagerly at her side, removed her shackles.

Hannah wanted nothing more to do with Athena, but the girl remained beside her and seemed to expect something, so she turned and, to her surprise, Athena hugged her.

“See you tomorrow,” she said. “You were beautiful tonight.”



Allain hugged her next and exchanged a few pleasantries with Betsy and Peter. Laura, Ormek and Gramma appeared and the conversation continued, wealthy people talking about the things that concerned wealthy people, Hannah thought, and she tuned out the sound until Ormek spoke to Alex.

“How are your studies progressing, Alex?” he asked, with what Hannah thought was a stilted formality, even by Ormek’s standards.

“Very well, Sir,” Alex answered with equal stiffness. “I’m taking calculus at Fort Worth Community College. My advisor didn’t think the high school level program would be challenging enough ... and I’m also taking the most advanced history.”

“At the college?”

“No, Sir, at Saint Bonaventure Prep.”

“Very good,” Ormek observed.

The conversation continued in that vein, Betsy and Peter sharing minor successes, Peter concerning the furniture stores he owned, Betsy in her legal practice, and Hannah got the strange sense this was a performance of sorts, meant primarily for her, as if she needed to be impressed by this new family before she could be properly shared with them.

As the families droned on, Gramma sidled up to Hannah. “How are you doing, Dumpling?” she asked.

“Very good, Ma’am,” Hannah said, not quite honestly.

“Gerald told me he met you this evening.”

“Gerald, Ma’am?”

“My son. He might have introduced himself as Uncle Bear.”

“Yes, Ma’am, I did meet him.”

“We might want to have you over in a week or two. To spend time with us. And Gerald. Would you like that?”

“Yes, Ma’am, I would,” Hannah replied, now being honest. “You and Uncle Bear – Gerald – are both very nice.”

“Gerald was very impressed with you. And Raven says you’re a treat.”

“Yes, Ma’am. Thank you, Ma’am. I like Raven as well.”

Allain, doing his best to put on a good face, agreed to pick Hannah up after lunch tomorrow, and he hugged her again and Hannah, with one last glance at the Petrosyans, shuffled after the new family, through the house, out the front door where her chip was scanned one last time, and to the main gate, standing while Peter retrieved a minivan.

## **To the Helmands**

Hannah and Alex sat in the back, the parents up front, and the family continued their stilted conversation, Alex discoursing on what he’d already learned in his first week of the new school term and speculating on how it would contribute to his plan to study material physics next year at college. Hannah was prepared to answer any questions, but she was intended to be only audience, apparently, and she listened and watched the lights as they passed them and realized with a start that Alex must be a virgin and his parents had bid on her to relieve him of the condition.

This was, she realized, terrifying, as frightening as anything she had faced sexually since she’d gotten to the stacks.

She was good at sex, she understood, but all her partners had been very experienced, if not actually trained in it. She was surely not qualified to bring carnal knowledge to a novice. What if Alex wasn’t pleased with her? What if either of them couldn’t perform? Would the family demand their money back? Would she be punished?

The Helmand’s home was large but not a mansion, and Betsy apologized for it as soon as they pulled up.

“We do own a home on the Gulf, in Florida,” she said. “But we have to live here when we work. And it’s comfortable.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

There was no elevator in this house and Hannah remained in her chains to climb the stairs, with Alex guiding her, his hand on her elbow. His touch was light but confident, and Hannah took it as a small sign that he wasn’t completely at a loss with a girl’s body.

He said a quick goodnight to his parents and took Hannah to a bedroom door, secured with a combination lock. He pressed the buttons quickly, opened the door and flipped on the light, revealing a room with a full-sized bed, images of what Hannah guessed were chemical symbols, pictures of distant galaxies and several men Hannah assumed were Alex’s heroes: Einstein, Hawking, Turing.

Alex shut his door and stepped before Hannah, unlocking her cuffs and setting her chains on his dresser next to a spacecraft made of Legos.

“It’s my birthday,” he said, looking at the floor, folding his arms, clearly far more nervous than she now she was in his bedroom.

“Happy birthday,” she said. “How old are you?”

“18.”

“So am I.”

“I’m old for my grade,” he said. “I learned how to read when I was three and I started first grade when I was four, but I got leukemia when I was nine and missed two years of school. I made up one grade last year.”

“I’m sorry you got leukemia,” Hannah said.

He looked into her eyes. “Do you like me?”

“Of course,” she replied. “How could I not?”

He laughed, a little less nervously, she thought.

“What would you like me to do?” she asked.

“Is that how it is? I just tell you what to do?”

“I guess,” she replied. “I’m new at all this. You know I was free until, uh, less than two weeks ago.”

“Yeah, your thing said that.”

“Did you look at everything about me?”

“I did.”

“The pictures?”

“Yes,” he said, the pride in his tone overcoming his nervousness, as if he were describing the solution to a difficult math problem. “I told my parents I was going to bid on you tonight, and they said okay.”

“It was your money?”

“Yes.”

Hannah stared at him, he looked down at her chest without seeing it, and she sensed that he was frozen, completely uncertain how to proceed.

“I can just do things to see what you like.”

He looked up at her face, studying her as if she were a physics problem.

“Where, um, would you start?”

“Can I pee first?” she asked.

He looked at her with shock and she realized he’d misunderstood.

“I need to pee,” she said, stifling a smile. “In the bathroom.”

He pointed the way, sat on his bed and took off his shoes.

She went in, shut the door because he probably expected her to, emptied her bladder, flushed and pulled off her gown and sandals.

“Do you have a spare hanger?” she asked, opening the bathroom door a crack, feigning modesty.

She heard him rummage in the closet, and a hanger appeared at the door. She hung her gown on it, put it on a hook on the door and put her sandals against the tub.

She opened the door wide and found him in the middle of the room, facing her, his eyes wide as he took her in, dressed in nothing but her panties.

“We should kiss first,” she said, and she walked over to him, reached up and touched his cheek. He closed his eyes and she put her lips to his.

He kept his mouth closed but she pressed on, putting her hands behind his back, pulling him toward her.

He was her height, so when his penis hardened, she felt it at her mound. He pulled away, embarrassed, but she pulled him back, pressing herself against his pants, guessing that it was a decent size, big enough that there would be some resistance.

“May I undress you?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he whispered, his voice barely a croak.

He was still in his tie, so she started with that, fumbled with it a bit as it was not something she’d ever removed before. She smiled at him and he did his best to smile back while she undid his shirt buttons, starting at the top, pulling his shirt open and sliding it down his arms. She pulled his t-shirt off and looked at him again. His face was blank and she knew he’d given up trying to do anything. She was in charge and he was simply hers, there to give her whatever she wanted.

She looked down, saw the bulge in his pants and felt the first tingles of arousal between her own legs. She undid his belt, unclasped his pants and let them fall to the floor. She pulled his briefs forward, away from his body and his erection dropped out, pointed toward her. It was short but thick, and she looked at the tip, imagining it inside her, wanting it there now.

“Let me start by licking you,” she said. “Would you like that?”

“Licking me?”

She wrapped her hand lightly around his penis, stroking it, and he sighed, his breath moving her hair.

“Licking you. There,” she explained. “Sit on the bed.”

He stepped out of his briefs, slipped off his socks and moved to his bed, scooting to the middle, his legs drawn up, his eyes on his toes.

In that moment, Hannah saw herself in the cage at Mrs. Alvarez’ shop, trying to adapt to the idea of sex, and she felt a sudden sympathy for him and wondered anew if this would work.

She pulled down her panties, climbed onto the bed, facing him, crossing her legs to expose her hair and vulva.

“Alex?”

He looked up at her, then down to her breasts and to her middle, between her legs, and she leaned back.

“Would you like to start by being inside me instead?”

He looked into her eyes and she saw, behind the show he made of his intelligence, something else, deep down, his insecurity, his vulnerability.

“I don’t know,” he said. “This is so ...”

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Do you want this?”

## **With Alex**

“Do you know how you can tell when a girl wants you?” Hannah asked.

“I ... I’m not sure.”

“She gets wet,” Hannah said, and she parted her lips and took his hand in hers and moved it to her vulva. “Put your finger inside me.”

He obliged, tentatively exploring her, fumbling among her folds before he slid his middle finger up her opening.

“Do you feel how wet I am?”

“Yes.”

“That’s because of you.”

“Oh,” he said, his eyes set with a determination Hannah hadn’t seen until now. He rose up, his full erection bouncing, and he grabbed Hannah’s shoulders, easing her to her back. She opened her legs wide and parted her lips with two fingers and Alex positioned his penis at her middle, poking at her vulva until he found her hole and slid inside.

“Ohhhhh,” he gasped, “Ohhhhhh.”

He wrapped his arms around her waist and arched up, thrusting violently into her hole over and over again while she gasped beneath him, surprised at the sudden intensity of his lovemaking.

She felt his orgasm building before he did, his ejaculation a surprise to him, apparently, his face suddenly twisted in what looked like alarm.

He continued to slide in and out of her, groaning mindlessly, long after he was done squirting, and she wondered if he could stay hard long enough to satisfy her.

“May I orgasm?” she whispered.

“You want to?” he panted, his mouth beside her ear.

“Yes, if it’s okay. Get on your back.”

He rolled over, his serious eyes now showing nothing but drunk ecstasy, and she mounted him, took his wet shaft into her body and ground down on him, rising and dropping a dozen times, cumming quickly, closing her eyes through her quiet cries of delight.

Before she was finished shuddering, he was writhing beneath her, stabbing up at her. She raised herself to give him the room he needed to thrust, put her hands beside his

shoulders and waited while he bucked and squirmed through his second orgasm.

Both sated, she rolled off him and settled beside him, her hand on his belly.

He turned his face to hers, his eyes half closed.

For a long time, they held still like that, as if posing for a painting of spent lovers. When he spoke again, it was with a new, breathy huskiness.

“Did you really want to do that?”

“Yes,” she replied. “Why are you asking me that?”

“It’s just ...” he said, looking for the words. “It was my first time. And I never thought, I didn’t think ...”

“What?”

“That a girl would ever want to be with me. I’m too ... too ...”

“Smart?”

“Yeah.”

She reached down and tapped his penis, still glistening with her fluid and his semen.

“You have one of these,” Hannah observed. “And you just used it. On a girl. You don’t have to be smart to do that.”

He looked at her, revelation dawning on his face, and she knew he had learned more in the last half hour about girls than in all his previous 18 years.

“You want to play Hell on Wheels?” he asked, rising to his elbow, smiling, the Alex who was still a boy returned.

“What’s that?”

“It’s a video game. You drive and shoot and blow stuff up. It’s like, all I do when I’m not studying.”

“I’ve never played a video game.”

“I can teach you.”



Alex slid off the bed, pulled on his briefs and went to his dresser to get a t-shirt and shorts.

“The game room’s in the attic,” he said, unlocking his door. Hannah stepped to the floor, pulled on her panties and followed him down the hall and up a narrow flight of stairs.

The room was small but comfortable, a big screen TV at one end, beanbag chairs and couches and what Hannah guessed was video game paraphernalia scattered everywhere, wires and plastic cases and computer keyboards and things you held, with levers and buttons and switches.

Hannah settled into a beanbag and, with the same patience she had used to teach Alex about sex, he taught her how to drive a truck, launch missiles from the front bumper and ram other vehicles. She got the hang of it well enough to win one round, although she was certain Alex wasn’t trying very hard.

“Alex?” said a woman’s voice from the bottom of the stairs.

“Yeah?” Alex shouted back, pausing the game.

“Is Hannah up there with you?”

“Yeah.”

“Is she wearing her chains?”

“No,” Alex said, and he looked at Hannah and rolled his eyes.

“She needs to have them on.”

“She’s playing a video game, Mom,” Alex protested.

“That’s the deal.”

“I know.”

“Where are they?”

“On my dresser.”

Alex resumed the game and Hannah focused on repeatedly ramming a submarine that had wheels on it, but she looked toward the stairs when she heard the clump of feet.

Betsy appeared, dressed in a green housecoat Hannah felt was particularly ugly, and she stopped and stared, clearly startled.

“Do you need a shirt, Hannah?” she asked.

“Oh,” Hannah replied. “No, Ma’am, thank you.”

Hannah knew what Betsy was thinking, that Alex had just spent \$7,500 so a half-naked girl could play a video game with him. But telling Alex’s mother what they had done in his bedroom wasn’t an option, so she hoped the woman could somehow piece things together.

Betsy approached Hannah, who set down the controller and offered her hands.

“Can you just do her ankles?” Alex asked, scowling and pausing the game again. “She needs to be able to play.”

Betsy didn’t say yes, but she looked at Hannah’s feet and Hannah raised her ankles and Betsy cuffed them.

The woman’s eyes went to Hannah’s crotch and then quickly back to her feet, and Hannah knew Betsy had her answer, that Hannah’s panties were soaked and it was due to her son.

Hannah held out her hands, believing she could still probably play with them cuffed, but Alex issued a “harrumph” and Betsy sighed, dropped the rest of Hannah’s chain on the floor and retreated back down the stairs.

Hannah smiled at Alex, he rolled his eyes again and resumed the game, and they played for another hour, until the game went blurry and she started making dumb mistakes.

“Had enough?” he asked.

“I think so,” Hannah said. “I’m kinda tired.”

“I could play ‘til two in the morning,” he said. “I do all the time.”

“That’s okay,” Hannah said. “But could I go to bed?”

Alex turned off the game and looked at her, nestled in her beanbag chair, her breasts squeezed between her arms, and

she knew what he was thinking.

He stood and she grabbed her loose chain with the cuffs meant for her wrists and followed him back down the stairs and to his bedroom.

He shut his door, released her ankles and stripped nude, his penis already firm. Hannah slid out of her panties and stood in the middle of his room, facing him.

“Do you want to try a new position?” she asked.

“Like what?” he asked her.

“From behind.”

“Show me.”

Hannah pulled the sheets down on his bed, got onto it on her hands and knees and parted her legs.

“Kneel behind me.”

Alex obeyed and she reached back to spread her lips.

Alex, with a better sense now of where her hole was, raised his tip to it immediately and eased in, slowly working his sex up her sheath while she rocked.

“Do you like it?” she asked.

“Yeah, it’s nice,” he grunted, his tone answering the question as clearly as his words.

For 15 minutes, Alex drove in and out of her. She suspected he was holding back, getting near orgasm but not ready to release yet, enjoying the feeling of being swallowed by her body too much to let it end. But she decided to finish him when her vagina began to throb, and she contracted her walls and immediately felt his hands tighten on her hips, heard his breath come in shallow gasps, and then he forced his penis as far as it would go up her and groaned out, a deep guttural sound of animal pleasure.

After a few more thrusts, he withdrew, clambered from behind her, dropped down to his back and smiled dizzily up at her. She fell on him and brought her mouth to his.

“Open,” she whispered, and he did and she kissed him the way she believed all lovers should kiss, with their tongues and teeth and lips and breath, and he seemed to understand and wrapped his arms around her back, squeezing so tight it forced the air out of her.

They kissed that way no more than a minute before his arms relaxed and his breath changed to a steady rhythm and Hannah rose, turned off the light and, aided by a Mars rover night light, got into bed beside him, pulled the sheets over them both and quickly fell asleep at his side.

### **The Morning After**

Hannah awoke in an empty bed, the first light of dawn showing through the window, the smell of sex clinging to the sheets.

She sat up, trying to remember where she was, and the memories of the night before came back piecemeal, as if from a dream, of a grand party, awful beer and slightly better wine, a man who’d lost part of his leg in a war; and then, a boy her age she’d taught sex to, and the boy’s family, and their relatively modest home. She’d been auctioned to them. They’d bid for her through their phones, which was a terrible thing from some perspectives. But what she and Alex had done seemed, to her, altogether good, and she felt she had done well, and she was happy.

Then her thoughts turned to Mother, and Athena, and she remembered that there were difficulties along with the pleasures.

As in any life.

She went to the toilet, lingering there. She looked at her gown, still hanging on the door, and the pair of shoes beside the tub, and the story of Cinderella floated into her mind briefly until she dismissed it because it was mostly irrelevant.

She flushed and went to the mirror. Most of Delilah's work was still intact, so she decided not to wash her face yet in the hope she might stay this beautiful all day. A few quick swipes with Alex's brush got her hair mostly into order, and she set the brush down without pulling out the long blonde strands, because she thought Alex would want to find them there.

Back in his bedroom, she flipped on the light and went first to Alex's books, stacked neatly on his desk.

The third book down was calculus, and she went to the bed and threw it open at the middle and was immediately overwhelmed by symbols and letters that looked like another language, formulas whose purposes she couldn't even guess at, explanations that did no good.

She heard a knock at the door.

"Come in," she said.

Alex appeared, looked at her and grimaced, as if something were painful.

"Your book is very confusing," she said, holding it up to him.

"It's calculus," he said.

"I never learned it."

"How much school did you have?"

He shut the door and stepped to the bed, an article of black clothing in his hand.

"I was 15 when I stopped going," she said. "I liked it, though, and I was really smart. I mean, for my school."

"Mom wants you to wear this," he said.

It was a long, black t-shirt that said "Helmand Furniture." She pulled it over her head.

"Tell your mom thanks."

"She's not up yet. It was folded in front of the door when I got up this morning."

“Where did you go?”

“I was reading downstairs. I think she was kind of freaked out by you. Last night.”

“Because I was playing a video game?”

“No, because you were topless.”

“The Petrosyans keep me nude.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know. Makes it harder for me to escape. Or be stolen. Or so I’ll stay used to it. Or something. I think that’s pretty normal.”

“Would they sell you?”

“I don’t know. They just bought me.”

“What if we bought you?”

“Sure,” said Hannah blithely.

“How much?”

“How much what?”

“How much are you worth?”

“I don’t know. It’s not up to me.”

“How much did they buy you for?”

“I don’t know,” Hannah lied.

“I want Mom and Dad to buy you.”

“Okay.”

Hannah looked at him, knew he was being completely serious and felt very sorry for him.

“Can you teach me calculus?” she asked.

“When?”

“Now.”

“I could try,” he said. “I’m just learning it.”

“Teach me what you’ve learned then.”

“Do you want breakfast?”

“Yeah.”

“Let me tell Mom you’re hungry,” he said, and he took the book from her and flipped to the second chapter. “The first chapter is just history and crap, this is where it gets interesting. Start here.”

He left, Hannah opened the curtain and looked out into his neighborhood. The houses were all nice, but not really mansions. Big and comfortable, though, bordered by hedges and trees. Someone was walking their dog but they didn’t look up at her.

She went back to the book, reading and re-reading the first two pages of chapter 2, studying the examples, until she believed she understood the basics, but she had a dozen questions for Alex by the time she heard a knock at the door.

“Come in.”

“Hannah?” It was Betsy’s voice.

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“Alex says you want breakfast?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

Betsy hit the combination and opened the door, looking relieved that Hannah was dressed.

“I found that shirt for you.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am.”

Betsy shut the door and grabbed the chains from the top of Alex’s dresser.

Hannah slid from the bed, pulled her panties back on and stood still as Betsy applied her restraints to all four limbs.

“Will you be able to eat like this?” she asked.

“No, Ma’am.”

“How is it done, at the Petrosyans?”

“They just shackle me,” she said. “Just my ankles, unless we’re going in the car. Then it’s my hands too.”

Betsy released Hannah’s wrists. “We don’t have shackles,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

“I can just hold these while I walk. Like I did last night.”

Hannah grabbed the loose chain with one hand, Alex’s book with the other, and followed Betsy down the stairs. He was already in the kitchen, drinking coffee and tapping on his phone. He looked up at her, grimaced again and she sat across the table from him while Betsy retrieved a pan from under the stove and went to the refrigerator.

“Would you like some coffee, Hannah?” she asked.

“I’m not sure.”

“You’ve never had it?”

“No, Ma’am.”

Betsy set a cup before Hannah. It was black and smelled bitter.

“Cream and sugar?”

“I guess so,” Hannah replied. The cream turned the coffee a beautiful brown, and the sugar disappeared. Hannah tried to take a sip but it was too hot.

“Hold up my book,” Alex said. “So I can see the cover.”

She raised it, keeping her finger in the place where she was reading, and he pointed his phone at her and pressed.

“Did you just take my picture?”

“Yes,” he said.

“Why?”

“Is that okay?”

“Yes,” she said. “I was just curious.”



“I’m going to send it to some people. Just to some friends.”

“Who?” Betsy asked.

“Just Anton, Karl. Felix. Um, Abigail. Matthew.”

“What are you going to say?”

“I don’t know. I guess just that this is Hannah. And she’s staying with us this weekend. And I’m teaching her calculus.”

“That’s all,” Betsy said. “And don’t put it on Look.”

“Okay,” Alex agreed, gazing up at the ceiling in profound annoyance.

“Let me see the picture you took,” Hannah said, reaching for Alex’s phone.

He tapped it and handed it to her.

“I should be smiling,” she complained. “Try again.”

Betsy laughed from her place at the stove while Alex pointed the phone at Hannah, tapped a half dozen times while she smiled with the calculus book just under her chin.

“That’s a good one,” he said, showing her a picture of a beautiful, mysterious girl, a girl from another world, happy and, inexplicably, holding a math book.

She agreed it was good and he went back to typing on his phone, putting a message together. Hannah suspected that his words would at least hint at what he had done to her. She tried to imagine how his message would be received by his friends.

As he typed and Betsy worked on breakfast, Hannah went back to chapter two, formulating a list of questions.

As soon as he set his phone down, she pounced.

“Tell me in normal English what this sentence means,” she said, her finger on the first word.

Intermittently, as they talked about calculus and Betsy served them eggs and bacon and blueberry biscuits, Alex’s

phone would beep and he'd look at it, sometimes setting it down, sometimes typing something back.

"Anton wants to know how many of your grandparents were Teutonic," he said, 30 minutes into the lesson.

"I don't know," Hannah admitted.

Alex typed and Hannah looked back at Betsy, cleaning up the dishes.

"Breakfast was very good, Ma'am," she said. "And I liked the coffee too."

Betsy looked back at her, met her gaze, stared at her for a long moment.

"Here's another one," Alex said. "Abigail wants to know if you've noticed any institutional differences in the ways male and female subjects are treated."

Hannah laughed. "I think your friends are very smart," she observed. "Like you."

She pondered for a moment. "I don't think so, but it's not anything I've paid attention to."

By 10:30, Hannah had done enough calculus, understanding some of it, frustrated by some of it.

"I need a shower," she told Alex. "Is that okay?"

He walked her back to his room, removed her chains and settled at his computer while she washed up. After her shower, she found a toothbrush in the cabinet, still in its packaging, and brushed her teeth and did her best to fix her hair. All her makeup was gone now, but she didn't care. She wondered if Alex would need her again but she suspected he didn't want to soil her so soon before Allain came to get her.

## **Friends of Alex**

She put back on the t-shirt and her panties, wishing desperately she had a second pair. If she were to be auctioned off again, she decided, she'd insist on bringing a bag of supplies.

Alex was waiting for her when she stepped out of the bathroom.

"One point five million," he told her.

"I don't know."

"You don't know what?"

"How much the Petrosyans bought me for."

"How did you know that's what I was talking about?"

Hannah just stared at him.

"If I'd said 800,000, what would you have said?"

"I don't know," she admitted, suddenly seeing the cage of logic Alex was building around her.

"You would have said 'What are you talking about?'" Alex said, his intense eyes focused on hers. He was solving another problem, she knew, but this one was about her and it made her uncomfortable.

"You said 'I don't know' right off, because that's what they paid, and you knew it but you just didn't want to tell me."

"Okay," Hannah said.

"You admit it, then?"

"It's not polite to talk about," Hannah said. "That's what I've been told. You should ask Allain."

"A girl who's worth more than our house ... than both our houses ... slept with me," Alex ruminated, and he looked at her with despair. "We could never buy you. Mom and Dad never would say yes."

"I'm sorry," Hannah said.

"My parents aren't super rich," Alex admitted. "I paid for you. With my own money."

“You mentioned that.”

“I’m not rich either, though.”

“How did you make that much?”

“Starting in third grade, every time I got an A in a class, Dad gave me fifty dollars. If I got straight A’s, I got another five hundred. So I got like fifteen hundred a year.”

Hannah laughed. “Did you know what you were going to spend it on when you were in third grade?”

“No.”

“Was it worth it?”

“Inarguably,” he said, looking up at her, and she knew he was being honest. “Most decidedly.”

Hannah smiled.

“The thing is,” he added, “I would have gotten all A’s anyway.”

“Can you get him to give you more for straight A’s in college?”

“Probably not. I’ll never get a million and a half, anyway.”

“Well,” said Hannah, “the Petrosyans just bought me, so I’m not sure they’d sell me anyway. I mean, not anytime soon.”

“Yeah,” Alex agreed. “Wanna play another game? Some people are coming over.”

“Sure. Who?”

“Abigail and Matthew.”

“Okay.”

“If you leave this room, I have to chain you, or Mom will get annoyed again.”

“That’s fine. Just my ankles, right?”

“Yeah. I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay.”

Back upstairs, Hannah took her place in the beanbag chair, tucked her legs under herself and wadded up the chain underneath as well. They had barely started their first round of play before a boy and a girl arrived.

Self-conscious about her chains and not sure why, Hannah greeted them without rising and checked to make sure all but the cuffs around her ankles were hidden.

Abigail was plump and tall, with glasses, frizzy hair and a loud laugh. Matthew was black and slightly built, wearing a t-shirt with equations on it.

They had come to look at Hannah, she suspected, so she stared at the screen and tried to play competently so they could get their fill of her.

None of them, she guessed, came from families that owned slaves, so she was something of a novelty here.

And yet, their conversation was surprisingly superficial.

“Do you like Easy-Peasy?” Abigail asked.

“What’s that?”

“Music. A band.”

“I’ve never heard of them.”

“What was your best score in Hell on Wheels?” Matthew asked.

“I don’t know. Like I guess twenty thousand something. I never played video games before last night.”

“Can you be in a picture with me?” Abigail asked.

“I guess so,” Hannah said, looking at Alex.

“Okay,” he said, “but Mom says not to put it on Look or whatever.”

“I won’t,” Abigail promised, and she knelt beside Hannah, held out her phone and put her arm around Hannah’s shoulder.

Abigail didn't want to play video games, so they flipped through videos of a tornado, a ship sinking, cats fighting, and finally a documentary about social behavior in snakes.

Betsy appeared at noon with a tray of sandwiches and fruit, and Hannah was the only one who thanked her. Alex grabbed soft drinks from the little fridge in the corner and Hannah thanked him too.

"Do you always have to be polite?" Abigail asked.

"I don't know," Hannah replied. "I just am."

"What if you weren't?" Abigail asked. "Or if you did something else bad?"

"I don't know," Hannah answered, curling her toes and trying not to take the question personally. Abigail meant no harm, she told herself. She was just curious.

"Don't they do things to you?" Abigail continued.

"Everybody does things," Hannah said, and then she summoned logic. "It would be impossible not to always be doing something. Ever."

Matthew laughed at Abigail, and she smiled and opened her mouth to ask something else when Allain's voice boomed out from somewhere below.

"Hannah, you up there?"

"Hey, Allain!" Hannah answered back.

Allain bumped up the stairs, looking as beautiful as ever in a plaid, short-sleeved button-down and black shorts.

He shook everyone's hand, being polite although Hannah knew he didn't need to be.

"Ready to go?"

"Yes, Sir," Hannah said. "But I need to get my gown. And my shoes. From Alex's room."

Hannah worked her way out of the beanbag, her chains visible to everyone now, ankles locked together and the

rest of the restraint trailing behind her. She picked up the loose chain, looking only at Allain, not wanting to catch Abigail or Matthew staring at her feet.

Alex rose to lead them to his room, Allain guiding Hannah down the stairs, Abigail and Matthew coming last.

Everyone entered Alex's bedroom and Hannah stripped off her t-shirt, threw it on Alex's bed and, wearing just her panties, went into the bathroom to put on her gown. She knew that Matthew at least must be gawking at her. Abigail too, most likely. And she didn't care.

Back in her gown now, but her hair a mess and her makeup faded, she walked with the others down to the front door. Betsy met them there and Hannah stood still for the humiliation of restraints. First, Allain chained her, both ankles and wrists, and then Betsy removed the cuffs from her ankles.

"It was very nice to meet you," she said with a nod to Alex, then to Betsy. "All of you," she added, looking at Matthew and Abigail, who just stared back.

"Where's your t-shirt?" Betsy asked.

"On Allain's bed."

"We wanted you to keep it."

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am."

After Betsy had retrieved the Helmand Furniture t-shirt and handed it to Allain, they left the home and settled into the BMW.

"So," he said as he backed down the driveway, "you just watched movies with Alex and his friends? Played video games?"

"They paid \$7,500 for me."

"Yeah," Allain agreed. "That's a lot."

He put the car in gear and headed out of the neighborhood. Hannah knew he wanted to know what had happened but couldn't figure out how to ask it.

“Last night, Alex was a virgin,” Hannah said simply.  
“He isn’t any more.”

“Okay,” Allain said. “Fine.”

Another pause, and then, “How many times?”

“Three.”

“This morning?”

“No, Sir.”

“Did you sleep in his bed?”

“Yes,” she said. “I don’t think they have a cage.”

“Probably not.”

“How many times did you ...?”

“Once.”

“You liked it?”

“Yeah. I always like that. He wanted to buy me from  
you.”

“Okay.”

“He found out how much your parents paid. Or he sort  
of guessed. I didn’t tell him.”

“It’s online, if you know where to look.”

“I know. Dr. Brierson found it too. Would you sell  
me? If they had enough money?”

“No,” Allain replied without hesitation. “Never.”

## **A Confession on the Way to Church**

That afternoon, Athena had some friends over and Hannah was allowed into the pool for the first time. It was only girls at first, Jessica and three other friends, so Hannah swam naked except for her shackles. If Jessica still felt something for Hannah, whatever it was, she wasn’t showing it,



barely looking in Hannah's direction, not asking her any questions.

Then two boys and another girl arrived and Athena brought Hannah inside to put on her bikini.

Ormek cooked on the barbecue while the friends threw each other into the water, tapped on their phones, played snatches of songs for each other and, often enough, included Hannah in the conversation.

Her mathematical abilities were of particular interest, but they also wanted to know about Four Pillars, the multiple wives, what school there was like. Most of them were from families that owned slaves, Hannah guessed, or at least had access to slaves. None of them seemed surprised by her, the way Matthew and Abigail had been.

Allain stayed by her side throughout, joining her when she wanted to take a dip, drying off with her in lounge chairs that were so comfortable they could be used as beds. He only left her to get her dinner, a hamburger and potato salad and ambrosia Darcy had made with Athena's help.

Hannah watched Allain gather her food and was happy, even when one of the boys, named Drake, approached him, whispered something to him and looked at her.

Allain smiled graciously and shook his head. Drake nodded, unsurprised by Allain's answer, apparently, and Hannah knew what they'd spoken about and was glad Allain had said no. She didn't want to be loaned out again.

She spent that night with Allain. Well aware that this was their last night together for five days, that he was leaving for school tomorrow, she threw herself at him as soon as they were in his bed, and he threw back, the two of them wrestling, writhing, grunting and cumming, Hannah's hole a bright pink, dripping mess by the time they turned the lights off sometime after midnight.

"Was that better than ... that kid?" Allain whispered to her in the darkness.

“Alex? Of course,” she said. “Do you even have to worry about that?”

“I can’t help it.”

“They paid seventy-five hundred dollars,” she said. “It needed to be done right.”

“But you liked it.”

“Yeah,” she said, and then decided to change the subject. “I got 750 dollars.”

“I know.”

“I want books.”

“What kind of books?”

“Math, at least to start. Alex taught me some calculus.”

“You poor thing.”

Hannah, tired as she was, rose up on her elbow in deep affront.

“I told him to,” she said emphatically. “I don’t think he wanted to, so I made him.”

“Why?” Allain said, a little defensively, and Hannah knew she’d gotten her point across.

“I missed three years of school,” she said. “I’m going to make up for it now.”

The family sat down together for Sunday breakfast, Hannah nude even though it was God’s day and they were all going to church. Delilah showed up at 8:30 to ensure Hannah’s debut among the Petrosyan’s fellow believers was sufficiently impressive.

“Do you do this for people every Sunday?” Hannah asked her once she was seated at the vanity that might one day be hers.

“Sunday morning’s one of my busiest times of the week,” Delilah mused. “I had to cancel on a regular customer

to see you. But it was you, after all.”

“Thank you,” Hannah said.

Delilah wiped Hannah’s face clean and bent over to whisper into her ear.

“Still being blackmailed?”

“Yes,” Hannah admitted.

“Do you have a plan?”

“Yes.”

Hannah wanted to change the subject.

“Do you make a lot of money?” she asked.

“Gobs of it. I mean, my owners keep half, but I get the other half.”

“You have a lot saved?”

“Enough to buy myself two times over.”

“Buy yourself?”

“Yes, I could be free today if I wanted.”

“What?” Hannah asked, dumbstruck. “Why don’t you?”

“Oh, Honey,” Delilah said, “I’ve got the sweetest deal. Room and board, I don’t pay taxes, free medical, and the lady who manages me is an absolute dear. So, I wear a collar and sometimes they chain me up, and I have to work the stacks 30 hours a week, but then I do whatever I want.”

“Oh,” Hannah said, still not sure she understood.

“Okay, let me tell you the real reason,” Delilah said conspiratorially. “My father sold me in a fit of rage when I told him I was a girl. So then Mom left him. His own family won’t speak to him. And he lost his oldest child. Every day I’m a slave, he suffers. If I buy my freedom, he can say it was for the best. And I won’t give him that.”

Hannah looked up, into Delilah’s face, and there was a hardness there, like the hardness that had descended onto her

mother's face in the mug shot. Like the hardness she sometimes felt in her own eyes.

"How long will you make him pay?" Hannah asked.

"Until I decide not to anymore," Delilah said. "I'm not there yet."

After Delilah had worked her magic, Athena dressed Hannah in a long white skirt, but Hannah insisted on the purple shirt she'd picked out at the mall, and Athena agreed, but only if she wore a wide, dark blue belt.

Hannah sitting in her chains between Athena and Allain, waited until they were on the highway to draw in her breath and begin speaking.

"Ma'am?" she said to Laura.

"Yes?" Laura said, turning in her seat.

"I need to confess something."

"What is it?"

"I told a lie about something," Hannah said, her voice shaking.

"You lied? To us?"

Laura sounded unconcerned, but Hannah was paying closer attention to Athena, and she felt the girl stiffen and draw in her breath.

"Yes, Ma'am. Well, to Athena. But you were all there. I'm very sorry, Ma'am."

"You never lied to me," Athena said, doing her best to conceal the terror that Hannah knew she felt.

"You didn't know it was a lie, but it was," Hannah said, and now she was lying again, but it was a small, calculated lie, to protect Athena.

"Would you like to talk about it?"

"Yes, Ma'am, if that's okay."

“Go ahead.”

To Hannah’s relief, Laura didn’t sound at all distressed. She turned back in her seat, facing forward.

“On the day you bought me, I told someone there, at the place where you bought me, that I wished I had run away when they took me from my mother. And that was considered trying to escape. So I was punished for that, and when they punish you, they put marks on your back. To keep track of what they’ve done to you.”

Hannah paused and Laura looked back at her. “Yes?” she said, trying to sound calm, but Hannah knew this was troubling for her.

“Athena noticed the marks, and she asked me about them, when we were all walking to the car. And I said they were nothing. But I should have said they were marks they put on me for punishment. I was just very ashamed, so I lied, but I shouldn’t have.”

For a long moment, everyone was silent, and then Laura spoke.

“And that’s the only lie you told, Hannah?”

“Yes, Ma’am. I’m very sorry, Ma’am.”

“Why are you telling us this now?” Laura asked, and she looked back at Athena suspiciously. She knew her daughter too well.

Athena did her best to look back in complete innocence.

“I should have told you days ago,” Hannah said. “I’m telling you now because I didn’t want to go into church with this on my heart.”

“Very good,” Laura said, and she reached back and squeezed Hannah’s knee. “We’ll work this out later.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am,” Hannah said, but her spirit sank under Laura’s words. She’d hoped Laura or Ormek would say right then it didn’t matter, or that she should forget it ever happened. That might be how they felt, but they

weren't saying it now, so she'd have to wait for the verdict, and she didn't want to wait.

She imagined going up to the punishment room Allain had shown her – what Athena called the mean room – for a round of suffering, perhaps wrought by someone the Petrosyans hired, while Laura supervised. The thought was so dreadful she felt sick to her stomach.

## **Allain Departs**

The Petrosyan's church was huge, with a parking lot so vast Ormek dropped the family off in the shadow of its towering façade before parking the car somewhere far away.

Hannah was placed in shackles, leaving her hands free, and she followed the family into the sanctuary and toward a pew toward the front, on the right side, next to a huge, ornately carved column.

It was the first time Hannah had been to church since she'd been taken, and she tried to remember she was there to commune with Jesus, not look at other people, but she couldn't help but stare, at the costumes of wealth and the many slaves, perhaps one for every third family, each at least as well dressed as their owners, some shackled, some completely free.

Hannah knew the Petroysans were showing her off again, like they had at the party on Friday, and she caught many eyes looking her way.

The service was beautiful, a pipe organ filling the space with complicated pieces that sounded nothing like the simple keyboard they played at the church where she and Mother went. She did her best to follow along, even singing quietly when Allain held the hymnbook for her, but she had trouble paying attention to the sermon or much of anything else.

After the service, the Petrosyans and hundreds of others amassed behind the chapel in a huge hall with a glass

ceiling and small shops around the edges. Hannah was introduced to at least two dozen people, shaking hands and speaking simply to each, not inclined to be clever or irreverent here.

They had lunch downtown, in a restaurant at the top of one of Dallas' tallest buildings, with windows all around that Hannah longed to stare through for the rest of the day. It was the first time in years she'd gone to a sit-down restaurant and been able to tell someone else what to bring her, and even though she was shackled, she felt a new kind of freedom.

They were joined at lunch by the Abercrombies, Bethany and Sonja and Ramone, whom she'd met at the clothing store, and their parents, two short, frumpy people who looked carefully at Hannah and smiled.

Hannah, for her part, tried not to look at Ramone, because she knew Allain was jealous of him. But regularly through the meal, their eyes would lock briefly and flicker, and she wondered what it would be like to mate with him.

Most of her attention, however, was on Allain, who sat close to her, touched her leg under the table, and even put his arm around her shoulders once, when he was leaning forward to tell Mr. Abercrombie something about medical school. If he was aware of the trouble she'd gotten herself into for admitting to lying, he wasn't showing it.

Hannah knew Athena was seething but would say nothing until they got home. She looked forward to Athena's words, though she knew they'd be angry and probably cruel.

The drive home after lunch was the same as any other, the family talking about this and that, Hannah occasionally answering a question, but when they got home, Athena escorted Hannah directly to her cage and unchained her.

"Strip," she said.

"Yes, Ma'am."

"The thought of helping me was that horrible for you?" Athena asked with steely calm.

“No,” Hannah said, slipping off her shoes and unbuttoning her shirt. “The thought of helping you cheat at school was that horrible.”

“Ha,” Athena said, unable in the face of Hannah’s logic to say anything more clever.

“I want to help you,” Hannah said, handing over her shirt, taking off her belt and zipping open her skirt. “I even know what your paper should say. But it has to be your words, and your knowledge.”

“Whatever,” Athena replied, staring into Hannah’s eyes but keeping her expression blank. “You’re going to be tortured.”

“I know. I deserve it.”

“No you don’t,” Athena protested quietly. “You’re too nice for that. I just wanted you to help me.”

Hannah stepped out of her skirt, folded it and handed it and the belt to Athena.

“We would have gotten caught,” Hannah said, reaching behind her back to undo her bra. “They would have figured it out. And helping you cheat is like lying. Probably worse than lying.”

Hannah wadded up her bra, slipped her panties down her legs and passed both through the bars. “So I would have gotten tortured anyway.”

“Are you going to tell Mom?” Athena queried.

“Tell her what?”

“That I tried to make that deal with you.”

“You mean, that you tried to blackmail me?”

“I guess you could put it that way.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

“Why would I?” Hannah asked.

“Because you hate me.”



“I don’t hate you,” Hannah said, and she paused and considered her next words carefully. “I’m disappointed in you, though.”

Hannah studied Athena’s face and, as it contorted in pain, realized she’d said the wrong thing.

“Why does everyone have to be better than me?” Athena asked, her voice choking on the last word, and she stared at Hannah as if trying to burn a hole through her, and her eyes filled with tears. “Even our slave. Even our fucking slave is better than me.”

Athena turned and stormed back to the elevator.

“Someone will get you before dinner,” she announced coldly.

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you Ma’am.”

Because Hannah’s conscience was clear now, she was able to clear her mind as well, and she piled her books around herself on the bed and began to read, first science, then one of the novels, then more about 19<sup>th</sup> Century France. She lost track of time, never glancing at the clock Athena had given her, until she heard the elevator bump.

“Hannah?” Allain’s voice called out.

“Hey, Allain,” Hannah said, rising, stretching. The clock said 5:50.

Allain appeared at the bars and Hannah walked over to him, trying to read his expression.

He smiled vaguely and seemed to be waiting for her to speak.

“What have you been doing?” she asked.

“Mostly packing,” he said. “I’m leaving now.”

“Oh,” Hannah said. “I thought you were going to be here for dinner.”

“It’s a four-hour drive to school,” he said. “I’ll be having dinner on the road.”

“I wish I could go with you,” Hannah blurted, and the joy of being with Allain this week, contrasted with the loneliness that she knew was coming, overwhelmed her. She closed her eyes and turned away from the bars, tears immediately streaming down her face.

“Hannah,” Allain said. “What’s wrong?”

Hannah turned back to him, so he would see her eyes, turned away again, stepped to her bed and curled up on it, facing the wall, surprising herself with how much this hurt. She’d known since the day she was bought that Allain would be going to school during the week. She had no excuse for reacting this way.

She sniffed and rose up, crossing her legs on her bed and facing Allain. She thought he might be crying or distraught or annoyed by her emotions, but there was instead in his eyes what she believed was quiet satisfaction. He wanted her to be hurt. He wanted to believe that she cared that much about him.

She sniffed again and regained her composure enough to give him a weak smile that communicated that she knew she was being silly.

“Come here,” Allain said.

Hannah obeyed and he reached through the bars, pulling her to him. Immediately they were kissing, open-mouthed, deeply, Hannah pushing her whole body against the bars, longing to be with him again.

He reached down, between her legs and touched her vulva gently and she spread her legs and continued to kiss him. But when he began circling her clitoris, she pulled away, remembering his aborted attempt to pleasure her yesterday.

“I don’t want that,” she said.

“Why not?”

“Because if it doesn’t work, I’m going to be unhappy,” she said.

“I don’t think Mom’s coming downstairs this time.”

“That’s okay,” Hannah said. “Just promise me ... promise me we’ll be together Friday night.”

“Of course,” he said, and he kissed her again, both hands against the small of her back.

By the time he pulled away with deep, urgent frustration in his eyes, she was feeling the same thing, her sheath soaked and her loins on fire.

“Hurry back,” she said, grimacing. “Please.”

With one last pained smile, he turned away from her and went to the elevator. As soon as she heard the door close, she returned to her bed and screamed into her pillow, her tears flowing freely, her mascara staining the pillow case.

## **Another Night with Raven**

She lay there for what felt like days, then sat up and tried to read until the elevator bumped at 6:30 and Athena’s voice called out, “Hannah?”

“Hey, Athena.”

Athena grabbed Hannah’s shackles and stepped to the cage.

“Did you say goodbye to Allain?”

“Yes.”

“Did you cry?”

“Yes. A lot.”

Athena chained Hannah’s feet through the bars and let her out of her cage.

“Have you ever cooked?”

“Yes,” Hannah replied. “But simple things. Nothing like we eat here.”

“You get to help me and Raven make pizza.”

“Raven is here?”

“Yeah, she’s making the dough. And she’s spending the night.”

Athena’s hand hovered over the elevator button, but she didn’t press it.

“Do you want to spend the night with her?”

“Yes,” Hannah replied.

“Are you going to have sex with her?”

“Why are you asking me that?”

“I don’t know. It’s just interesting. That we have to get people for you.”

“You don’t have to.”

“Well, Mom says we need to. To keep you happy.”

“Okay,” Hannah said, and Athena pressed the button.

In the kitchen, Raven was nude and shackled, pressing her fingers into a large lump of dough. Hannah looked at her and Raven looked back and smiled.

The smile of a friend, Hannah thought, not a lover. She hoped Raven wasn’t expecting anything from her tonight other than friendship.

Hannah played a minor role in preparing the pizza, just cutting up mushrooms and peppers, while Raven and Athena led the effort, something they’d obviously done together before.

Laura and Ormek declared everything delicious, and Hannah suspected they were just being polite until she bit into what they’d made and found it so superior to the frozen pizzas Mother sometimes bought that it was almost like a different food.

As dinner neared its end, Laura spoke in the tone Hannah had been waiting for.

“Hannah,” she began.

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“That matter you brought up this morning?”

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“You and Athena will write up everything that happened and print it out, alright?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“And you’ll take that to the clinic. I’ll make an appointment for you this week. We’ll give it to them. And they’ll take care of everything. And we won’t need to discuss it any further.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, relieved that nothing would be done to her in the room upstairs, but dreading whatever awaited her at whatever the clinic was.

“Is that the place where I’ll get to see Mother?”

“Yes, if you want to.”

“I do.”

“If you’ll write the letter, I’ll mail it tomorrow.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am.”

After dinner, all three girls went to Athena’s room, Hannah on her bed to help Athena type up the story of the lie, Raven to flip through a fashion magazine and pretend she wasn’t paying any attention to what the other girls were working on.

After Athena printed out Hannah’s transgression, she reviewed math and went over the broad outlines of French politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

At 9:30, Laura escorted the girls back to their cages, removed their shackles and, without asking, handed Raven the key so she could unlock the door between them.

“Goodnight,” Laura said, turning and flipping off all but one dim light near the elevator. “Sleep well.”

Hannah’s eyes adjusted to the darkness, making out Raven’s form moving to her toilet.

“So you lied to Athena,” Raven observed.

“Yeah,” Hannah said, filling in the details Raven hadn’t already heard while she and Athena wrote up the letter, about her punishment at the stacks and Athena’s subsequent blackmail.

“Ooh,” Raven said simply.

“What are they going to do to me at the clinic?”

“I don’t know,” Raven sighed. “Whatever they think of. Like at the stacks.”

“I fainted at the stacks.”

“You did the right thing.”

“You mean by confessing?”

“Yeah. You don’t want to help someone cheat at school. But more important, you don’t want to let Athena think she can hold anything over you.”

“Yeah,” Hannah agreed. She thought about asking Raven what had been done to her during her punishment, quickly thought better of it.

“She’s not a bitch,” Raven said. “She’s just trying to make her way.”

“I know.”

“So, you’re gonna see your mom?”

“I hope so,” Hannah replied. “But I have to send her a letter. There’s no way to call.”

Hannah paused, stared through the little windows at the faint glow of the neighborhood. “I got a letter from her, yesterday. She doesn’t understand what’s going on.”

“What do you mean?”

“She’s trying to have me move in with her.”

“She’s out of jail?”

“Yeah, living with some family.”

“Are you worried about her?”

“Of course. There’s something weird going on. Her letter didn’t make sense, really.”

Raven wiped, flushed and stepped into Hannah’s cage, sitting next to her on the bed but not touching her.

“Are you sexed out?” she asked.

“Three times Friday night,” Hannah said. “And last night with Allain. A lot.”

“How was the boy genius?”

“You mean Alex? Grateful. And good. I came once.”

Raven leaned back, her head against the wall. “Can I lick you?”

“I guess so, but I might not cum.”

“I can just masturbate on my bed.”

“No, that’s okay,” said Hannah. “How do you want me?”

“On your back. I’ll do all the work.”

Raven stood and Hannah scooted to the middle of her bed and lay down, her head on her pillow. Raven clambered over her in reverse position, her vulva over Hannah’s face, her mouth at Hannah’s sex.

Hannah spread her legs and Raven went to work, licking lightly, her tongue against Hannah’s hair and outer lips.

Hannah sighed, the feeling unexpectedly good. Raven reached back to rub her own clitoris, her hips rocking slowly as she pleased herself.

“I can lick you, if you drop down a little,” Hannah said.

Raven obliged and Hannah raised her mouth to Raven’s opening, running her tongue tentatively up Raven’s slit, tasting her honey and remembering their first night together.

They labored on each other for another 10 minutes, Hannah cumming first, a mild but pleasant release that had her

panting against Raven's vulva before she reengaged her mouth, licking Raven's clitoris and biting her lips until her friend grunted, rocked and squirmed with a strong, carnal reward.

"You're getting better at that," Raven whispered, still in position over Hannah.

"I'm learning from you," Hannah replied, kissing Raven's wet folds before she reached up and pushed her gently off her bed.

Raven went to Hannah's toilet to wipe, and Hannah went next, urinating and cleaning herself.

"Who was that you left with Friday?" Hannah asked. "They looked nice."

"The Changs. Funny people."

"What did you do?"

"They have this huge bed. And I spent the whole night in it."

"With both of them?"

"Yeah."

"Did you do anything?"

Raven returned to her own bed and sat down. Hannah could see her silhouette, back straight, her legs crossed, her hands folded in her lap.

"Yes. It was kinda weird, but strangely sexy," Raven said. "We all went to bed, in the nude. We talked a little, just small talk, like we did it every night. But then I had to seduce Mr. Chang. Touched him and he pretended he was half asleep, but he got erect, and then I got on him, really quietly, like we didn't want Mrs. Chang to catch us, and I spent half an hour with him inside me, just rocking over him, slowly, until he came."

"What was Mrs. Chang doing?"

"Pretending to be asleep."



“Are you sure she wasn’t really asleep?”

“No, she got up and went to the bathroom, and Mr. Chang told me to be really quiet, so I was, and I held still until she got back in bed. And then I finished him off, and I finished too. No way she didn’t hear at least one of us.”

The girls talked about other things, about Athena, about Gramma and Laura and Ormek, about Allain driving back to school tonight, and Hannah wished she had a way to communicate with him, so she could know he’d made it there safely.

### **Scheduled at the Clinic**

Hannah woke first the next morning, saw that the sky outside the little window was a dark gray and knew dawn was coming.

She began the day with a heavy heart. Allain was gone, not to return until Friday sometime. She was going to be sent somewhere to be punished, possibly tomorrow or in a few days. Her relationship with Athena was damaged, perhaps irreparably. And Raven was probably going back to Gramma this morning.

She went to her toilet, then stood at the bars of her cage, longing to be somewhere else, to be doing something else. Raven sighed and stirred in her sheets but did not waken, and Hannah returned to her bed, sitting up, her bare back against the wall, waiting for something to happen.

Somewhere upstairs, she heard footsteps, the sound of water in the pipes, a door shutting.

Raven stirred again, sat up, rubbed her face and went to the toilet, not looking at Hannah.

“It’s raining,” Raven announced quietly.

Hannah looked back at the window, saw that the sky was not the gray of dawn but of clouds, and she was glad the earth was getting a drink.

“Do you sleep with Uncle Bear a lot?”

“Almost every night,” Raven said.

“Do you love him?”

“Do you know what love is?”

“I love Allain, I think.”

Raven moved back to her bed, sat, her dark outline turned toward Hannah.

“There’s a lot of kinds of love,” Raven said. “Loving the people that own you is just one kind.”

“Does he love you?” Hannah asked.

“Yes, in a way. Does Allain love you?”

“In a way,” Hannah said.

The elevator bumped and Laura called out, “Everyone decent?”

“Good morning,” Raven replied.

Laura appeared, bearing shackles, and Hannah’s heart lifted a little. At least she was going upstairs.

“Did you girls make love?” she asked, kneeling to chain Hannah’s feet.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Raven said. Hannah wondered if that was the right term for what they’d done. She loved Raven, as much as you could love a new friend. But last night wasn’t love, really. It was just sex. Or not even sex, really. Just pleasure, coarse and sweet.

Laura didn’t ask about orgasms and neither girl volunteered the information. She shackled Raven, opened their cages and they followed her to the elevator and up to the kitchen.

Darcy greeted them with two plates of food. Athena appeared, nodded to everyone and joined them at the table.

“Math and that history paper tonight, okay?” she said, looking sharply at Hannah.

“Yes, of course,” Hannah said, glad that at least that aspect of their relationship would continue.

“Allain got to his place about 10 last night. He said to make sure you knew.”

“Thank you for telling me,” Hannah said, and she looked at Athena and offered a weak smile. Athena just stared back.

After Athena left to take Raven back to Gramma’s on her way to school, Hannah helped Darcy in the kitchen and the rest of the house, vacuuming, dusting, polishing wood.

Ormek nodded to Hannah as he passed through the living room on his way to the kitchen, and a little after 10 that morning, Laura found Hannah in the den, where Darcy had assigned her the task of wiping down windows and the mirror.

“I’ve spoken to the clinic,” Laura said, standing at the door.

“Yes, Ma’am?” Hannah replied, turning away from the mirror where she’d been looking into her plain-girl face, the face of the girl she knew, without makeup, without lipstick.

“We’ll be dropping you off there at 9 tomorrow morning.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“You’ll be spending the night there.”

“When will I come home?”

“Wednesday afternoon.”

“What will they do to me there?”

“A very thorough health checkup,” Laura replied. “And you’ll be examined, for studies they do. I’m not sure about everything, but I’ve been promised it won’t harm you in any way.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“And then, you can see your mother Wednesday morning. You need to write her today. I’ll take the letter in at

noon today, and it should reach her tomorrow.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am.”

“I’ll give you the information you need to put in your letter, about where she should go and the information she’ll need. You can see her at 10 Wednesday.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“And,” Laura continued, a sudden tension in her voice and face that Hannah knew meant unpleasant things, “you’ll have to give them that note, that you and Athena wrote last night, and they’ll take care of that too. I told them to expect it.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said evenly. “I would like to write the letter now, to Mother, if it’s okay with Darcy.”

Laura got the pen, paper and the okay from Darcy and returned Hannah to her cage. She wrote some information onto a sheet of paper and passed it through the bars.

Hannah grabbed Mother’s letter from her cabinet and sat down to read it again:

“My Dearest Hannah,

“I am so proud of you! I understand that you’ve been staying with a good, Christian family since you had to leave me. I wish to be reunited with you as soon as possible.

“I am well. I will be able to say more about my situation when we are together. An angel has entered my life and has performed several miracles. I am truly in the hands of Jesus!

“I have a space I can share with you, which is nicer than our last apartment. I look forward to having you back with me.

“Please write me as soon as possible. I can probably have you picked up if you will provide your address.

“With all my love, Mother.”

Hannah blinked back tears and set pen to paper. After several discarded sheets, she was done:

“Dear Mother,

“Thank you. It was very nice to get your letter.

“I am very glad you are doing well, and have been blessed!

“I will need to explain my condition to you in person. I will not be able to provide my address, or to meet you where I am living.

“Please get to 5010 Patriot’s Avenue in Dallas at 10 in the morning this Wednesday. There is a reception area. Go there and ask for female N8114P165, and then we can meet.”

Hannah put the letter down and returned to her books. Laura arrived at 11, took the letter, read it quickly and left to drop it off.

“As soon as I get back, I’ll let you out to have lunch, and then you may spend the afternoon wherever you want in the house.”

This was an unexpected privilege, and Hannah smiled despite the many things she had to worry over.

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am,” she said. “I’d like to stay in the library.”

“Of course you would,” Laura said. “Did you read when you were with your mother?”

“As much as I could,” Hannah replied. “I had a library card, and our church had books to share. But they weren’t as good as yours. I like science a lot.”

## **Questions with Jessica**

Laura was true to her word, shackling Hannah and bringing her up for lunch at 12:15, then escorting her to the library. She got a towel from her bedroom and Hannah spread it over a heavily-cushioned, silk chair, grabbed a book about Medieval art and lost herself in the beautiful pictures.

Laura was doing something in her bedroom – Hannah guessed it might be work on her computer, for church, because she'd promised several people after the worship service yesterday that she would follow up with them on things.

But every 15 minutes or so, she'd call out, "Hannah, are you doing okay?" and Hannah would reply "Yes, Ma'am."

Were she to try to escape, to slip downstairs, to evade Darcy's notice, to somehow get through a door or window that was probably locked from the inside, to get outside and hope no one noticed a nude girl in shackles and a collar, she would most likely be apprehended soon enough. And she would not see Mother – possibly ever. Escape was not even the remotest option, Hannah thought. Surely Laura knew that as well.

Hannah devoured five picture books – art, astrophysics, Amazonian flora – and lost all track of time until Athena appeared with Jessica.

"What are you doing up here?" Athena demanded.

Hannah was about to answer but Laura spoke first, from her bedroom: "I hated to leave her downstairs by herself all afternoon. So we agreed she could read in the library."

"Okay," Athena said, turning to Hannah. "Homework time."

Hannah followed Athena and Jessica to Athena's room, took up her regular place on Athena's bed and prepared for the next math assignment.

Jessica, however, needed something resolved first.

"You had sex with Alex Friday."

Hannah just looked at her, trying to think of an answer.

"Didn't you?"

“What did Alex tell you?” Hannah asked.

“He’s saying you did. Or kind of implying it.”

“It’s true,” Hannah said.

“You know he’s a huge dork, right?” Jessica said.

“What’s a dork?” Hannah asked, suspecting it wasn’t good and starting to feel annoyed.

“Well, let’s see –” Jessica said, looking up at the ceiling as she pondered. “A dork is someone who, uh, doesn’t have sex, for example.”

“We had sex,” Hannah said sharply, sensing a new kinship with Alex as she began to understand that he was, as she had been before she was taken, on the outside looking in at the people he wished would be peers.

“He sent your picture out,” Jessica said.

“I know. I made him take a good one.”

“With his math book?”

“Calculus. I made him teach some of it to me.”

“So this morning in English, Sally Chimkiss just point blank asked him, ‘Did you do her?’ and he was all just smiling, like he was hot shit.”

Hannah nodded but remained silent, her anger growing.

“What did you do with him?” Jessica asked in a hot whisper, moving to Athena’s bed, leaning toward Hannah, as if anything Hannah said would remain their little secret. “I mean, how did you do it? What did he say? What was he like?”

“That’s none of your business,” Hannah answered, and she stared blankly at Jessica.

For a moment, Jessica stared back, obviously surprised that a slave would speak to her that directly. She looked at Athena, as if hoping her friend would rebuke their girl, but Athena leafed through her math book and pretended not to have heard.

Jessica, perhaps realizing she'd miscalculated, that Hannah had won, smiled and reached for her book bag.

They worked until dinnertime, first on math, then science vocabulary, then on 19<sup>th</sup> Century French politics.

After dinner, Athena wrangled permission from Laura to take Hannah along for the drive to get Jessica back home.

Hannah thought they'd just be putting her in her wrap, but Athena brought her to the bedroom, the room that one day might be hers, and they picked out a pair of jeans, a white blouse and black sandals.

As soon as they'd chained Hannah and buckled her in the back seat, Jessica turned to her.

"I'm sorry about what I said. About Alex."

"That's okay."

"He was a virgin," Jessica declared.

"Is that what he told you?"

"No. But I just know it." Jessica paused. "Right?"

"I don't know."

"Yes you do."

"Okay," Hannah said, and she rolled her eyes the way she'd seen Athena do, "if your parents rented someone for your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, would you want them to tell everyone what you did?"

Jessica pondered the question for a moment.

"Did you like it?" she asked.

"Like what?"

"Sex with Alex."

"Yes," Hannah replied, realizing that Alex had given her a frightful power over him. She could say terrible things to Jessica, and Jessica would announce them to the school tomorrow, and it would get back to Alex, and he would be humiliated. Could he have her punished? Was it a right he'd bought with his \$7,500, to discipline her if she violated his



confidence? He'd have to complain to Laura, and tell her what Hannah had said about him, and Hannah would have to answer for it, or deny it, and if she denied it, most likely nothing would ever happen.

"What's sex like?" Jessica asked her.

"What do you mean?" Hannah asked.

"You know what I mean," Jessica said, scowling.

"I don't," Hannah protested. "You mean, how does it feel? Or what it's like to do that with someone? Or what's it like to, um, have someone in your life, to do that with?"

"All of it," Jessica said, her smile more frustrated than happy.

Hannah laughed. "It would take a long time to say. And it's different for everyone, I think. And I'm probably not the best person to ask anyway. I was a virgin until, um, Saturday."

"So, Jessica," Athena interjected, "if your parents offered to rent someone for you, would it be a boy or a girl?"

Jessica was silent.

"Are you a lesbian?" Hannah asked.

"I'm not sure," Jessica said. "I have too many ideas."

"Jessica still wants to be with you," Athena said.

Both girls laughed nervously, and Hannah sensed that Athena's words weren't spontaneous, that the girls had discussed what to say to Hannah, how to bring up the topic.

"Would it be okay with your parents?" Hannah inquired.

"I don't know," Jessica said. "I can't ask."

"That's why you're going with us," Athena said. "You have to ask."

"Ask who? Ask what?"

"Ask Jessica's parents if she can be with you."

“Oh,” Hannah said, suddenly, completely out of her element, lost once again in a strange world where intense carnality was bubbling just under a thin veneer of unbreakable order.

“I can’t do that,” Hannah blurted. “They’ll think I’m terrible.”

“Mom’s totally cool,” Jessica said. “And Dad doesn’t care. And I’ve already told them about you.”

“What did you say?”

“That you help us with our homework. And you’re nice.”

“And?”

“Yes,” Jessica said. “They know that too.”

“I told them about your scores,” Athena said.

“What am I supposed to say?” Hannah protested. “How can I even bring it up?”

“As soon as we get home, me and Athena are going to take my dog for a walk, since I’m supposed to do that, and you’ll be there with my mom, in the kitchen, probably. She’ll be drinking but she won’t be drunk. And you can just talk to her.”

“Maybe,” Hannah said.

## **Missy**

Jessica’s home was, if anything, bigger than the Petrosyan’s, a great dwelling of white clapboard and columns, lights in windows and moonlight glinting off a copper roof.

Athena parked in the round front drive, helped Hannah out of the car, and she shambled in after them, through their great front room to the kitchen, where a woman sat in a nook. As Jessica had predicted, she was typing on a computer, a half-drunk glass of wine near her hand.

Elegant, fit, attractive like Laura, she stood as soon as she saw the girls.

“Mom, this is Hannah,” Jessica announced.

“Hello, Hannah, I’m Missy.”

The woman offered her hand, noticed Hannah’s chains and smiled awkwardly, raising her hand to Hannah’s shoulder, squeezing it.

“We’re gonna walk Mrs. Bites,” Jessica announced abruptly, and she and Athena left the kitchen, came back for the dog’s leash, said goodbye to Missy and Hannah, left the kitchen again. Somewhere, a dog’s urgent claws scrabbled against a hardwood floor, and then a door shut.

Missy looked at Hannah, smiled warmly. “Please, Hannah, sit down,” she said, motioning toward the breakfast table.

Hannah obeyed, sitting with her hands in her lap, her nervousness fading.

“Jessica talks about you all the time,” the woman said, taking a seat across the table. “You seem to be quite a marvel.”

“I’m not sure what that means,” Hannah said.

“She is very taken with you.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“I’m Missy, not Ma’am,” she said, leaning forward, resting her elbow on the table. “And if I could snap my fingers and set you all free, I’d do it.”

“Why?”

“Because owning humans is wrong. You must know that.”

Hannah just nodded, not wanting to say anything that could be interpreted as agreement, or a complaint about the Petrosyans.

Missy stared, as if waiting for Hannah’s next words, and Hannah found the courage to speak: “Jessica wants to be

with me.”

“I know.”

“She told you?”

“No, but I can tell.”

“Is it alright?”

“Do you want to be with her?”

“I want to do whatever I’m told,” Hannah said.

“No!” Missy exclaimed. “Please don’t think like that. Please don’t give in.”

Hannah laughed, because she saw herself as Missy saw her, and knew Missy wasn’t seeing her fully.

“This is how it is,” Hannah said, and she shifted in her seat and her chains rattled faintly. “There are things I like about it and things I don’t. Just like anyone else, in their own life.”

“Would being with my daughter be something you’d like?”

“I mainly like boys,” said Hannah. “But it would be fine, I think.”

“You think?”

“Yes,” Hannah said. “Everyone’s different. Maybe it wouldn’t work.”

“Some people feel that any sex with a slave is rape,” Missy said, “by anyone, slave or free. But if you follow that logic, then no slave would ever have sex. And people need sex.”

“Yes, Ma’am ... Yes, Missy, I think they do.”

Now it was Missy’s turn to laugh. “Jessica says you’re very intelligent.”

“I like to learn,” Hannah said. “I didn’t get to go to school for three years, so I’m trying to make up now.”

“Do you want to go to college?”

“Yes, if the Petrosyans let me.”

“I hope they will,” Missy said. “You can do anything you want with Jessica.”

“Thank you, Ma’am,” Hannah said.

With that resolved, Missy went on to query Hannah about her life before she was taken, what being acquired by Mrs. Alvarez was like, how she felt about things now. Hannah answered the best she could until Athena and Jessica returned with Mrs. Bites, an enthusiastic golden lab that put her nose against Hannah’s hip, sniffed at her feet and ambled away.

Jessica hugged both girls before they left, but no words were exchanged about what Missy had said until Hannah and Athena were back in the car together.

“Did you ask?” Athena blurted.

“Yes.”

“No you didn’t,” Athena retorted.

“You told me to, and I did,” Hannah replied back, not sure why Athena didn’t believe her.

“What did she say, then?”

“She said yes. I think she sort of knew I was going to ask. But she said I should only do it if I wanted to.”

“Do you want to?”

“It’s fine. Jessica’s nice. Most of the time.”

Athena snorted.

“Will it be okay with your parents?”

“Sure.”

“I think Jessica should have to pay,” Hannah said.  
“What Alex paid.”

Athena looked at Hannah, and Hannah laughed.

“Where’s my money?” she asked.

“You’ll get it. We’re going to open an account for you.”

“I already know what I want.”

“What?”

“Books.”

As soon as Athena pulled the car into the garage, she got out her phone and started texting furiously.

Hannah waited patiently for five minutes, watching Athena’s fingers fly, and then she decided she wanted to do something else.

“Take me inside,” Hannah said.

Athena sighed with annoyance but obeyed, leading Hannah up to her parent’s room first to let them know they had made it back safely.

“Did you get to meet Missy?” Laura asked from the bed, a laptop resting on her thighs.

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

“Missy said Hannah could be with Jessica,” Athena announced.

Laura looked up at Athena, possibly with surprise or consternation, Hannah couldn’t tell.

“Can she spend the night Thursday?” Athena asked.  
“We only have a half day Friday.”

“We’ll see.”

Athena brought Hannah to the room with her clothes, took off her chains and told her to strip.

“If Mom lets Jessica spend the night, you’ll be in here together,” Athena said.

“All night?”

“Would you like that?” Athena asked.

“Yes,” Hannah said, but she was a little disappointed, because she’d always imagined having this room to herself, at least the first time.

Athena shackled Hannah for the walk to her cage, making small talk about clothes and music, most of which meant nothing to Hannah.

“Mom told me to leave the lights on,” Athena said, returning Hannah to confinement. “She’ll be down before 11 to turn them off.”

“Okay. Goodnight.”

Hannah looked up at Athena, waiting for her to leave, but Athena lingered at the bars.

“I wouldn’t have told,” Athena said. “Even if you had said no, about helping me with school, I never would have told Mom and Dad that you lied.”

“You didn’t ask me to help you with school,” Hannah said, settling down on her bed. “You asked me to help you cheat.”

“Okay,” Athena said. “But you never had to say anything. What’s going to happen to you is your fault.”

“It is my fault,” Hannah said, certain Athena wanted her to argue, to blame Athena for what was going to be done to her. “I lied, and now I’ll be punished. It’s how it has to be.”

Athena turned on her heel, the elevator’s quiet bump the last sound she made.

Hannah cleared her head and opened the science book, inspired by Missy’s encouragement to study.

## **An Arrangement with Ormek**

At 10:45, Laura arrived to turn off the lights. But first, she walked to the bars.

“Hannah.”

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“Ormek will be coming to you at 11 tonight.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“He won’t enter your cage. You’ll turn around and bend over, and allow him to enter you.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, not completely surprised by Laura’s words.

“You will not need to speak to him.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Or touch or kiss him.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“You’ll want to wet yourself before he arrives.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“This will be known only to the three of us.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said. “Of course, Ma’am.”

Laura looked at Hannah without uncertainty, without diffidence, conveying to Hannah that this was how things would be, and it suited her, and it needed to suit Hannah as well.

“Thank you, Hannah.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

At 10:55, Hannah sat on her bed in the darkness, spread her legs and put her fingers against her vulva, revisiting a pleasure she used to have to steal in the bathroom while Mother hovered just beyond the door.

It had been 24 hours since her last orgasm, with Raven, and her honey flowed freely, quickly soaking her lips, her hair, her fingers.

Promptly at 11, the elevator bumped and she slid off the bed.

Ormek appeared, nude in the darkness, no different from the way he looked when she saw him naked after his shower, except that his penis was hard now, sticking straight out, the way Allain’s did.

Hannah went to the bars, turned and bent, putting her hands on her knees, and felt the tip of Ormek’s penis, first



against her anus, then down into her vulva. He reached through the bars, spread her lips and was up her vagina a moment later, grunting with deep pleasure as he moved within her body.

“Uh,” Hannah groaned with Ormek’s first thrust, the pleasure of being filled mixed with an unexpected pain. The angle was wrong, perhaps, or his penis was larger than she was used to.

“Ahh,” Ormek said in reply.

They were not to speak, Hannah knew, by orders of Laura, but grunting was not really speech, and it was a way to reassure each other that it felt good, that they were together, that they were conscious in this place.

Hannah moaned quietly, but loud enough for Ormek to hear, and he echoed her.

He pushed harder and she lost her balance, slipping forward, away from Ormek, out of the reach of his sex.

She quickly returned to her position and he found her hole and put himself back up her with another grunt.

Not wanting to stumble away again, she reached back to grab the bars, her hand met his and he fumbled for a moment and then wrapped his fingers around hers, first both left hands, then both right hands, grasping and caressing as if their fingers were making love as well.

It was just their hands touching, Hannah thought, and it was only to hold her in position. But she knew Laura wouldn’t approve. She knew she was colluding with Ormek to violate the spirit of Laura’s instructions. They were touching, and she had said not to.

Ormek built up to his orgasm slowly, pushing in hard and fast, then slowing, savoring the sheath he’d paid more than a million dollars for.

Hannah thought about tightening, bringing him to orgasm on her own terms, but she didn’t want him to stop, didn’t want him to leave. He’d changed his angle, or her vagina had gotten used to it, and now the friction between his

skin and her wet cavity was pure pleasure, every thrust and every withdrawal a new source of instant, carnal joy.

Was letting him stay as long as he wanted another betrayal of Laura? Hannah decided not to worry about it. Laura would never know what stayed in Hannah's mind.

Ormek's rhythm changed and quickened, and Hannah knew it was time. She constricted herself around his member as soon as she heard the first gasp of his climax, rewarding him for his performance, drinking him in, grabbing at him, milking him of all the semen her body could hold.

With one final grunt, he finished but stayed in her, moving gently, sighing, while she held still, relaxing her organ, the friction reduced but still delicious now that his semen lined her walls.

And then he was gone, out of her hole and her presence without a word, the elevator spiriting him upstairs, back to Laura, back to his life.

Had Allain done this to her, she would have collapsed on her bed and wept. But it was Ormek, and Hannah felt both aching arousal and a certain pride. She had served the head of the household intimately, as expertly as she was able. If his grunts were any indication, she had done well.

She went back to her bed not to mourn but to touch, to massage her throbbing, gushing slit.

She reached a finger into her chasm, found it a poor substitute for Ormek's manhood, pulled it out and slid it up her vulva to her clitoris, swollen and so sensitive it felt electric.

"Oh," she sighed, realizing immediately that this was something new, that touching after sex, while deep arousal roared in her mind and body, was completely different from the furtive, tentative strokes she practiced while she was still with her mother. In less than 30 seconds of effort against her erect lump, she felt the tension build to crisis, and then she came, a long, hard, grinding orgasm that had her hips shaking, her legs rocking, her hand sawing between her legs.

“Ohjesusohsesusohjesussavemesavemesaveme,” she whispered shamelessly, rapturously.

She trembled and drew in deep breaths until the ecstasy had passed, replaced by waves of contented joy. She dropped to her bed, curled up, head on her pillow, blankets pulled up to her shoulders, hip against the puddle in her sheets, her last thought of the day the new pleasure she had taught herself, at last.

## **Female, Recreational, Part 10: Survival**

### **To the Clinic**

Hannah awoke at dawn's first light, the gray sky outside her window barely brighter than the basement's gloom. She forgot where she was for a moment, reaching out to feel the wall, the soft blankets.

Memory came back in pieces, beginning with Ormek and what she had done for him last night, then the distant Allain, and Athena and Laura and her condition and, finally, dread.

In a few hours, Laura would bring her to the place called the clinic, where she would see Mother, where she would be punished, and where other, unknown things would be done to her.

It was too dark to read, and the coming mornings would only get darker as early fall turned to winter. She resolved to ask Laura for a light she could control, and she sat up and wrapped her arms around her legs, waiting.

She heard footsteps, water, pans clanking, and at 7:15, the elevator bumped and Darcy arrived with a plate of food.

"Laura says for you to take a shower and be ready to go by 8:15," Darcy said.

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied. "Please turn on the light."

Hannah was ready to go by 8 and spent the next 15 minutes reading the novel on her bed. Simple as the writing was, she found it difficult to concentrate, going over the same lines repeatedly between glances at the clock.

At 8:17, the elevator bumped, Laura called to her and Hannah set her book down and went to the bars.

Laura handed Hannah's wraps to her and Hannah snapped them around her breasts and middle, then offered her

hands, watching as Laura chained her wrists and ankles.

Laura said nothing until they had left the neighborhood, Hannah in the passenger seat of the BMW, passing buildings and people and cars, wishing she could be anywhere else but here.

“You should be home by 5 tomorrow,” she said.

“Yes, Ma’am, I’m looking forward to being back.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Hannah,” Laura said.

“Yes, Ma’am?”

“You’ve only been with us eight days.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“But I want you to know we are very pleased with you. All of us.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you very much, Ma’am.”

Laura turned and smiled, but Hannah stared straight ahead, wondering if Ormek had said anything last night about their tryst. Perhaps he just returned to bed and lay beside Laura, his penis still wet with Hannah’s syrup and his semen.

If anything had been said, Hannah imagined, it would have been calm, emotionless.

“How did Hannah perform?” Laura would have asked.

“Completely satisfactorily,” Ormek might have replied, and then he would have closed his eyes and gone to sleep.

Laura continued navigating the streets of the Dallas suburbs, silent, as if waiting for Hannah to speak. Unsure what to say back, she at last settled on the practical.

“May I ask a favor, Ma’am?”

“Yes?”

“I would like a light in my ... in my space. To read by.”

“Of course, Sweetie.”

Their conversation on the rest of the drive was inconsequential, small talk about Athena’s studies, Allain’s new school term, Hannah’s desire to buy books. Hannah knew she was just mouthing words, too distracted to focus on the conversation. Laura also seemed absent, sometimes speaking in monosyllables, or losing track of what had been said more than a few sentences ago.

Once they reached an industrial area on the outskirts of Dallas, Laura stopped talking altogether, studying her phone for directions.

Hannah expected to see a medical office of some kind, her anxiety growing when Laura slowed before a large, gray, windowless building, surrounded by a barb wire-topped chain link fence. The building was bigger than the stacks and, because no one came here to shop, far less attractive. Hannah reminded herself that this would all be over tomorrow afternoon. She had survived the stacks for four days. She was certain she could endure this for less than two.

Laura left the street and pulled up to a large gate, guarded by a little wooden shack where a man and woman, both in blue uniforms that made them look like police officers, peered out a window.

“Hello,” Laura said.

“Appointment number?” the woman said through a microphone.

“1419994,” Laura said, looking at a piece of paper spread on her lap.

The woman stepped away from the window and emerged from the shack through a side door. While the man watched, the woman stepped up to Laura’s window and looked across at Hannah, first at her face, then down at her lap, where her manacled hands rested.

“License, please,” the woman said.

Laura reached into her purse, pulled out a large wallet and opened it for the woman's inspection.

"Pull forward, park and take her into reception," the woman instructed.

The gate before them rolled slowly aside, revealing a parking lot and, beyond it, the building, with doors marked "Reception," "Deliveries" and "Staff."

Laura parked, helped Hannah exit the car. She noticed that the asphalt was warm and rough on her bare feet.

She ambled forward, following Laura into a plain room with white walls and a gray floor.

Hannah, heart thumping despite her ongoing attempts to reassure herself that nothing terrible could happen here, quickly took in the room.

Along three walls, plastic chairs had been set up in lines broken only by a yellowing potted palm, a magazine rack and a trash bin.

Five of the chairs were occupied – two by a man and woman in their thirties, casually dressed, neither in chains. Why were they here? Two more chairs held girls in their twenties, both in thin black wraps like Hannah's, and chained as she was, by the wrists and ankles. An older woman, perhaps late thirties, sat next to them, and Hannah guessed this was the owner. They might be sisters, both dark-haired and fair-skinned. One of the girls typed on a phone while the other watched. Something happened on the phone and they snorted and looked at each other, smiling, oblivious to their restraints. Hannah wondered if they were always together, if they were caged together, used for sex together. The woman beside them read a magazine.

The least interesting place in the room was the receptionist window, but Hannah turned her attention to that next as she and Laura approached it, looking at the woman there, middle-aged and graying, in a red jumpsuit that seemed out of place on her pudgy frame.

She raised a clipboard to the slot in the window and Laura took it and filled in the lines, writing “Laura Petrosyan” in the first column, “Hannah” in the second, Hannah’s ID number in the third, the time they had arrived, and her signature in the last column.

Laura handed the clipboard back to the woman, who looked at it, raised her eyes to Laura and Hannah and, without smiling, promised that someone would call them soon.

Hannah hoped Laura would want to sit near the other five people there, but it didn’t surprise her when she headed to the far end of the reception area and sat, Hannah taking a seat beside her.

Laura pulled out her phone and tapped at it and Hannah knew she was too nervous to talk. Hannah, with nothing else to do, studied the other people here, wondering about their stories, their pain, their joy.

The door to the right of the receptionist desk opened with a beep and a woman appeared. “Will?”

The man and woman stood and the staffer walked up to them.

“Hello, Will,” she said brightly.

He nodded and smiled.

“You’ll be with us until tomorrow.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he said, “I’m ready.” He was fit, handsome, the kind of man someone would want to buy, Hannah thought. She imagined finding him in the showroom, naked and chained to the floor by his ankle. She imagined what she would say to him, what he might say to her.

“Good,” she said, adding apologetically as she reached into a bag slung over his shoulder, “And now, some formalities. Sorry.”

He didn’t seem to mind, holding out his hands, allowing her to chain his wrists and ankles.

She pulled a collar out of her bag and snapped it around his neck, but it was black, not silver like all the other



collars Hannah had seen.

He grimaced, then smiled and turned to the woman who had brought him and she hugged him – a tight, passionate embrace that told Hannah they were lovers of some kind. Unable to hug her back, he kissed her neck. “See you tomorrow, Baby,” he said, and the staffer led him back through the door while the woman who brought him departed with a quick glance around the room, her eyes locking briefly onto Hannah’s.

A black girl in a short dress and chains entered the room from the parking lot, ushered in by an older white man, obviously her owner. Hannah thought of Raven and Uncle Bear and about servicing him. She wondered if Raven would be jealous.

“Tina and Carmen?” a woman called from the door.

The two girls rose and waited while staffer chained them and the woman who had brought them removed their original chains. No one was brought back until they were in the clinic’s restraints, Hannah concluded.

The black girl and her owner sat and talked, too quietly for Hannah to hear, but with an obvious intimacy. The girl smiled, laughed, scowled, the man alternately amusing and teasing her, perhaps.

“Hannah?”

Hannah rose, fighting another round of nerves. The staff member approached, a woman in her late 20’s with blonde hair and long legs.

“Hello, Hannah, how are we doing?”

“Fine.”

“I’m Irene, and I’ll be checking you in today.”

“Nice to meet you, Irene,” Hannah said, lying.

## **Checking In**

Irene scanned the chip in Hannah's back and chained her wrists and ankles. Laura removed the chains she'd been brought in, and all three of them headed through the door and to a desk, one of a half dozen set into little alcoves along one side of the room.

Irene took her place behind her desk and tapped on a computer keyboard, Hannah and Laura sitting opposite her, in two small plastic chairs. Hannah could hear other voices – the man, answering questions at a nearby desk, the two girls and the woman who'd brought them, at a desk further away, the girls chattering. If they didn't want to be here, they weren't showing it with their voices.

Irene looked at her computer screen, then at Laura.

"I'm showing three orders," Irene said. "You want a new-subject checkup, she has a visitation scheduled for tomorrow, and we'll be disciplining her."

"That's correct," Laura said.

"And you'll approve her use in research while she's with us?"

"Yes," Laura said. "I understand that brings the cost down? And you won't harm her?"

"That's right," Irene said. "At worst, a little temporary discomfort."

Hannah's nerves, which usually calmed once she was in the presence of those whom she feared, were jangling with surprising intensity.

"Do you have documentation on her infraction?"

"Yes," said Laura, and she reached into her purse and pulled out the one-page narrative Hannah and Athena had prepared.

Irene read it carefully, glanced up at Hannah, returned her eyes to the document, then set it down.

"This is a lie, and it's about a serious matter," Irene said. "The recommended punishment is eight units, but you can choose from a range between six and 10."

“We’ll go with the recommendation,” Laura said.

“Eight discipline units?” Irene asked.

“Yes, eight. If that’s what’s recommended.”

Irene tapped on her computer while Hannah quietly died inside. Laura could have given her six. But she chose eight. Eight of whatever they did here. By the second shock in the stacks, she had fainted. Enduring eight was incomprehensible.

“What will you do to her?” Laura asked quietly.

“It depends on a few things,” Irene replied. “Who’s working the discipline room, what stations are occupied, and we may adjust her program based on her response to the first few units. But normally we try to maintain a balance between corporal punishment and stress restraints.”

“Okay,” Laura agreed.

“Does she have any medical issues that might interfere with punishment?”

Laura looked at Hannah. “I don’t think so.”

“Recent injuries, orthopedic problems, incontinence, digestive challenges?” Irene said, apparently reading from a list on her computer. “Sprains, morbid fear of confinement, social phobias, spinal infirmities?”

“I don’t think so,” Laura said. “We just bought her.”

Laura turned to Hannah and raised an eyebrow.

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah said. “None of those things.”

Irene rose from her desk, stepped to a supply closet on the other side of the hall and returned with a small piece of metal.

“This will be your tag while you’re with us,” she said, holding it out to Hannah. “Your complete record will open up whenever you’re scanned, but this will give staff a quick visual of what you’ll be doing with us.”

She pointed to a “W” at the top of the tag. “This means you’re leaving tomorrow – Wednesday – and the colored bars represent areas: white for check up, blue for research, red for punishment, black for a visitor.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Hannah said, so softly it was almost a whisper.

“Turn your collar around so the ring’s in the back,” Irene instructed.

Hannah obeyed, fingers trembling against the cool metal as she reversed it.

Hannah felt a slight tug on her collar and heard the faint clink of metal and knew a second tag was being added to the one that said “Hannah” and “Female, Recreational” and listed her federal ID number. Everyone who saw it would notice the red bar and know that she would be suffering here, that she had done something very wrong.

Irene slipped the collar back around, the second tag bouncing against Hannah’s neck. She returned to her desk, typed at her computer, then looked at Hannah and leaned forward.

“Any infractions while you’re with us will be addressed separately,” Irene said, “and added to your discipline program.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Follow orders immediately, cooperate at all times, respect all staff and all other subjects.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Any attempt to remove or deface your tag will earn you four more units.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“I’m sure you’ll do fine,” Irene said, her features softening. “Now, let’s get you to your cage.” She stood, Laura and Hannah rising as well.

“Would you like to take her wraps?” Irene asked.

Laura reached out and pulled Hannah's top and bottom off, leaving her naked except for her chains and collar.

"I'll see you tomorrow," she said, and she embraced Hannah and kissed her forehead.

"Yes, Ma'am, thank you, Ma'am," Hannah said automatically, feeling less than grateful.

Hannah watched Laura walk away until Irene tugged her arm.

"Do you need to go to the bathroom?"

"No, Ma'am."

"Okay, this way," Irene said, leading her toward the back of the room, past the two dark-haired girls and their owner, still talking to one of the staffers.

Hannah heard water running and saw the man from reception, showering in one of a half-dozen cages, his eyes closed. She looked down immediately at his penis, half-erect, and at the rest of him, and imagined being with him, because her mind could not help but think about that.

She looked back at his eyes, saw they were open now, looking at her – first at her middle, then up to her breasts, then to her eyes. He smiled and nodded, pressing the shampoo out of his hair, and Hannah smiled back and marveled at how little she cared. Naked and chained, in the presence of a naked male stranger, she'd simply smiled back at him. Two weeks ago, she would have dropped to her knees in shame.

"In here," Irene said, directing her to the cage next to the man. A solid wall separated them.

Hannah turned as Irene closed the door, reached through the bars to remove her chains and hung them on a hook just outside the cage.

"Are you hiding anything?" Irene asked.

The question meant nothing to Hannah.

"You'll be punished either way, but it's better if you admit it before I find it."

The woman's meaning began to dawn on Hannah.  
"No, Ma'am."

"Good. Turn around and bend over."

Hannah obeyed, put her hands on her knees and closed her eyes. She knew from past experiences what was about to happen, so the feel of Irene's touch against her vulva wasn't a surprise, and she barely flinched when a single finger was pushed up her vagina, probing her walls before it exited and moved to her anus, quickly penetrating her hole, moving in a quick circle and, finding nothing, withdrawing.

"Very good. Wash up, and someone will come for you soon."

Although she'd already bathed once this morning, Hannah obeyed, rinsing her hair, soaping and rinsing her body, drying off with a small towel, then stepping to the bars to wait.

"First visit here?" said the man's voice from the shower cage beside hers.

"Yes, Sir," Hannah replied.

"Please don't call me sir," he said. "I'm just Will."

"Hi, Will, I'm Hannah."

## **Will**

From this angle, Hannah could see the two dark-haired girls. They stood, and one laughed while the woman who was probably their owner pulled off their wraps, leaving them naked, like Hannah had been, except for their collars and restraints and two black triangles of trimmed pubic hair. The woman hugged each of them and they both offered a cheery goodbye before they were led to the showers. Each looked briefly at Hannah, and then longer at Will, and Hannah knew he must have smiled at them because they both smiled in his direction.

Each was locked into a shower cage, had her chains removed and had her cavities searched. One of them was silent, but the other said “oh, oh, oh” when it was being done, prompting laughter from the first girl. They were told to shower and, as the water rushed, Hannah turned her attention back to Will.

“You don’t have a normal collar,” she observed.

“I’m not a slave yet.”

“Then how can you be here?”

“They’re going to look me over,” he said. “If they like what they see, I’ll be just like you tomorrow.”

“I’m sorry.”

Will laughed, and Hannah tried to picture him, his mouth moving, his smile, as he stood naked against the bars of the shower cage.

“Well, it’s this or prison.”

“What did you do?” Hannah blurted before she thought better of the question.

He laughed again. “How old are you?”

“18.”

“You ask a lot of questions.”

“Sorry.”

“That’s alright. Most people just aren’t that blunt.”

“How old are you?”

“31.”

“Okay,” said Hannah. “But you should tell me. I like to know things.”

“I looked at some pictures I shouldn’t have looked at.”

“What do you mean?”

“Pictures of girls. Too young. I thought they were women. It was all the same to me. But they were girls. And the government found out.”

“How did you get from there to here?” Hannah inquired. “And that lady?”

“She owns a store,” Will said, as if that explained everything.

The girls in the two showers besides theirs were talking now, loudly so they could hear each other over the water, discussing someone named Bennie and what he was wearing Sunday.

“His coat made him look thinner,” one said. “Like by 25 pounds, at least.”

“Yeah, but his tie was leprechaun green,” the other observed, and they both laughed.

“So she’s rich?” Hannah said.

“Rich enough,” Will said from the other side of the wall.

“How did you meet her?”

“I got charged, the court published my pictures, she was lonely and she saw me and got in touch with me, and we kind of hit it off, so she’s going to have me checked out, and it I do okay here, I go to her instead of prison.”

Hannah fell silent, surprised by how many ways there were to become someone else’s property.

“She’s buying you?”

“Sort of. There are fees you have to pay to the courts, to a victim’s fund.”

“How much?”

“You first.”

“Me first what?” Hannah asked.

“How much did you sell for?”

Hannah couldn’t think of a reason not to tell. “One point five million.”

He whistled. “Nut surprised. But damn.”



“Now you,” Hannah said.

“Seventy-five thousand or so, I guess, altogether.”

“What’s she going to do with you?”

“A lot of sex, I hope,” he said, and he chuckled.

“What were you doing ... before this?”

“Assistant manager at a food place. So this might be a step up.”

“But you won’t be free.”

“It’s this or prison,” he said, adding after a pause, “I’ve never been free. Not really.”

Hannah heard a beep and the sound of a door opening somewhere out of view, and two female employees appeared at the bars, both in their twenties, both in black jumpsuits.

One of the girls grabbed Hannah’s chains, and Hannah turned to the bars with her hands out. The other girl was doing the same thing with Will.

“Where’s the next stop?” he asked.

“You’re going to a cage, and someone will get you from there.”

“Okay,” said Will, as if it mattered that he agreed or not.

The shower cages were opened and Hannah and Will shuffled after the staffers. He turned to her and smiled and she met his eyes and looked down at his penis, fully erect now, bouncing between his cuffed hands. They reached a locked door and she looked at the tag on his collar, seeing the little W and the white and blue bars. Check up and research. She wanted to turn away, so he couldn’t see the red bar on her tag, but he wasn’t looking there, instead directing his gaze to her breasts.

The door before them opened with a beep and they were escorted through, into a small antechamber with another locked door.

Beyond that door lay a long, bare hall, painted white, lit with bright fluorescents, and Hannah and Will followed the staff girls, walking together in silence past a dozen doors and around a corner before they reached a door that read “Holding Cages 3.”

This door was also locked, the girl beeping it open with a press of her finger against a pad.

Inside the room were two long rows of what looked like prison cells. These weren’t, to Hannah’s relief, the kinds of cages they used at the stacks, but cages more like the one where the Petrosyans kept her, only smaller and bare, with a concrete floor, a small cot, a sink and toilet.

She and Will were put next to each other, their cages separated by bars and clear plastic permeated with small holes, so they could talk to each other but couldn’t touch.

“Someone should be here for you soon, and food will be brought at meal times,” one of the staffers said. “Don’t masturbate unless instructed to.”

Their chains were removed and the staffers left. Hannah scanned the room, noticing two females on their beds several cages away. She wondered if greeting them, talking loudly enough to be heard, was allowed, and decided not to risk it.

“Are you from Dallas?” she asked quietly, turning to Will.

He settled on his bed, his penis still erect, angled up.

“Have you ever been to a place like this?” he asked, ignoring the question of his origins, his frustration almost palpable.

“Sort of, yeah,” she replied. “It was somewhere else in town. Everyone called it the stacks.”

“The stacks?”

“Because they stacked us up. In little cages. You could only sit or lie down.”

“Damn. You were in them all the time?”

“No, they took us out for training, and the showroom.”

Hannah sat on her bed, cross-legged, glad to talk about what she'd been through, and she continued to share the narrative of her life. She noticed that his penis calmed down when she talked about the Petrosyans – the party, the clothing, the family members – but hardened when she told him about training with Sam and Taylor, and her sexual assessment. He wrapped his hand around himself once or twice, and Hannah wondered if he was going to relieve himself despite their instructions not to.

If he did, and he was caught, she realized, it would be her fault, so she fell silent.

“Why can't we, uh, do it?” he asked, looking down at himself.

“Maybe they want to watch,” Hannah ventured, and her mind wandered to the boy in the cage beside hers who masturbated. Wasn't his name Joe? Or Joey? He was sweet and very smart, she recalled, and it bothered her that she wasn't sure what he called himself.

“What do you mean?”

“You're here for a checkup, right? And research?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“So maybe they'll want you to orgasm for them. As part of their tests.”

Will looked up at her, surprised. “Does all this seem normal to you?”

“No,” she said. “But it's how it is, and I'm getting used to it.”

Will nodded.

“How weird is it that a girl is going to buy you? So you can be her boyfriend?”

“I would never have dreamed of it in a million years,” he said, looking at the ceiling. “But then, people's lives take

strange turns sometimes. It's the nature of life. And I'm good with it."

She heard a beep and the two dark-haired girls were escorted in. They were caged across from Hannah and Will, smiling as their chains came off and they were told not to masturbate.

"Welcome," Will said, stepping to the bars.

One girl looked away. The other smiled, looking at Will but saying nothing.

## **To Clinic 7**

"What brings you here?" Will asked, making no effort to hide his full erection.

"We don't belong here," said one of the girls, keeping her eyes on Will's face.

"None of us do," said Will. "But here we are."

"No," she said. "We're students. We're here for a class."

"What kind of class?"

"Subject management," she replied. "Advanced. So staying here is part of the course."

"Why?" Hannah asked, rising.

"So we'll know what it's like, I guess."

"Are you scared?"

"No," she said. "They told us what to expect. We've already done a tour. I just want to get it over with, though."

When the clock at the end of the room said 11:50, a staffer arrived to hand them food through the bars, the same sort of biscuits Hannah ate in the stacks, bland but not terrible.

The students, not apparently interested in talking any further to Will and Hannah, or perhaps instructed not to talk to

subjects any more than necessary, kept to themselves, whispering through the plexiglass partition, while Will and Hannah did the same, small talk about their lives, their hopes, the strange world they'd landed in.

A little after one, a staffer arrived at Hannah's cage, holding out a pair of shackles, and Hannah stepped to the bars and held her feet together, watching as the restraints were applied, glad her wrists would remain free.

Her cage door was opened and she stepped out, looking back at Will. "See you later, maybe," she said.

"I hope so."

In the hall, away from Will and the others, she worked up the courage to speak, her heart thumping madly.

"Where are we going?" she asked, fearing she might be going to punishment now.

"Clinic," was the female staffer's terse reply.

"Do you know when I'll be punished?"

The staffer stopped and turned toward Hannah, looking at her tag.

"Today or tomorrow," she said, stating the obvious, and she continued walking, Hannah struggling to keep up.

"But probably tomorrow," she added.

"Why do you say that?"

"They're not going to want it to interfere with your checkup, or with research, and they're doing both of those today. So it'll probably be done tomorrow."

"Do you know when?" Hannah persisted, hoping too many questions wasn't grounds for additional punishment.

"You've got a black bar on your tag. You're seeing a visitor?"

As they passed through the labyrinthine building and talked, Hannah glanced at the other nude subjects, mostly

female, being escorted from one place to another, some merely shackled, some in full restraints.

“My mother’s supposed to show up tomorrow.”

“Do you know when?”

“Ten o’clock,” Hannah replied, reminding herself anew of the likelihood Mother would not show up, didn’t even know about the appointment.

“Then it will probably be done after your visit,” she said. “If it’s on the same day as a visitor, it’s usually done afterward.”

“Why?”

“How many punishment units have you been assigned?”

“Eight.”

“Well, it could be worse. But girls will sometimes come out of there hoarse. So you wouldn’t be able to talk to her.”

“Hoarse?”

“From screaming.”

Hannah raised her hands to her mouth, slowing her pace and almost stumbling. “Oh, God,” she said quietly.

“Eight’s not that bad,” the girl reassured, looking into Hannah’s eyes with unexpected sympathy. “I mean, some girls, sometimes, have that problem, but usually after a lot more units. You’ll probably still be able to talk but you might be a little upset. That would be normal. So you’ll see your mom first. Then they’ll come get you.”

The staffer stopped at a door that read “Clinic 7” and put her finger on the pad. The door beeped and she opened it, guiding Hannah in.

Hannah’s eyes swept the room quickly, finding at least two dozen slaves positioned in two rows, all but two female, some standing, some kneeling, some on their backs, some on

all fours, as at least a dozen staff members hovered over them or worked at desks along the opposite wall.

Each slave occupied the outline of a large yellow square painted on the floor. A metal ring was set into the middle of each square, and two long chains, from each slave's collar and ankle, secured them to the ring.

"Here," the staffer said, pointing to an unoccupied square, two chains fastened to the ring, each coiled neatly beside it. "Sit down."

Hannah obeyed and the staffer picked up the first chain and secured it to Hannah's collar. A cuff at the end of the second chain was locked around her right ankle, and her shackles came off.

The staffer hung her shackles on one of the hooks by the door where chains were kept, and she left the room.

Hannah, wondering how long she'd be left by herself here, returned to studying the room's occupants, starting with the boys.

One was sitting cross-legged, five squares away, talking quietly to a woman in a lab coat who crouched before him.

The other boy, three squares away and in the next row, was on his knees, a female staffer wheeling a cart up to him with what seemed to be a collection of equipment whose purpose Hannah could only guess at.

Several of the girls were by themselves, eyes wandering the room like Hannah's were, sadly or blankly or with innocent curiosity.

One girl was getting a shot, one was kneeling, a worker applying something to her left breast, and Hannah realized with a start she was being milked, the white fluid slowly filling a plastic bottle. Were they sampling her, or collecting milk to give to a child? Her child, or someone else's?

Several more girls were on hands and knees, staffers crouched behind them, looking at their openings or touching

them there, and Hannah knew there would be no dignity for her here.

“Hello,” said a girl’s voice behind her, and Hannah turned to find a blonde standing behind her, holding a black case.

“Hi,” Hannah said, resigned to whatever was going to be done here, not nervous at all in a situation that would have traumatized her a few weeks ago.

“I’m Amy,” the girl said. “I’ll be looking you over.”

Amy set the case on the floor, unlatched it and swung the top open.

“Up on your hands and knees, please, let’s start with your temperature.”

Hannah obeyed, wishing this could be done by mouth. Amy stepped behind her, scanned the chip in her back with her phone, then knelt and touched Hannah’s anus lightly before sliding a thin rod inside.

Hannah felt fingers on her vaginal lips, felt them being spread, and a second rod was pushed inside her sex.

Hannah looked at the floor, not wanting to make eye contact with anyone while this was happening.

Amy touched Hannah’s back where the chip had been inserted last week.

“Any pain here?”

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah replied, looking down at the links of the chain that fastened her neck to the floor, the chain in a pile between her hands.

Amy touched Hannah’s arm, where the birth control had been inserted.

“There’s a little redness here,” Amy observed, “but that’s normal for a few weeks after it’s put in. Is it bothering you at all?”

“I haven’t even thought about it,” Hannah replied, looking at the little pink swelling where John had slipped in



the dose.

“How’s your collar feel?”

“Fine,” said Hannah. “It’s very light.”

“Every once in a while – like, maybe one out of a few thousand people – someone will develop an allergy to the metal. So if it starts to itch, tell your owner. And make sure you don’t get any soap or shampoo inside it. We get subjects here all the time who swear they’re allergic, and we find soap, or oil or something instead.”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

The thermometers beeped and were removed, and she looked back to see Amy tapping into her phone.

“Sit down, arm out,” Amy said, applying a blood pressure cuff.

Kneeling, she pressed a cold stethoscope against Hannah’s chest, then against her back, telling her to breathe and cough.

“Do you mind shots?” she asked.

“No, Ma’am,” Hannah replied.

The sting was sharp but brief as Amy slipped a needle into Hannah’s vein at the inside of her elbow, filling three vials with her blood, putting a sticker on each.

“Is your bladder full?”

“Not really,” Hannah said.

“Can you give me half a cup?”

“I think so,” Hannah said, both revolted and humiliated by the question.

## **More Examination**

Amy set a long, narrow pan on the floor and handed Hannah a small cup. “Have you done this before?” she asked.

“No, Ma’am.”

“You’ll urinate in the cup, and if you need to keep releasing, you can drain into the pan.”

Hannah rose up on her knees and slipped the pan between her legs, then lowered the cup to her opening and tried to relax.

After thirty seconds of willing her body to cooperate, the first trickle of urine rolled into the cup, followed quickly by a stream. She filled the cup and raised it to Amy, continuing to empty herself into the pan, looking around quickly to see if anyone noticed the sound of liquid splashing against metal. No one seemed to care.

Amy closed a lid over the cup, labeled it and set it in her bag, and offered Hannah a tissue. She wiped, dropped it into the pan, and Amy slid a cover over it and carried it to one of the sinks along the wall. Hannah sat down, drew up her legs and wrapped her arms around them, willing this to be done, going back to that place in her mind that had sustained her before, where this was the body of another girl, naked, chained by the neck and ankle to the floor, forced to undergo an embarrassing medical checkup in a crowded room.

Amy returned and Hannah looked up at her, wishing she would close her bag and leave.

“Back up on your hands and knees,” Amy commanded.

Hannah obeyed and Amy stepped behind her.

“I’m going to put a collector up your anus,” she said, penetrating Hannah with another small rod before Hannah had the chance to agree or disagree.

The object went deeper than the thermometer had, and Amy stirred it around inside her before withdrawing it and sealing it in a small glass vial.

“On your back,” Amy instructed, “legs spread.”

Hannah toyed briefly with the idea of resisting, of curling into a ball and refusing to unwrap, and she knew that

in the grand scheme, such rebellion would have been entirely justified. Here, however, in this place, she would earn only punishment.

But guessing that a question wouldn't get her into trouble, she remained seated and asked, "Why?"

"Pap smear," Amy replied tersely.

Hannah rolled over, dropping to her back, untangling her ankle chain from her other foot, lifting and spreading her legs.

Amy pulled a speculum out of her case, coated it with lubricant, knelt between Hannah's legs and reached down to open her vulva. Hannah stared at the ceiling and winced as Amy pushed the cold, stainless steel tool deep into her sheath, spreading the device, stretching Hannah's chamber.

She locked it open, Hannah heard the tearing of paper and felt something touch her, deep inside. And then the ordeal was over, whatever had been inside her secured in another vial, the speculum removed and placed in a bag.

Amy closed her case and stood.

"Thanks, see ya."

"Okay," Hannah replied.

Left alone again, Hannah sat cross-legged, wanting to go back to her cage, to go back to the Petrosyans. But she had more than a day of this ahead of her, culminating with, possibly, a meeting with mother and then, certainly, punishment.

"Hey, Hannah," said a familiar male voice.

She turned, surprised to see Will there, in the square beside hers, already chained to the floor.

"Hey," she said, trying not to sound as distressed as she was. "When did you get here?"

"She was, uh, putting that thing in you," he said.

"Yeah, I was staring at the ceiling," Hannah said, glancing down at Will's penis, noticing that it was fully erect

again. “Not really noticing anything.”

“Did it hurt?”

“A little. They were stretching me.”

A black girl showed up at Will’s square, set her case down and introduced herself as Rhonda. Hannah tried not to stare as Will was run through his paces – temperature taken, blood pressure taken, blood drawn. His penis remained stiff throughout.

“I’m going to need a urine sample,” Rhonda said.  
“Can you urinate with an erection?”

“I can try,” Will said without apology.

“Do you want to give a semen sample first?”

“Yes,” he said quickly.

“Let me get the machine,” she said, stepping toward a collection of devices along the wall.

Will turned to Hannah and she stared, recognizing the look in his eyes: sexmind.

“I think you’re going to get to do it,” she observed.

“She said machine,” Will said, voice strained. “What does that mean?”

Hannah glanced at Rhonda, standing among a corral of equipment, tapping on her phone.

“Maybe you’ll, um,” Hannah began before her voice trailed off and she realized too late she didn’t want to finish this sentence.

“What?” Will demanded.

Rhonda saved Hannah from having to say anything more, arriving back at Will’s station, pushing a sort of black pillar, waist high and about a foot in diameter.

“Have you used one of these before?” she asked.

“No, Ma’am, I’m new to all this,” Will admitted.

“Stand up and I’ll show you how it works.”

Will rose, chains clinking, penis bobbing.

“You’re going to put yourself in here,” she said, pointing to what looked like a pair of vaginal lips, protruding from the side of the machine. “Step up so I can adjust it.”

Will obeyed and she took his penis in her hand, compared its height to the machine’s lips and pressed a handle at the base of the machine to raise it slightly.

“Is this your full extension?” she asked, returning to his penis, pinching the tip.

“Yes,” he said, an ache in his voice.

She stepped to her case, pulled out a tape measure, wrapped it around the thickest part of his penis to gauge his girth, then measured its length along the top, setting down the tape measure and tapping both numbers into her phone.

Back at her case, she pulled out a tube of lubricant, squeezed it into her hand and coated Will’s tip and shaft with it while he shifted on his feet.

“Alright, penetrate the machine and tell me how it feels,” she said,

Hannah couldn’t help but watch out of the corner of her eye. Will was angled away from her, and she prayed he wouldn’t turn back and catch her spying.

He put one hand on the machine and used the other to guide his member gingerly into the slot. Hannah saw his rear tighten as the machine gripped him, and she heard him grunt quietly.

“How does it feel?” Rhonda asked.

“Oh, god,” Will said with a gasp, and he pulled out and pushed back in.

“How does it feel?” Rhonda repeated. “Want it looser, tighter?”

“It’s good, it’s good,” Will said hoarsely, moving in and out slowly.

“To build up a complete sample, you need to do at least five minutes before you ejaculate,” Rhonda said, her tone professional, as if she were asking him to fill out a form or get something from the supply closet. She tapped the top of the pillar. “Here’s your timer. You’ve got four minutes thirty-five seconds left.”

“I’ll try,” Will replied, withdrawing and driving back in slowly.

## **An Interview**

Hannah knew he was pacing himself, and she imagined herself at the receiving end of his thrusts, wrapping her sheath around his full length, doing her best to stay relaxed so he could last the allotted time.

When Hannah felt the trickle of lubricant at her lips, she knew she’d gone too far, and she turned away from Will and closed her eyes, aching with lust, cursing herself for losing control. If she were alone, she thought, she might try to masturbate again, as she had for the first time last night. But she wouldn’t do it here even if it were allowed.

I’ll be back home tomorrow, she told herself. And I’ll be with Allain Friday.

A steady hum filled the room, talking, testing, new subjects being brought in and chained to the floor, those who were done here being shackled and escorted out. The two dark-haired students showed up together, chatting to each other and the boy escorting them as they were restrained in two nearby squares.

Through it all, Hannah could hear Will, his breath as he fought the urge to climax, the slight squeak of the machine as it rocked under his attention, the barely-perceptible sound of his lubricated sex slicking between the machine’s artificial lips.

“Twenty seconds to go,” Rhonda announced.

Will grunted.

“During ejaculation, I want you to keep your penis fully inserted, so we can get everything into the collection cup. Do not pull out more than half an inch.”

Will responded by panting “uh, uh, uh” and Hannah knew his time had arrived, that he was speaking the wordless, universal language of a man suffering from intense pleasure.

“Any time now,” Rhonda said.

Will issued a long “oooooh” and another quick “uh,” and Hannah turned back to him, unable not to watch. As his back and buttocks tensed through the orgasm, he drew back slightly.

“Keep it fully inserted,” Rhonda barked.

Will pressed back in, his hips still but the rest of his body jerking through the last spasms of relief until, spent, he drooped, penis still in the machine but everything relaxed now, as if he were a balloon and he’d begun to deflate.

“Are you finished?”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Will said quietly.

“Pull out, and you can sit down.”

Will withdrew his still-erect penis and Rhonda opened the machine from the top, reached in and pulled out a small cup, clear, filled more than halfway with Will’s thick semen. She twisted a cap over it, labeled it and stepped to a large refrigerator against the wall, where she set it on a shelf.

She came back to retrieve the machine, looking down at Will, sitting now, hunched over, staring at his feet.

“I’ll be back for that urine sample in a minute or two,” she said.

Will nodded, not looking up, as she wheeled the machine away.

Hannah couldn’t resist:

“Was that fun?”

He looked at her sharply, wildly, as if startled, and she realized he was probably embarrassed and immediately regretted her tone, her words.

“You watched?”

“Some,” Hannah admitted. “But not all.”

“I’m sure you wished you were somewhere else.”

“That’s not why I looked away,” Hannah said.

Will stared at her defensively, clearly unsure of her meaning, and she realized the conversation was on the verge of going south, that Will was about to be hurt or offended or both.

“It was too much,” Hannah said. “I wanted ...”

Will just looked at her, raising an eyebrow.

“I think the machine had fun,” she said, trying to say what she meant with humor.

Will seemed to get it now. “It’s too bad a person couldn’t take its place.”

“That’s what I was thinking,” she said, leaning forward, her breasts swaying, her legs crossed, her hole warming, wetting itself again.

“Would you have let me use you?” he asked. She looked down at his penis and saw it was hardening again, already.

“Of course,” she said, knowing this round of lust would be no more requited than the last, but glad she could at least express it to someone, instead of being frustrated alone.

Even if she were released from her chains, she realized, she wouldn’t have gone to him. Not in here, anyway. But they were sharing something carnal, if only through their eyes and words, and that was good enough for her.

The door to the room opened and Hannah, not wanting to pursue her Platonic dalliance any further with Will, looked toward it. A young woman with short black hair, wearing



glasses, jeans and a lab coat, entered and turned to the girl at the desk closest to the entrance.

"I'm Heather Dumaine, from Dallas Tech," she said. "I'm here to do some interviews."

The girl at the desk consulted her computer and, apparently finding Ms. Dumaine there, gave her a badge on a string and told her to drape it around her neck.

"You can only talk to subjects with a blue research stripe on their tag," the girl said, pointing to an imaginary tag on her own neck. "But only if they're not being seen. If a staff member shows up, you'll need to wait."

"Okay," she said.

Hannah watched the girl make her way to the far end of the room, looking for an unoccupied subject. She stopped at the first girl who had no one with her, and she crouched, smiled, fingered the girl's tag and said something to her. To Hannah's surprise, the girl looked up, scowled and shook her head. Refusing to talk seemed to be an option. The student nodded and kept moving, not at all surprised by the subject's response.

Hannah, feeling sorry for Heather, and glad to talk to someone instead of just sitting alone in her chains, continued to watch as she neared.

"Would you like to participate in a study?" she asked, leaning over to peer at Hannah's tag.

"Sure," Hannah said, trying to sound casual, knowing the girl could also see the red bar for punishment and might know what it meant. "What's it about?"

The girl sat down, cross-legged, facing Hannah. "It's just some questions. I'm Heather."

"I'm Hannah."

Heather drew out a large tablet, poked at it and looked up. "Do you think anyone's going to need you for anything soon?"

"I doubt it. I think I'm done with everything for now."

“I need to get some information from your tags.”

Hannah leaned forward and Heather reached out, looking back and forth at the two tags affixed to Hannah’s collar, then at her tablet to enter data.

“How old are you, Hannah?”

“18.”

“Have you been a subject all your life?”

“No. Just since last Tuesday. I mean, eight days ago.”

“Okay,” Heather said, and her voice began to drone as she spoke from memory: “Everything you tell me is strictly confidential. You can refuse to answer any questions, or end the interview altogether. If you share certain information, in particular active plans to harm yourself or others, or to escape or assist another subject in escape, I will have to report it to the authorities.”

“Okay,” Hannah said.

“Do you have any brothers or sisters?”

“Two half-brothers.”

“Tell me more.”

Hannah talked about her stepbrothers, her mother and stepmother, the lack of money, her acquisition by the Alvarez and what had happened since, while Heather took everything down.

Except when Hannah shifted on the floor and her chains rattled, she was so absorbed in speaking of her journey she forgot where she was, that she was restrained in the nude in a noisy room where two dozen others were also being held.

Done with the part of the interview where Hannah just talked about her days, Heather poked at her tablet and looked up, her expression not as certain now.

“Did your mother or father ever beat you?” Heather asked.

“Beat me?” Hannah asked

“Or abuse you in any other way?”

“No,” Hannah blurted defensively. “I was spanked, when I was younger, but it wasn’t abuse.”

“Did your mother do drugs or use alcohol excessively?”

“No,” Hannah answered emphatically.

“What was your household income?”

“I don’t know,” Hannah said. “Maybe a few thousand dollars per year.”

“Was it supplemented by any illegal activities?”

“What do you mean?”

“Drug sales, prostitution, theft?”

Hannah laughed. “Never. My mother would never have done that. I don’t like these questions.”

“Do you want to end the interview?”

“I don’t know,” Hannah said, remembering that this was up to her. “What else are you going to ask about?”

“We’re trying to develop a complete picture of who ends up as a subject. Past history, crime, financial problems.”

“Ours was financial,” Hannah said. “No crime. Other than borrowing and not paying it back, if that’s a crime.”

“Are you worried about your mom?” Heather asked, looking up at Hannah with sympathy in her eyes. This question didn’t seem to have come from her tablet.

Hannah paused, suddenly fighting back tears. “I don’t know where she is. I’m not sure what’s happened to her since the last time I saw her. She’s supposed to come tomorrow, but I don’t even know if she’ll make it.”

Heather looked at her tablet, swiped her finger across the screen, bit her lip.

“That’s really all I have,” she said. “The rest of the questions are for if there was some kind of crime.”

Hannah, not wanting to talk about crime, but sad the distraction was ending, nodded and turned to Will. He was gazing around the room, taking everything in, but when he sensed her staring at him, he turned and smiled.

Hannah smiled back and looked at the two students. To her surprise, they were being put through a full checkup, one on her hands and knees with thermometers up her anus and vagina, the other squatting, releasing urine into a pan.

“Well, thanks,” Heather said, rising to her feet. “I really appreciate it.”

“Sure.”

## **Back to the Cages**

Heather scanned the room, spotted the two students and walked over to them. They all seemed to know each other well enough to be comfortable talking, even with two of them being treated like slaves.

“First day or second?” Heather asked.

“First,” one of them replied. “Twenty four hours to go.”

“First day’s the worst,” Heather said.

“They’re taking us to punishment tomorrow,” countered one of the girls.

“Not to be punished,” Heather clarified, “just to watch.”

“Yeah,” she agreed. “Still.”

Hannah looked away and raised her hand to her mouth, a dread gnawing at her insides. The thought of having an audience while she suffered was, for her, a new dimension to the horror that awaited her.

“Having fun?” Will asked.

Hannah turned back to Will, unable to smile now. “Not really,” she said. “I want to get this over with.”

Beginning at four, as Hannah and Will talked quietly, the room started to empty, girls and the occasional boy being shackled and escorted out and not replaced. A staffer came for Hannah at 4:50, walking her back to her cage.

For a time, she was in the room by herself, but Will and the two students arrived soon after, followed by two more females, caged at the other end of the room, too far away to talk to without shouting.

Hannah had no interest in talking to the students, feeling a gulf far wider than the distance between their cages. With the possibility they would be watching her in punishment tomorrow, she couldn’t even stand to look at them.

Dinner came at 5:15, another large biscuit and an apple. She sat on her bed and ate without tasting, trying not to think about Mother and their last, meager meal together.

Done with her food, she washed up, urinated and looked at Will, lying back on his elbows, eyes on the ceiling, penis hard and pointed straight up. He was clearly in a state of deep frustration, desperate at least to touch but trying to obey the rules, exposing himself to anyone who looked because that was one of the symptoms of his condition.

Hannah was tempted to say something to him, partly to ease his mind, but partly for some other reason she didn’t fully understand. She wanted to know if he was thinking about her – if seeing her naked in the cage next to his was a source of his arousal. She wondered if he wanted to be inside her. Or, given that was probably true, if he wanted to be inside her more than any other girl. More than the two students. More than the girl that was considering buying him.

She imagined herself on top of him, riding him, barely fitting him, her slot groaning as it strained to swallow his penis.

For what seemed like a long time, they existed like that, each in their own place of longing, Will looking up at the

bare ceiling, Hannah on her bed and staring at her feet, crossed at the ankles. She leaned back, saw that she was wetting herself again, the fluid dripping out of her opening, making a gray oval on the thin white blanket.

The door to the room opened and a new female staffer walked in.

She went to the far cages first, addressing the two girls there.

“Do you need anything?” she asked.

“No, Ma’am, thank you Ma’am,” each of the girls replied.

She went to the students’ cages next.

“Do you need anything?” she asked.

“Something to read?” one of the girls inquired.

“We don’t have that here,” she said.

“Uh, we’re kind of bored,” the student complained.

“You can talk to each other and masturbate.”

The students laughed nervously, and one grabbed her crotch and looked at the other, clearly finding the suggestion ridiculous.

“Does that go for males?” Will said, sitting up in bed.

“Yes,” she said, turning to Hannah and Will. “Do you need anything?”

“No, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am,” Hannah said reflexively.

“I’m good,” Will said, and he sat up and grabbed his penis.

“Limit your ejaculate to the bed and toilet,” the girl told him.

He nodded, but waited until she was gone to begin stroking, hand moving slowly up and down his shaft. Hannah wondered if he’d want to talk to her, or at least look at her, and she was ready to oblige him, but he was in his own place now,

hunched over, rubbing until he came with a quiet groan, his semen squirting onto the blanket, his leg.

Self-conscious now, perhaps, he stood, pulled up the sheets and crawled under them, dropping his head to the pillow, lying still. He was either asleep or pretending to be, and Hannah felt profoundly alone.

She looked at the students, whispering to each other through the glass partition. One of them glanced at Will and Hannah knew they must be talking about him, about what he had just done. She guessed it was nothing they'd ever seen before. At least not in a place like this.

Sitting in the center of her bed, she drew her knees up and wrapped her arms around them, desperately bored, fantasizing about having a book the way someone hungry might fantasize about food.

She would survive tomorrow, she told herself, punishment and possibly a meeting with her mother, both terrifying events in their own way. She thought about math, the easy stuff in Athena's book, the much harder material Alex studied, and she rehearsed the concepts in her mind, not wanting to lose them.

Soon enough, her thoughts turned to Friday. Allain would return and she'd be with him. They would mate with the fierceness of long-separated lovers. She allowed her mind to go there, to what she would do to him, what he would do to her, and her lubrication gushed out between her lips, soaking her sheets.

She longed for a penis, to mount it from above, to devour it with the starving sheath between her legs. Or, lacking that, she longed to reach down, to let her fingers dance over the soft folds and that firm, screaming lump that God had put there for unknown reasons, to torment his female creations, to remind them that the universe was a wondrous place, or to drive them to seek resolution by pursuing mutual pleasure with men.

She lost track of time, barely moving, barely sensing anything outside her own mind, until the lights dimmed almost

to blackness and she guessed it must be 9:30, or 10, or whatever time the people here were expected to end their day.

Immediately, her hand went to her middle and her mind went not to Allain or Will or any of the other males she had made love with, but to Ormek. Because of the constraints Laura had put on them, they'd coupled in only the most physical sense – through bars, Hannah turned away from him, not kissing or even talking, touching hands only by accident, finishing as soon as Ormek had squirted his semen into her chamber.

What was it like to make love to him? What would he do if she mounted him, as she had Allain the first time they were in his bed? Would he protest? Would he melt, as Allain had? Or did he prefer it as it was? Was that how he did it with Laura, wordlessly, from behind?

She looked at Will, just a dark outline in the cage next to hers. If he woke and turned and studied her, or if the students looked at her from their beds, they would know what she was doing, the shadow of her arm moving rhythmically, faster and faster, her breath coming hurried and sharp.

She didn't care, and when the orgasm came, grinding up from her clitoris, through her belly to her heart, her legs, her brain, she was glad, only glad, that she could do this now. There was no shame in it, no reason for shame, and after she was done gasping and panting, she stretched out, surprised by her sudden weariness. She closed her eyes and drifted off, prayerless, her lubrication rolling in a thin trickle around her thigh.

## **To a Meeting**

She woke early, while the cage room was still dark, went to the toilet and relieved herself quietly and knew she would survive the day, whatever it might bring. Girls were punished all the time, she knew, and they survived it and learned from it and continued to serve.



Head cleared by sleep and a surprising optimism, she sat on her bed and returned to the question of math, reviewing that first, then going over the biology from the other book. The lights came on and she went to the bars of her cage to look at the clock at the end of the room. Seven a.m.

Will stirred, looked at her without smiling, went to his toilet and urinated, and she knew he must feel self-conscious, about that, about everything.

“Sleep well?” she asked.

He looked at her, nodded, finished at the toilet and turned toward her, his penis just as hard as it had been the night before.

“Fuck,” one of the students groaned. Hannah looked at her, watched her roll over, sit, put her face in her hands. She seemed to be in crisis, and Hannah guessed she had slept badly because this was strange to her. The other student groaned and they both went to their toilets. One laughed, and the other said “fuck” again.

A female staff member came through, asking how everyone was, handing out biscuits that Hannah found to be indistinguishable from last night’s meal.

Will went back to his bed, sitting, penis angled up, and Hannah walked to the bars and looked at him and his member.

“Hey,” she said. “Good morning.”

He looked at her with surprise, eyes wide, and she knew then that he was still in the mind of someone new to all this, that his sense of propriety hadn’t been tempered yet by days lying with hundreds of other girls and boys naked in cages, or having sex with strangers while other strangers graded the performance, or being forced to go nude in a home where everyone else was dressed.

“It’s okay, you know,” she said, and she looked down at his penis so he’d know what she meant.

He laughed, nervously at first, then comfortably.

“It just doesn’t stop,” he said, looking down at himself.

“Did you masturbate after the lights went out?”

“Yeah. Did you?”

“You couldn’t tell?” she asked.

He smiled. “What if I said yes?”

“It wouldn’t matter. It’s what people do.”

Will lowered his voice and turned his eyes briefly toward the students, chatting together, complaining about the biscuit. “Do you think they did?”

“I doubt it. Or maybe.”

The door to the cage room opened and two female staffers walked in, each bearing a handful of chain.

They went first to Will, shackling his ankles, ignoring his erection.

“Where are we going?” he asked.

“Your assessment.”

Hannah stood at her bars and looked at him, knowing what was in store, sex with a stranger, in front of strangers. Did they make males get assessed with other males? If Will were brought back before she left, she’d ask, unconcerned how embarrassed the question might make him.

She watched him shuffle out of the cage room, wondering if she’d ever see him again, if he would ever think about her.

“Who did your pubic hair?” asked a voice.

Hannah looked toward the source, one of the students.

“Someone named Delilah,” Hannah said, and she turned away, went to her bed and sat, surprised by her anger at the question. Did they want to make small talk with her? Or were they interested in the cut of her hair for professional reasons, because they would send any females they managed to the same place, to be trimmed and made up and prepared for

sale? Caged briefly in the same room, they belonged to completely different worlds. The students would be going back to their real lives today, a world of clothing and freedom and learning. Hannah's real world was the opposite.

The door to the room opened and a female staffer walked up to Hannah's cage, a length of chain strung over her shoulder.

"Hannah?"

"Yes, Ma'am?"

"You have a visitation today."

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah agreed, rising.

"Do you know who it is?"

"My mother might be showing up."

"Well, whoever it is, she's here."

"Oh," Hannah said, her heartbeat immediately roaring in her ears. "I think she's early."

The girl unslung the chain on her shoulder and held out an open cuff. Hannah put her hands up to the bars, watching as each wrist was restrained. The girl knelt and reached through to secure her ankles, then checked the fit of her wrist cuffs and opened her cage door.

"Where are we going?" Hannah asked, panic rising, wondering if they'd chained all four limbs because she was being tricked, she was going to punishment now and they didn't want her to know.

"Visitation's done on the west side," the girl said casually, and Hannah decided she was being honest.

At that moment, as Hannah shuffled through the halls, passing other slaves, all naked and in chains, she had a sudden, horrifying realization: this is how she would be brought to her mother. Like this.

"Will I have clothes?" Hannah asked, panic in her voice.

“No,” the girl replied tersely.

“Will I be chained?”

“Yes,” she answered.

Hannah halted, came to a dead stop, looking down at her hands and feet and her trimmed pubic hair.

“I can’t,” she gasped. “I can’t. It’s my mother. She won’t understand. She’s never seen me – like this.”

The staffer was unsympathetic, putting her hand on Hannah’s upper arm and propelling her forward.

“I just have to take you there,” she said. “If you don’t want to be there, that’s between you and the visitation manager.”

Hannah considered fighting, turning, sitting down and curling up, but she knew that would only earn her punishment, so she drew in her breath and turned her mind to Mother’s letter, which she had memorized word-for-word as she’d read it repeatedly over the last few days:

“My Dearest Hannah,

“I am so proud of you! I understand that you’ve been staying with a good, Christian family since you had to leave me. I wish to be reunited with you as soon as possible.

“I am well. I will be able to say more about my situation when we are together. An angel has entered my life and has performed several miracles. I am truly in the hands of Jesus!

“I have a space I can share with you, which is nicer than our last apartment. I look forward to having you back with me.

“Please write me as soon as possible. I can probably have you picked up if you will provide your address.

“With all my love, Mother.”

As she reviewed the letter in her mind, she only vaguely perceived the people around her, the doors and signs, the fellow slaves and their escorts. She returned to the present only when she arrived at a door that read “Visitation #2.” The staffer unlocked it with a beep, opened the door and guided Hannah in.

Hannah heard voices, male and female, and a cacophony of emotions. She heard laughter, a female’s brief cry of despair, adults speaking calmly, simply sharing information.

Like the area she’d been brought to before her shower the day before, this space was a long hall divided into small alcoves. She glanced into the first one, saw a girl her age – nude, chained, seated on a small plastic chair – talking to an older man seated on the other side of bars and a clear glass partition. There would be no hugging here. There would be no touching here.

“I’m sorry,” the man said, focused entirely on the girl, oblivious to Hannah as she walked behind her. The man’s eyes were red, his face wet with tears.

“Sorry?” the girl asked quietly, malevolently. “Sorry for what? For not paying my bail? For not getting me a lawyer? Apology not accepted.”

The man, who Hannah guessed was the girl’s father, choked out something Hannah couldn’t hear, syllables of agony.

In the next alcove, a woman sat facing a pastor, his clerical collar made of fabric, something he could remove at night and forget about.

“I’ve spoken to Mrs. Agave,” the pastor said, stopping when the woman jerked as if she’d been punched.

This, Hannah realized, is the place where two worlds meet, the enslaved and the free, bound not by chains and bars but by something stronger, blood or faith or community, or memories of love. They came to connect, to go over practical

matters or, she knew, to try to resolve that which was unresolvable.

“Mom’s got a hernia,” a young man told a young woman.

“No, just tell him to get on with his life,” a woman in her 30’s choked to an older man. “I don’t need his letters.”

“They’re taking me to California next month.”

“No, of course I haven’t forgiven her.”

“We’re keeping your room just like you left it.”

By the time she reached her own alcove, Hannah was blind, tears she could not wipe flowing down her nose, her cheeks, dripping off her chin. The staffer positioned her over a chair and she sat and looked through the blur at the shape that might be her mother or might be a million other tall, slender blonde women.

Something was wrong with the form. She leaned down, pulling her chains tight to bring her hands to her eyes, brushing away her tears.

“Hello, Hannah,” said Mother’s familiar voice, soft and quiet.

**”Whore”**

Hannah looked up, seeing the woman before her now, Mother in some ways, another woman in other ways.

“Who did your hair?” Hannah asked, the words coming out before she could stopper her mouth. It was the only thing she could think to say, and she immediately felt ridiculous for asking. But Mother’s hair had always been long and straight, parted in the middle, falling to her shoulders without any discernible theme. Now it was cut at the neck, parted on the side, a slight wave at the end. And there was makeup now, eyeliner and faint lipstick.

“How have you been?” Mother asked. She was in a pink tanktop, black shorts and black sandals, surely the best things she’d ever put on her feet, which in all the time Hannah had known her until now had never been shod in anything but the heavy, black vinyl shoes of an idyllic prairie that probably never existed.

Mother had become beautiful, at least by the standard of the world to which Hannah now belonged.

Hannah looked into Mother’s eyes, which stared back at her, unblinking, so focused Hannah wondered if she’d even noticed that her daughter was nude, collared, chained.

“I’ve been okay,” Hannah said. “I worried about you every day.”

“Why is that, Hannah?” Mother asked, still staring, the trace of a smile on her lips.

“Do you remember when they took me?”

“When who took you?”

“The people? In the truck? The Alvarezes? And the sheriff’s deputy.”

Mother closed her eyes, a long, slow blink, as if she were remembering something, or trying not to remember something.

“No,” she said finally.

“You got arrested,” Hannah said, a sick feeling growing in the pit of her stomach.

“Oh,” Mother said with another long blink. Then her eyes were open again, staring at Hannah but not, Hannah realized, seeing her.

“If you’ll get your things together, we can leave now.”

“I have no things,” Hannah said with a sudden, completely unanticipated anger. “And I can’t leave.”

Mother stared, and Hannah realized what was going on behind her eyes, that she had constructed a narrative of her life that wasn’t true because the truth was fundamentally

unacceptable, and each thing that happened to her had to conform with it or be dismissed. The challenge of such an existence was greatest here, with her daughter, because there were things that simply could not be, that she in her made up life still could not believe in.

“My feet have bled,” Hannah said, hoping the old phrase would mean something to Mother, that Mother would remember what she used to say: “Everyone must walk over thorns to reach their Eden. If your feet aren’t bloody, you’re not in paradise yet.”

But even as the words left Hannah’s mouth, she knew it was futile. Mother simply stared.

There would be no understanding, Hannah realized, no sympathy, no mothering today. But there could be an exchange of information, and Hannah focused on that.

“You said in your letter an angel has helped you.”

“Yes,” Mother said, smiling fully for the first time, but with a blank stare in her eyes, now aimed over Hannah’s head. “I had been imprisoned, for the Lord, and I prepared to spend my life there for Him, and then I was freed, by a miracle.”

“What form did the miracle take?” Hannah asked quickly.

“Bail.”

“Bail?”

“Yes, Jesus paid for my release.”

“But where did the money come from?”

Mother smiled, showing her teeth, and looked at Hannah again. “From Jesus. I told you that.”

“But a person ... a person paid it. Right?”

“I don’t know who. I only know Jesus.”

Hannah tucked that detail away in her mind.

“Where are you staying?”



“With the Farradays,” Mother replied, and her smile vanished.

“They’re a family?”

“Yes.”

“Who’s in the family?”

“Mr. Farraday. And Agnes. And Jacob, their son.”

“You’re renting an apartment from them?”

“No,” Mother said, and she drew in her breath and leaned back, her smile suddenly strange and victorious. “He is my husband.”

“Who is?”

“Mr. Farraday.”

“You married Mr. Farraday?”

“Yes, Hannah. You have a new father.”

“Who is Agnes?”

“Mr. Farraday’s wife.”

“His first wife?”

“Yes. I’m his second wife.”

“So there’s no marriage license, right? His first wife is his only legal wife?”

“We were married in his temple. He proposed to me the day we met. Jesus told us both it was right.”

“Have you consummated the marriage?”

“I’m his wife,” Mother replied simply.

“How did you meet him?”

“He was waiting for me, outside the jail. Jesus told him to be there.”

“Is that what he told you?”

“Yes.”

Hannah went inside her mind, processing, processing, seeing nothing, feeling nothing, all the voices in the room silenced, her manacles gone, the staffers nonexistent who paced back and forth on either side of the glass partition, behind her, behind Mother.

Something wasn't right. Something was very, very wrong.

"Are you paying him?" Hannah ventured, terrified of the answer.

"No," Mother replied, and then she paused, and Hannah waited. "Not yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Mr. Farraday is the most generous man I've ever met," Mother said, the first hint of defensiveness in her voice, the first hint that perhaps the life she'd concocted in her mind wasn't completely convincing. "He has given me two months to return his kindness."

"How much is he charging per day?"

Mother frowned, looking down at the floor, a cloud over her eyes, but then she looked up and turned the brightness back on in her face and voice.

"\$250 per day."

"You already owe him \$1,000?"

"\$750."

"Did you get the money?" Hannah asked. "From my sale?"

Mother looked at Hannah, mystified.

"They told me you would get the money," Hannah said, her tone urgent.

"There were proceeds," Mother said distantly.

"Who got them?"

"Your father."

Hannah choked back a sob. "He disowned me."

“He claims he didn’t.”

“He sent that letter. It was signed and everything. It had that stamp on it. You showed it to me.”

“It’s gone.”

“The letter is gone?”

“Yes,” said Mother. “It was taken. With everything else.”

Hannah fought a new round of panic, of horror, of rage at the unfairness of the cold universe.

Her mind, strangely, began tormenting itself, with images of Mother sweating under the lump of meat that called himself Mr. Farraday. Did he always do it properly, on top? Or did he take her from behind? Did he order her to mount him, as he lay beneath her?

As reconciled as Hannah had become to her own physical responsibilities, the thought of Mother doing the same thing was unbearable.

Focus, she told herself, fighting the urge to gag. Focus.

“How will you pay him?”

“He might let me work at his company.”

“Did you sign anything? About the money?”

“I did,” she said, adding cryptically, “Biblical law.”

“Mother, no,” Hannah said, and her vision grew cloudy again, the form of the blonde woman before her shrinking away, into infinity.

“No what?”

Mother’s words were clearer, sharper, spoken at what Hannah believed was a higher level of awareness, as if she were slowly waking from a dream.

“Mr. Farraday is not your husband. He’s going to let your debt grow until you can’t possibly pay it back, and then he’s going to sell you.”

For a long time, Mother simply sat, unblinking, absorbing Hannah's words, or processing them, twisting them, converting them into something more compatible with the fantasy she had concocted.

"Get your things, Hannah."

Hannah held up her hands, shaking them so that if Mother could not see her chains, she could at least hear them.

"I'm not leaving with you. I can't leave with you."

Mother looked down, at Hannah's middle, at her legs, and her eyes registered a mild surprise.

"Why are you naked?"

"It's how I'm kept."

"Why?"

"It's a rule."

"The family you're staying with are Christians," Mother observed, as if that simple fact countered all the evidence before her eyes.

"They go to church, yes," Hannah replied. "But they own me, Mother. And they use me. For sex."

## **Straight Stocks**

Mother seemed to hear that. She leaned back, mouth open, eyes wide, drawing in her breath, as if Hannah had reached through the glass partition and punched her in the stomach.

Hannah, briefly, believed she had broken through.

Her hope was short-lived.

"You need to marry him," Mother said. "Now. And until your union is under the Lord's hand, you are not to ... to know him."

"Mother, that's not how it—"

“Whore,” Mother hissed, leaning forward, sudden fury in her eyes, a blind, mad rage more terrifying than anything Hannah had ever seen in her life. “Whore.”

She rose and stepped to the partition, scowling and raising her hands to the glass.

“Get your things, Daughter,” she demanded. “Get your things, whore, and speak no more ill of Mr. Farraday. Ever!”

“You’re as much a whore as I am,” Hannah countered, giving up on reason now, simply enraged and humiliated and heartbroken beyond her capacity to be rational. “He’s just using you, for sex now, to sell you soon.”

“Mr. Farraday is a man of God, with the mark of the Lamb upon him!” Mother said emphatically.

A staffer materialized behind Mother, moving his hand gently to her shoulder. Mother felt the hand and connected it to the noise she was making, so she simply opened her mouth, gaping, closed her mouth, opened it again, looking off now, somewhere over Hannah’s head, seeing nothing.

Hannah studied her face and saw at last the emotion she’d been waiting for, eyes wet and red-rimmed, countenance not angry or judging but merely hopeless and desperate.

For a brief, excruciating moment, Hannah saw her mother at the truck, handcuffs flying wildly, hair and sweat and tears across her face, trying to rescue her daughter from something terrible and strange, and Hannah buried her face in her hands, unable to look up.

Mother cried out, deep and guttural, just beyond the partition, then again, but more quietly, and Hannah knew she was being escorted out, no doubt like many who came here, unable to fully understand what had happened to someone they loved – a child, a spouse, a lover, a parent – and reacting with a denial that took the form of anger, threats, insults. They would not be arrested. Just eased out. Of the building. Of the life they had touched.

Somewhere, a door was pressed closed and Hannah knew Mother was gone. Perhaps forever.

She tried to cry quietly, the tears running down her fingers and into her palms, her shoulders shaking, a mix of shame, guilt, anger and helplessness turning all her being to misery.

After what seemed like an hour spent weeping alone, but was probably no more than minutes, Hannah opened her eyes and peered through her splayed fingers at her feet, trying not to hear the echo of Mother's awful words.

"Whore."

She sat up, glanced around, hearing again the voices of the other people there, bereft, confused, optimistic. A female staffer passed by and Hannah looked at her until the girl looked back.

"I'm ready to go," she said.

The girl scanned the chip in Hannah's back.

"There are openings in Discipline now," she observed.

"Pardon me?"

"I can take you back to your cage, or you can get your punishment done now."

"Punishment," Hannah blurted before she had time to think. But yes, it was the right answer. It was time.

The staffer backed up and Hannah rose.

"Do you know how long it will take?" Hannah asked, sniffing, blinking away the tears that continued to fall, wishing she had a tissue, or at least could raise her hands to her face. There was nothing, of course, she could do about her deep, abiding sorrow. Her mother had called her a whore. She had called her mother a whore in return. This was something she would have to live with for the rest of her life.

The girl scanned her chip again.

"A few hours, probably," she said. "Depending on what they do."

Hannah bit her lip, horrified by the answer. But then, some of the punishments would involve uncomfortable restraints, she recalled, and that would take longer than corporal punishment.

“You can count on about two units per hour,” the staffer added, “and you’re getting six.”

“Six?” Hannah repeated.

“Six units of punishment,” she repeated.

Hannah knew she had been given eight. She was certain the staffer had simply misread the number.

As she rattled through the halls behind the worker, and then onto an elevator to descend two floors to the basement, she remembered her last walk to punishment, a terrifying march through halls she barely saw, with a male staff member she would always, always hate.

This time, she remained completely alert, studying the faces of the staffers and the slaves walking in the opposite direction, looking for tears, or distress, or blank eyes, wondering if any were on their way back from punishment.

She wanted desperately for this not to have to be done, but she was not afraid at all. She’d survived it before. She would survive it again. And this would settle things with Athena in certain ways. She’d made her point to her. She made her point to all the Petrosyans, for that matter. She could not be blackmailed. She was not afraid of pain. She was honest. She was brave.

Midway down a long, narrow hall in the bowels of the building, she heard a girl shout. As they drew nearer, she heard another cry, a word that sounded like “Damn!” several light thuds and, disconcertingly, mere conversation.

A few steps closer and she heard a sharp crack, then two more, followed by a male voice, shouting “Ahhh!”

After passing doors that read “Storage S-3” and “Medical/Culinary,” they arrived at the door of the room where Hannah would face accountability: “Discipline 1.”

The staffer pulled open the door and, in an ironic gesture of politeness, motioned her to pass through first.

Hannah, greeted by another girl's cry, started and took in the room, immediately reminded of the scenes from Dante's *Inferno*, a book she'd absorbed more than half of before her mother caught her with it.

Here, the devils were all dressed in black jumpsuits, at least two dozen workers, some actively engaged in tormenting the damned, some in a row immediately before her, typing on computers, one sliding her fingers across her phone.

There were at least 30 slaves here, all naked, mostly female, a male here and there, held in more conditions of suffering than Hannah could immediately take in.

The man at the desk just before her looked up, first at Hannah's belly, then at the girl escorting her.

"Six," the girl said.

"Six," he repeated, and he stood, picked up his phone and stepped behind Hannah, scanning her chip.

"Six," he said again, and she heard him uncap a marker and she smelled the acrid pigment as he drew a large "6" on her left shoulder, followed by two horizontal lines and seven vertical lines, the most efficient way to mark off six squares on her upper back. "She's medically cleared for any station?"

"I haven't been told otherwise."

The man motioned to a woman seated nearby, and she rose and stepped over.

"This is a six," he said to her. "Medically cleared for any station."

He looked into the room. "Let's start with an hour of straight stocks."

The woman, dark-haired, olive-skinned, possibly Indian, and probably in her 30's, grabbed a leash off her desk and clipped it to Hannah's collar.



She stepped back, pulling the leash taut and looking at Hannah's feet expectantly.

There would be no conversation with her, Hannah knew. There would be no eye contact. And at the end of the day, the woman would go home to her family or her pets and forget what she had done. The less she knew about those she punished, the less she had to forget.

Hannah thought about asking her to verify her punishment units – everyone was saying six, while she knew she'd been assigned eight – but decided against that. She didn't want to speak and be ignored. Or get punishment she hadn't been assigned. She shuffled forward, following the woman, who led her not into the punishment area but to the right, toward a row of toilets along the wall.

The woman pointed at the first toilet and Hannah sat and urinated and looked into the room. A woman screamed somewhere, out of Hannah's view, and a male voice issued a groan that closed with the word "No!"

At the opposite side of the room, at least a dozen slaves stood, facing the wall, hands chained to a beam mounted over their heads. Two female workers, one holding a thin rod, had reached the mid-point of the line, standing on either side of a girl with a large number "10" written on her back, other marks and 10 squares scrawled beside it.

One worker put her hands on the girl's bare hips, turning her slightly. The girl raised her head and looked at the wall before her, and all the muscles in her back, her buttocks, her thighs tensed, while the other worker got into position, drew the rod back and swung it with sudden force against the slave's rear.

The girl's whole body shook, her legs bending, only the chains around her wrists holding her upright. She looked up at the ceiling, then turned to glance at the girl who had struck her before returning her gaze to the wall.

A red line appeared where the rod had landed, and Hannah wiped herself and wondered what the girl had done. She was in her mid-20's, Hannah guessed, blonde like

Hannah, and slender, certainly used for sex, even if that was not her only purpose.

The worker landed another blow and the girl flinched again, muscles clenching, and she hung by her wrists for almost five seconds before she regained her footing.

“We’re going to lunch at Tipper’s,” said a voice to Hannah’s left. She looked up at a woman in her 30’s. “At least five of us so far. You in?”

“For sure,” said the woman holding Hannah’s leash, her voice strangely gentle, high and soft.

“They’re already talking about the Christmas party.”

“It’s still summer,” the woman noted.

“That’s what I said, but that’s what they want to talk about. Molly’s got some ideas.”

“Fine.”

The slave being punished at the wall received her third swat, crying out this time, and Hannah allowed her mind briefly to wander, to what thing the girl might have done, perhaps in all innocence. A minor lie? Brief disobedience? What kind of person was she? Was she sweet? Did she do her best to please her partners? Did her owners profess their love to her when she was done? Three red lines crossed her bottom now, the newest a faint pink that quickly darkened. She deserved sympathy. She deserved tears, Hannah thought. But no one here would cry for her. Not even Hannah.

The new woman looked down at Hannah’s lap.  
“Where are you taking her?”

“Straight stocks.”

**“Fuck Off, Father”**

“That’s his favorite, I think,” the woman said, inclining her head toward the man at the front of the room.  
“Fifth this morning.”

“Yeah.”

“See you at lunch.”

The woman tugged on Hannah’s leash and she rose from the toilet and was led into the middle of the room to join the other damned, at least 10 of them, sitting or lying or on all fours, each silently completing a unit of punishment.

“Sit,” the woman said, speaking to Hannah directly for the first time.

Hannah carefully dropped down in her chains beside the instrument she guessed would be used to administer her first round of unhappiness: A pair of long boards, hinged at one end, with a latch at the other, the board cut so that, when they were closed together, they formed four small holes. A chain, no more than a foot long, ran from the end of one of the boards to a ring in the floor.

The woman set the stocks on the floor, raised the top board and looked at Hannah expectantly.

Hannah scooted forward, placing her ankles in the two outside openings, her shackles long enough to stretch between them. She leaned forward, placing her wrists in the two middle openings, and the woman brought the upper board down, sliding Hannah’s cuffs out of the way, tightening the boards together and latching them closed. She checked the fit, stepped behind Hannah, wrote something on her back, and removed her leash.

“No talking,” she said and returned to her desk.

One hour, the man had said.

Hannah looked down at the boards that held her, at the chain gathered uselessly between her limbs, at the floor between her legs, at her thighs and her vulva, and fought the urge to cry. This will end, she told herself, forming the words silently with her mouth. This will end.

This punishment was meant to inflict pain on the lower back, she quickly realized, the strain there already rising. Would she trade this for one of the quick but

excruciating jolts she'd received at the stacks? She wasn't sure. How did they measure punishment? she wondered.

She looked toward the wall, toward the girl who'd been beaten. She was still there, three red lines across her buttocks, two parallel to the floor, the third at a slight angle. The two staffers who'd administered punishment had moved on to the next girl, her long dark hair halfway down her back, one shackled foot tapping nervously as she was positioned.

Hannah looked away, wishing she could close her ears to the girl's first shout of pain, to the other cries, sharp and intermittent, that punctuated life here.

From her place on the floor, Hannah could see most of the room. Further along the wall where slaves were beaten, five stations were designed to hold the miscreants with padded bars at the thighs and upper torso, as Hannah was held when she was punished at the stacks.

A male and female were secured there, no worker near them at present, and Hannah wondered if they were still waiting for punishment or were recovering from it. Their faces in profile to Hannah, both were staring straight ahead, expressions unreadable.

Just beside Hannah, two girls had been stretched out on the floor, chained spread-eagle. One appeared to be sleeping, the other moving her head – the only part of her body that wasn't immobilized. She seemed to sense Hannah's eyes upon her and turned to look, offering a weak smile.

"How long?" Hannah ventured with a whisper.

"Ninety minutes," the girl whispered back after she raised her head from the floor for a quick, furtive glance around the room.

"What did you do?" Hannah asked, looking past the girl at a row of small boxes that, she realized, held people in tight confinement, their cramped hips or knees or shoulders dimly visible in the little window at the side of each box.

"I told someone to fuck off."

Hannah fought the urge to laugh, and she looked away, toward the male and female in the pads. Two workers were with them now, and one raised something to the girl's back and she howled and jerked. The man was next, and he said "No!" and then cried out unintelligibly and dropped his head.

Hannah looked at the girl on the floor beside her, and the girl raised one eyebrow in question.

"Lying," Hannah admitted, starting when one of the girls on the wall shouted.

How long, Hannah wondered to herself, would one have to work in a place like this to no longer hear the noise of suffering?

The drone of conversation among the workers proceeded steadily, remorselessly, their words a mix of instructions, personal news and talk of the work being done, and they spoke in a professional code that Hannah was able to only partly decipher:

"I've got an eight and a 12 I'd like to put on the wall next, can you get me two leashes?"

"... and the girl in box three says she needs to defecate, so take her to the toilet and reset her time ..."

"... two more cats, and then they bought a puppy ..."

"... turn just a little more. Now, hold still and we'll ..."

"... said she wouldn't be in until three, their water heater broke this morning."

"I'm not sure this wand is delivering a full charge – reduced responses from two females and a male this morning"

"... but the steak was overdone the last time I went."

She heard two familiar voices at the entrance to the room and looked up to see the students, still naked and chained, talking to the man at the front of the room. One of them laughed nervously in response to something the man said

while the other scanned the room, eyes wide, taking in all she could of the sorrows of this place.

Leashes were clipped to both girls' collars, and two staffers walked them into the room, explaining what was being done, how long the various punishments lasted, the responses they typically elicited. Hannah wanted nothing to do with them and looked at the floor as the girls approached, but she saw their feet stop and one of them turn toward her, so she looked up.

"Hey," the student said to her, as if they had just crossed paths at the store.

Hannah smiled but said nothing and the girls continued their tour, chatting as if there were nothing horrible about this place.

Clocks ticked off the minutes on all four walls, a small mercy in a room cruelly short of them, and Hannah found herself staring at the second hand, watching it make its circuit with diabolic slowness. Twenty five minutes down, 35 to go, and all her joints were already aching, lower back in constant strain, her rear growing numb. She envied everyone else, the girl stretched out beside her, the people in the boxes, even the slaves being beaten and jolted along the wall. None of them were being held the way she was, she thought, with such cruelty.

She closed her eyes to the misery, shut her mind to the occasional scream and turned her thoughts to Mother. If being here, held like this for an hour, could take away what had happened earlier today with Mother, she would gladly submit. But she couldn't take away the terrible things she and her mother had said to each other, nor the desperate situation her mother had unwittingly landed herself in.

Once Mr. Farraday had decided he'd had enough of mother's body – and her debt to him was beyond anything she could pay back – he would summon whatever authorities performed such tasks, and they would come to his home, put Mother in chains and cart her off to the stacks, where she would be placed nude in a tiny cage, brought to rooms to be

trained and tested, displayed in the showroom and eventually sold to the highest bidder. And if she failed her assessment, she'd be packed off to a factory to perform menial labor.

She wouldn't survive it. Hannah would never see her again, and she'd have to imagine the woman who gave her life slowly fading, mentally, physically, until there was nothing left.

And it would all be Father's fault. He had disowned his daughter, and now he was lying about it to win the proceeds of her sale. For the first time, Hannah hated him. Until now she'd been merely disappointed, ambivalent. Now, she hated him with all her passion. He was a monster. She was here because of him. Mother would be here soon enough, because of him. She wanted him to die. Painfully.

"Fuck off, Father," she said to herself, longing to say it to his face. "Fuck off."

Hannah wept, regarding a future that at this moment seemed both unspeakably bad and inevitable. Her stomach rumbled and she swallowed, realizing she would vomit if she didn't fight it. She wanted to scream, to curse everything and everyone, to use the foulest words she knew against all in the room who weren't slaves.

Instead, she allowed the tears to roll down her nose and drip on the floor just in front of her vulva, a hole whose existence was as much to blame for this as anything else. It was her most important asset, the reason someone was willing to pay an unimaginable sum for her, and in two days, Allain would return from college and want to use it, and she would be expected to share it with him without question or complaint. Worse, Ormek would continue to assert his ownership privileges, ejaculating inside it wordlessly, leaving her to pleasure herself, returning to Laura.

Hannah looked up at the clock. Time had passed. Ten minutes to go. She'd lost track of things through her tears and her rage.

She turned her face to the side, raised her shoulder and rubbed her eyes on it.

She looked at the saline smear and wondered: How had she ended up with six units of punishment when Laura had chosen eight?

## **A Little Hope**

The answer came to her instantly, crystal in its clarity: Athena.

Surely, Hannah imagined, Athena had come home from school and asked Laura what punishment Hannah would suffer. Laura no doubt told her eight, but that the recommended range was six to 10. And Athena had demanded six. Athena had insisted that Laura call the clinic and reduce the units to six, and Laura had complied.

The idea of Athena as her rescuer offered Hannah a single, weak ray of hope in the darkness.

With three minutes yet to go, a male staffer knelt behind Hannah, marked her back, clipped a leash to her collar and unlatched the stocks.

“Five minutes to stretch,” he said.

“Where next?” she asked, drawing her feet up, pulling her chains tight so she could pass her fingers under her eyes, then flicking the tears onto the floor. She didn’t expect to be answered, but he inclined his head toward the wall, where several stations had opened up.

Hannah lay down on her side, her lower back screaming with relief, and stretched her arms and legs as far as her chains would allow. The staffer stood, holding her leash, waiting for what felt like no more than a minute or two before he tugged it.

“Let’s go,” he said.

Hannah rose to a crouch and then stood slowly, not wanting to stumble in her chains. Once upright, she turned toward the girl chained to the floor beside her, and they



exchanged the brief, half-smile common to people who must suffer together.

Knowing where she was going, Hannah walked not behind but beside the staffer to a spot in the middle of the wall, between two females.

He hooked her ankle chain to the floor, undid one of her wrist cuffs and she rose her hand to have it secured above her head. He repeated the process with her other hand, let her wrist chains fall to the floor and removed her leash.

The two female staffers, one holding a rod, the other with a marker in her hand, were making their way up the line again, starting with the girl furthest to Hannah's left. She was positioned, the rod struck her bottom with a sharp "ffft," and she danced and grimaced but stifled a cry. Hannah turned away, watching the clock. The staffers allowed about 30 seconds to pass between swats, delivering the next two within a minute before moving to the girl beside her.

This girl, black-haired, with what Hannah thought might be a mix of Asian and Hispanic features, issued a soft "uh" with each strike, smiling grimly through the pain, looking at Hannah after the last one.

Hannah knew the rod wouldn't hurt as much as the jolts she'd received at the stacks, and yet her heart raced as the two staff members reached her. She had been restrained facing the wall, but with enough slack in the chain to turn to either side, and she angled herself to look at the girl holding the rod, first into her eyes, then at her hand and the rod she held. It was made of wood, stained almost black, three feet long, about as big around as her thumb.

Hannah felt the other girl take her hips and, with a strange gentleness, turn her slightly. The girl with the rod got into position at Hannah's left, drew the rod back and, without ceremony or any words, brought it hard against Hannah's rear.

"Oh, Jesus," Hannah whispered to herself, surprised by how much it stung.

Instead of watching the girl with the rod, Hannah watched the clock, knowing the second swat would come in 30 seconds. It landed just as hard but didn't hurt as much this time. Still, she gasped and pulled at her chains.

Thirty seconds later, the last blow landed, the sting bitterly sharp. Hannah sucked in her breath and held it, determined not to cry out.

The two staffers moved on to the next girl, provoking three sharp cries, while the next girl and the boy after her barely flinched. They looked at each other like they were lovers, Hannah thought, and the boy's erection never softened as he stood at the wall.

One by one, Hannah and the others along the wall were leashed, marked with an X and returned to their wrist chains for the walk to the next stations. Hannah, thinking grimly that she was only one-third done with her ordeal, didn't bother asking where she was being taken this time. After a few steps past the dozen slaves chained and stocked in the middle of the room, Hannah stood before one of the small boxes, its side open.

"Get in," the female staffer instructed. "30 minutes."

Hannah dropped to her hands and knees and crab-walked into the box, her chains ringing as they scraped across the floor.

A single cuff waited at the end of a long chain fixed to the floor of the box, and the staffer closed it around Hannah's ankle, removed her leash, raised the side of the box and latched it shut with a soft click.

Hannah was plunged into an immediate, terrifying darkness, and a near silence that was almost as frightening. She couldn't see the clock or hear any words, just the muffled voices of staff people and the occasional scream of a slave, from what sounded like a great distance.

And yet, Hannah quickly adapted. No one could see her here. Her wish to vanish from the earth, prayed silently again and again early in her captivity, had at last been granted,

at least temporarily. She could move in here. She could even masturbate if she wanted, and although she had no desire for that kind of pleasure and wasn't sure it was allowed, she pressed a finger to her vulva and tapped her clitoris.

Soon, her eyes adapted to the gloom and she saw at least a half dozen reassuring pinpoints of light, sneaking in around the door.

A little more staring and she found the meager gray light of the one-way window beside her shoulder, where staff could peek in and verify the box was occupied and its victim was where she should be. She put her eye to it, unable to see anything but a slight darkening as someone passed, and she gave up and turned her mind to calculus, immediately losing herself in the challenge.

The soft knock on the door surprised her, and she guessed someone had just bumped into the box until it opened, a crack of light blinding her. She closed her eyes, adjusting them as a third X was marked on her shoulder.

Halfway through.

"Do you need to use the toilet?"

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah lied, wanting a break before the next station. She was walked to the toilet, sat and produced enough urine that she couldn't be called a liar, while the girl holding her leash flirted idly with a male staffer.

"Done?" the girl asked.

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah said, wiping and standing.

She knew, with the preternatural sense of a desperate animal, where she was going next. Back to the far wall again, where she would be braced by the thighs and torso and given a single, awful sting, the same sort of jolt that had made her faint at the stacks, that had turned her mother into a blank-eyed ghost, beginning her long slide toward what Hannah encountered this morning – blindness, anger, exploitation, and no awareness she was any of the three.

"Stand here and face the wall," Hannah was told unnecessarily, and she stepped into position, looking down as

she was braced tightly, hands at her sides.

Three females and a male were already secured beside her, two of the girls whimpering in a way that told Hannah they'd already been stung, tears on one girl's nose, the other staring blankly, humming. Were they about to be taken away, or would they suffer again? Hannah could see the number on the back of the girl closest to her: 12.

She attempted to calm her mind by imagining the logistics of the room. For efficiency's sake, a girl due 12 units of punishment should probably be kept at the same station for several turns. But how many? Two? Three?

A pair of female staffers approached, one holding that agony-inducing device that they seemed to refer to as a wand, speaking in what Hannah could tell was an irritable tone even before she heard the words.

"... so Karla's out with a busted hot water heater," she complained, "and Brooke's on vacation, and I have three reports due." She paused to jab the first female with the wand, pressing it firmly against her shoulder blade. The girl tensed up and groaned, opening her mouth to scream, but no sound came out. Once it was done, she went limp as the other worker put an X on her back. "So do they get Mark or Todd, who have both been trained on the wand? No, it's me, as always."

She continued, in a high-pitched, whiny voice, "You have the most experience. You're the best at it. Blah blah blah."

She pressed the wand against the next female's shoulder blade and the girl screamed, never opening her eyes.

The worker stepped behind Hannah, and Hannah braced and prepared to stifle a scream, but the sting didn't come.

Hannah turned to find the girl standing there, waving the wand inches from Hannah's back, continuing her rant. "But when I ask for a raise, they tell me 'Oh, no, you're administrative now, you're not doing punishment anymore.' Buncha bullshit."

On the last word, she raised the want to Hannah's back and pressed.

Despite her determination not to cry, Hannah shouted, first in surprise, then in pain as the shock wound through her body, exploding from her shoulder blade, winding around her spine like a living thing, writhing within her loins and thighs.

"No, no, no," Hannah groaned. And then it was done and she felt the cool ink against her skin, marking out the fourth X.

Two more to go, she thought, and the worst was surely over. As the pain subsided slowly, she felt a brief hope, the first sense of certainty that this would pass, that she would be done and would be going back to the Petrosyan's home. To her home.

## **A Choice**

Hannah closed her eyes, felt fingers at her neck and opened her eyes to see a male staffer fastening a leash to her collar.

She was released from the station and walked on wobbly legs to the middle of the room, where her ordeal had begun. Three girls sat in straight stocks, one staring at the floor, the other two taking in everything around them, both glancing up at Hannah as she approached. They'd both heard her protest, she was sure, and they were looking into her eyes now to get a sense of her suffering. Was she crying, near-hysterical, stunned to a catatonic state? She looked back at them, offered them a half-smile, wanting them to know that she had survived, that she was strong – perhaps even stronger – despite what had been done to her.

"Sit down," the staffer told her. She'd seen others suffer this way. It didn't seem terrible, and she obeyed quickly.

The staffer chained one ankle in place and removed all her shackles.

“Lie down on your back and spread out.”

He secured her other ankle, then her wrists, shortening the chains so she was held immobile.

“90 minutes,” he said, removing her leash. “No talking.”

Hannah dropped her head to the floor and stared at the ceiling, not daring to look at the other girls around her. She heard a female cry, imagined the girl at the wall, and then she imagined herself, the way she looked, stretched out on the floor, arms and legs spread wide, and saw an obscene, female Jesus, suffering but not dying.

If there were a higher purpose here, she would have to find it. She had no Holy Father to create her destiny. She would not be saving the world.

She would however, she resolved, use this to improve her own existence.

Athena would ask what was done to her, and she would not say, not at first. She would hint. She would pretend it was too terrible to be spoken of. She would point to the X’s on her back and thank Athena for having the number reduced from eight to six. She would carefully measure out Athena’s guilt for as long as it would last. Guilt, she realized, would make Athena a sort of slave to her.

She didn’t know how guilt would play out among the rest of the Petrosyans. Did Allain know what had been done to her? Did he care? Laura and Ormek were even harder to read. But they loved their daughter, and if Hannah asked Athena for a favor, she had faith that eventually she would be able to convince her parents to grant it.

Her wishes were simple: books, and being allowed to stay in the bedroom upstairs, at least a few nights a week.

Did she ever want to see Mother again?

With the passing of time since their awful meeting that morning, Hannah was able to distance herself from the pain of their words. She and mother were entirely different people from the two women who sat sewing and sharing an apple on

the morning Hannah was taken. Sex had changed them both, Hannah thought, but it was far more than that. Their world had been almost exclusively each other, spiraling to doom in one-room apartments, one after another. Another world had been forced on them, a world of chains and cages, some physical, some made of paper and promises and debt.

Hannah knew she could do only so much for Mother. The woman had always lived in a fantasy, and those who did so must eventually be held to account, by what was real. Reality was now exacting its retribution. And yet, Hannah suddenly realized, there were things she could do.

Yes.

She stared at the ceiling and worked out her plan. It would begin with a letter. There was, still, some small hope for Mother.

Perhaps Jesus would rescue her. Or maybe Hannah would. Perhaps there was no Jesus. At least, not the Jesus who solved problems and rescued Christians from terrible things.

For almost an hour as she pondered her existence and worked out her plan, Hannah forgot where she was, forgot that she was chained naked to the floor in a room where others, male and female, came to be tortured.

She raised her head, glanced at the clock: 12:15. Forty minutes left. And then she would have one more punishment. One more. She had to get through this one first, however, and Hannah was beginning to sense the misery of this particular torment.

She wanted to move. She wanted to scratch her nose. She wanted to sit up, walk, bend, reach. Things that were so simple now appeared as fantasies of a distant paradise. Her back, calves and buttocks, forced against the hard floor, were starting to sting. She tried to arch her back, fighting against her chains to lift herself, to get at least her bottom up for a moment or two. Within seconds, sharp pains clawed through her heels and shoulders and she gave up. She raised her head, looked around, saw the same room she'd forgotten, the same gallery of suffering, girls chained to the wall with one or two

or three pink welts across their rears, two females and a male waiting to be shocked, boxes where others waited in darkness, others just beside her hunched over, hands and feet bound in wooden stocks.

Hannah tried to turn her mind back to calculus, but that trick wouldn't work this time. She needed the darkness and quiet of the box for that level of concentration.

And so she merely suffered, stared at the two clocks she could see, returned her gaze to the ceiling, looked at the clocks again, certain that both must be broken, so slowly were the hands turning.

What if she were forgotten? How, she wondered with a concern bordering on panic, was the suffering timed? Did staffers just casually look at their watches or phones, remembering some poor soul that needed rescuing, sometimes forgetting?

She closed her eyes and rolled her head back and forth, knowing she looked insane or idiotic and not caring, just needing to move something, anything.

She stopped only when she felt fingers at her neck, heard the jingle of someone reading her tags.

She stopped moving, opened her eyes and looked into the face of a woman kneeling beside her.

"Hello, Hannah," she said.

"Sorry, Ma'am," Hannah blurted, certain the woman was there to reprimand her for thrashing like a maniac.

"I'd like you to help me with a little research," the woman said, tapping Hannah's tag. "But it's voluntary."

"Yes, Ma'am?" Hannah replied, grateful for the interruption but apprehensive as well.

"You have one more punishment unit left. You can either accept whatever you're assigned, or you can choose between the two options I give you."

Hannah looked up, processing the woman's words. She wasn't in a jumpsuit – instead, she was dressed



professionally in a skirt and jacket. She was in her 30's, at least, and Hannah guessed she was a researcher, and she was studying the ways one inflicted suffering on slaves. She wore a wedding band. She was married. She probably had children. Did she have a daughter? Did she ever worry that her child, through no fault of her own, might someday be taken as Hannah was, sold and punished with a torture her mother had helped devise?

Lost in thought, Hannah stared blankly at the woman, so she repeated herself patiently: "You have one more punishment unit left. You can either accept whatever you're assigned, or you can choose between the two options I give you."

"Yes, Ma'am," Hannah replied, understanding now, her mind clearing. "What happens if I don't like either option? May I go to my first assignment?"

"No. If you decide to let me provide your options, you will have to choose between them. And if you refuse to choose, you'll get both."

"I'll choose," Hannah said, hoping she had not made a grievous mistake.

The woman consulted her phone, tapped on it.

"Are the choices randomly-generated?" Hannah asked.

The woman looked down at Hannah, eyes registering both surprise and concern.

"Why do you ask?"

"I'm curious."

"Yes, they are," the woman said. "We have an app that sends the choices to my phone."

"What do you do with it, with the information?"

"We're trying to keep the punishments equal, so if subjects consistently choose one over the other, we'll know we need to make adjustments."

Hannah raised her head from the floor, looking out at the room again.

“Have you been part of other studies?”

“No, Ma’am.”

“Have you conducted a study?”

Hannah detected a slight quaver in the woman’s voice. What if Hannah had said yes? What if she’d told the woman she was a researcher as well? Or had been a researcher before whatever twist of fate had landed her here? The woman did not want to help torture a fellow scientist, Hannah thought. Everyone in this room was a mere body to her, males and females whose base responses to pain were objects of study, data points. If Hannah were more than that, it would be difficult for the woman. Hannah wanted it to be difficult.

“No, Ma’am,” she said, adding with complete honesty, “I’m only 18. But I’m very interested in science and math.”

The woman’s eyes clouded over, and Hannah knew her words had found their mark. Hannah wasn’t a scientist. But she might become one someday. Or might have become one, if her life had not taken the turn that brought her to the floor of the discipline room.

“Your options,” the woman said, clearing her throat, “are the wand or the box.”

“The box,” Hannah said immediately.

“Why?”

“I don’t mind it that much. And the wand really hurts.”

The woman stood, looking down at Hannah. “Thank you, I’ll let them know what you chose.”

“Yes, Ma’am, thank you, Ma’am.”

Hannah smiled, the rest of her time on the floor passing quickly.

Returned to her chains and shut in the dark silence for a final 30 minutes of punishment, Hannah almost laughed,

pondering what she at this moment considered great good fortune. The box was of so little distress to her she considered herself the victim of only four units of punishment, not six, and certainly not the eight she'd originally been assigned.

She thought her mind would turn to math again, but instead it turned to the future.

She would be taken back to her cage to recover from punishment, most likely. Perhaps she'd be allowed to shower. Then Laura would come for her. Maybe Athena would be there too. And she would stare out the window as she was driven home, as if her suffering had left her unable to speak. And then she would work out her plans. For Mother. For Athena. For the Petrosyans.

## **A Reunion at a Club**

At a Dallas social club, on the 30th floor of a downtown skyscraper, a girl with long, blonde hair sits alone by the window. It is late April, and she squints now and then at the brilliant blue sky as she pokes at her salad and taps on her phone. Her foot rocks nervously.

She is in a navy skirt, white sandals and a white shirt, open at the neck, exposing a silver necklace from which a crescent moon dangles, two diamonds set within it, the sort of thing a grateful lover presents on no particular occasion. The silver of her necklace sets off the metal of her collar, a ring of bright metal, with a single hinge and no hole for a key, reserved for that class of people whom others own.

From somewhere overhead, in speakers set discretely into the ceilings, something light is playing. The girl guesses it's Vivaldi.

A woman appears at the entrance to the club, sweeping the room tentatively with her eyes. She is dressed in a long print skirt, a long-sleeved blouse, black sandals. Her hair is long and blonde, like the hair of the girl by the window. There is a little makeup, around her eyes and mouth, where the

face of the girl by the window has been expertly made up, every mark where it should be.

The woman at the door wears no collar. She is free.

The girl by the window notices the woman, stands and smiles. The woman approaches, cautiously at first, but when the girl holds out her arms, the woman half-runs to her and for a moment, all sense of decorum is abandoned, the woman issuing one great sob as she buries her face in the girl's neck, her cheek against the girl's collar.

They embrace for a long time, and then they pull themselves apart and the girl motions to the chair at the other side of the table.

The woman sits, looks down at the table. The girl reaches her hands across and the woman takes them, wraps her hands around them so tightly the girl flinches a bit, but she smiles again.

"Mother," Hannah says, "Mother, it's okay."

"I don't think it is," Mother replies, looking into her daughter's eyes, her own eyes clear with an understanding that had eluded her at their last meeting. "I'm so, so sorry."

"About what?" Hannah asks.

"About what I said last time. About what ... what you are."

"What am I?"

"A —," Mother begins, but she cannot say the word, so she looks out the window, down at the city streets, at the tiny cars 30 stories below, at the even smaller people.

"Slave," Hannah says, because the word must be said. They cannot progress until the word is uttered, set on the table between them, to be acknowledged, processed, accepted.

Mother bites her lip, unable to speak, the pain obviously unbearable.

A server appears. Mother orders tea and the server departs.

“It’s not your fault,” Hannah insists, giving her mother’s hands a shake. “It’s no one’s fault. It’s just something that happened. And –” Hannah pauses, waiting for her mother to look up at her. “And ... I’m happy.”

Mother, well aware from personal experience how the mind can play tricks on one, can block all the truth from one and replace it with a story of the wispiest fiction, looks at Hannah and does not believe her. Hannah is fine with that. She hadn’t expected Mother to believe, and she has no plans to argue the point.

“I was afraid you wouldn’t come today,” Hannah says. “Did you get all my letters?”

“I got a lot of them,” Mother says. “But I might have missed a few.”

“Why didn’t you write me back?”

Hannah already knows the answer, but Mother confirms it by looking at her daughter with profound shame.

“I didn’t know what to do. It took me months to understand. I almost didn’t come today. Roger insisted.”

“Who’s Roger?”

Mother smiles, ever so slightly, then sets her mouth into a tense, straight line again.

“My boyfriend.”

“Not your husband? Or future husband?”

“No. Or no time soon.”

“Do you live with him?”

“Yes.”

“Is he already married?”

“No.”

“Did he make you sign something?”

Mother scowls, clearly embarrassed by the question, remembering how stupid she had been, how trusting, how naïve.

“No,” she says firmly, and her eyes become hard and she looks at Hannah with certainty. “If he had, I would have left him.”

“When did you meet him?”

“November 23rd,” Mother replies. “One week after I got the check.”

“Where did you meet him?”

“At church.”

“What church?”

“Second Presbyterian.”

“He’s a Presbyterian?”

“Yes.”

“Are you?”

“I don’t know,” Mother says, speaking with a voice as soft as ever. She looks away, out the window, back straight, hands in her lap, her body in an habitual attitude of obedience even if her mind has begun to turn. “I don’t know what I am.”

“Have you lost your faith?”

“I don’t know.”

“What does Roger do?”

“He’s a manager at Lonestar Automotive.”

“Do you love him?”

“He’s 26,” Mother replies, as if that were an answer.

“That’s 10 years,” Hannah observed. “More than 10 years.”

“Yes.”

“Do you like him?”

“Very much,” Mother confesses.

“You should have written me back. I never knew if you would show up. I didn’t know today.”

“It’s very hard to come out of what I was in,” Mother says, and Hannah isn’t sure if she is talking about what she was in with Mr. Farraday, or what she was in all her life, all the things she had been through from the day she was born. “I never knew what to say. I couldn’t write the first sentence. I tried. I couldn’t.”

Hannah sets her phone before her on the table, taps on it quickly, puts it away.

Mother seems to notice but says nothing.

“Tell me everything that happened since the last time I saw you,” Hannah says.

“How much time do you have?”

“Until 3:30,” Hannah says.

“Is someone coming for you?”

“Yes.”

“Who?”

“A girl named Jessica.”

“Not one of the Petrosyans?”

Hannah realizes that Mother must know things. Who the Petrosyans are. Perhaps all their names. And she knows the proper pronunciation. The information surprises her. What else does Mother know?

But Hannah knows things too. The Petrosyans had Mother vetted. A meeting like this would have been impossible without it. They didn’t tell Hannah what they’d learned, but their approval of this meeting meant that they had found her to be stable, trustworthy, not a threat to their investment.

“No,” Hannah says after a long pause. “They thought it would be better if someone else came for me today.”

“This is a very nice club.”

“Yes, Ma’am, it is.”

“Are you a member?”

“The Petrosyans are. So I can come here too.”

“You’re alone here,” Mother says, and Hannah knows what she’s getting at.

“Not really. The staff know what I am, and they ... take care of me.”

Hannah pauses. “If I tried to leave, they’d stop me, or they’d just turn off the elevator, or someone would be waiting for me downstairs. Or ...” Hannah touches her collar, and Mother’s eyes follow her fingers, then quickly look away, “they’d pick me up as soon as I reached the street.”

The woman looks at her phone, puts it away, looks out the window.

“For me,” Hannah says, wanting Mother to understand, “the club is a cage. But it’s a very nice cage.”

Mother nods quickly, and Hannah sees that she is beautiful, in a way that would make her prized, despite her age, and she fights the inclination to guess at how much Mr. Farraday could have sold her for.

“Now tell me,” Hannah says. “Tell me everything.”

Mother draws in her breath.

“After I left ... that place ... where I saw you, I went back to Mr. Farraday, and I told him ... I told him how wicked you’d become. And he agreed with me. And I realized I didn’t want him to agree with me. He told me you were dead to me. And I should forget about you. Forever. And that seemed like something he shouldn’t say, so I wondered why he would say it. I kept thinking about it, and after two days, I understood. I knew. I knew. I knew you were right. About everything.”

Hannah nods, remembering that dreadful day: the horrible words they’d exchanged, then the fear and despair over her mother’s plight, far more painful than the worst torture there.

“They locked the doors and the windows,” Mother recalls. “And I didn’t have a key. I had been a prisoner since



the day I moved in, and I didn't know it. So I had to think. Very hard."

Mother taps her temple, the merest smile playing across her lips, and Hannah sees a new look in her eyes. It takes a moment to interpret, and then she knows what it is: pride.

"But I had a phone," Mother says. "Or I could get hold of their phone. So I called emergency."

"911?"

"Yes. Mr. Farraday was at work, Mrs. Farraday was in the shower and their son was at school. I called them, and I said I smelled smoke and I thought there was a fire, and I was getting dizzy. I said I was going to faint. I made up all those lies. I lied. And they came. They came to me, and rang the doorbell, and I ignored it, so they smashed down the door, and I pretended to be very afraid and ran out and ran away. I stole Mrs. Farraday's shoes, because they never gave me any to own, just to borrow, and I went to a park. And then I cried, because I had nothing."

Hannah blinks away a tear.

"But there are good people in this world, Hannah," Mother says, looking into her daughter's eyes with certainty. "I spent the night there. I hardly slept. And the next morning, I was in a place in my mind I can't describe, and I was weeping and sick, and two girls your age were walking home from school and found me and asked me my story, and the family of one of the girls took me in.

"Every day I could I went to check my mail. I didn't care what you wrote. I just wanted to read your words. Written by your hand. And when they finally came, and you told me you forgave me and hoped I was well, I cried again, and I hated myself so much I wanted to die.

"And then that awful woman, Mrs... Mrs. Alvarez, sent me a note and told me she had that letter from your father – where he disowned you – and so I forced myself to meet her, to speak to her, to accept her kindness, to not spit in her face."

Hannah looks down at the city, wondering, as she often had, if she would have done the same thing Mrs. Alvarez had, if she would have caged a girl she'd obtained in a settlement, if she would have sold her to the highest bidder.

But there are more important things to think about.

"Didn't you have to go to trial? For hitting that sheriff's deputy?"

"No," Mother says. "They dropped the charges. They almost always do when it's a ... when it's a mother ... who ... her child is being taken, and she does what a mother would do."

Mother looks out the window, stares beyond the city to the green horizon, everything brilliant outside today.

"Father was arrested."

"How? What happened?"

"I brought the paper to court, and they asked him if it was his, and he said no, but they saw my letter and saw it had been notarized, and they found the notary, and she had a copy, so ... and then, the next week, he went to jail."

"He's still there?"

"I don't think so," Mother says, and now her face becomes hard, the face of the woman in the mug shot. "But he had to give back all the money, and then they wrote me a check."

"How much?"

"One hundred twenty-two thousand dollars."

Hannah sucks in her breath, the number higher than she'd expected. In truth, she didn't really believe Mother would ever get any of it.

"You're rich."

"No I'm not," Mother says. "I can't spend it. Ever."

"You have to. I want you to."

"On what?"

“On yourself,” Hannah says. “For once in your life. You deserve something nice.”

“Clothing?” Mother says, and she looks at Hannah’s shoulders and the way her blouse covers them, and there’s almost a sneer on her lips.

“Not clothes, then,” Hannah says. “School.”

“School?” Now mother is incredulous.

“Yes. Learn to type. Learn to do nails or hair. Study business and work at a shop.”

“I have a job,” Mother says softly.

“Doing what?”

“A repair shop.”

“Roger’s shop?”

“No, I can’t work there. Because he’s there. But he knew some people at another place. I’m at the front desk.”

This is new information for Hannah. Unimaginable information. Mother has changed in ways Hannah did not anticipate.

## **Lunch**

“Someday,” Hannah says, “you could buy me. With that money. If you won’t spend it.”

“I spent a little of it,” Mother confesses, and the shame has returned to her face.

“On what?”

“I gave it to Mr. Farraday.”

“To pay him off?”

“He was very surprised.”

“Tell me,” Hannah urges.

“I had to go to court. He had the paper I’d signed. And the men were there – the deputies – and they were waiting for the judge to tell them to take me. And the judge asked if I could produce any of the money I owed Mr. Farraday. And I said ‘Yes, Your Honor.’ And he said ‘How much?’ And I said ‘All of it,’ and Mr. Farraday laughed because he couldn’t believe it, so I pulled all the money out of my purse. One thousand five hundred dollars, plus one hundred dollars more for Mrs. Farraday’s shoes. Mr. Farraday laughed again, and he followed me out of the courtroom and grabbed my arm and begged me to come back, promised that all would be forgiven if I would return. And I thought about you and I slapped him, right across his nose. And I turned around and walked away. I don’t believe he laughed again.”

“But you have the rest of it. If you save it, you could buy me. One day.”

“You’re worth more than a million dollars,” Mother observes, and Hannah realizes that Mother knows what has happened to her daughter, has found the sales record, has investigated at least the rudiments of buying and selling human beings.

“My value will go down every year,” Hannah says, speaking matter-of-factly of things that are very strange. “The Petrosyans might be willing to consider an offer when I’m 30. Or 35.”

Mother returns to bitterness.

“She’s pregnant,” Mother says. “And getting divorced.”

“Who?”

“That Mrs. Alvarez.”

Mother pauses. “It’s judgment. There are judgments for this kind of thing. I believe that.”

Mother’s eyes become very hard. Bright with fury and hatred and fear, a more organized version of what Hannah saw at the back of the truck, after she was put in the cage and

Mother was being handcuffed and she tried to rescue Hannah and the sheriff's deputy tased her.

"You're my daughter," she whispers.

"I'm 18," Hannah replies. "Almost 19. We can't live together forever."

Mother blinks slowly. Hannah knows she is trying to understand but she's at the limit of comprehension.

"Mother," Hannah says. "Listen to me. This is how it is. I am a slave. I am the property of the Petrosyans. But they have been very generous, and they ask very little of me, and for now, I'm happy."

"You have to have sex with them," Mother blurts between her teeth.

"I do," Hannah said, and she looks directly into Mother's eyes. "With different boys. Sometimes with girls. I like it. Almost always. And I'm not ashamed of it. You will not make me ashamed of it."

Hannah needs her mother to hear these words, and accept them. Mother swallows, blinks, but there is recognition there, and Hannah knows at that moment that Mother is having sex with Roger, and she likes it too.

"Are they very rich?" Mother asks blankly, as if she just wants to change the subject.

"Rich enough," says Hannah. "They're paying for college."

"College?" Mother echoes, incredulous.

"Yes. I have a computer. School is online. It's something I told them they had to do for me."

"You tell them what to do?" Mother asks, smiling with disbelief.

"I do," Hannah says, electing not to elaborate.

"Where do you sleep?"

“Sometimes in a room upstairs. As big as our biggest apartment. And sometimes downstairs, in a cage, the size of a small room.”

Mother frowns.

“I got your letters,” Mother says after another pause, “asking me to meet you in December, in February, in March, but not in January.”

“I wasn’t here in January.”

“Where were you?”

“New Zealand.”

Mother leans back, breathes out, looks down at the tea that has been set before her. She is having difficulty with what her daughter has told her.

“The family took you?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Why?”

The daughter laughs, surprising herself. Mother looks up, surprised as well.

“They wanted me with them there,” Hannah says. “And I wanted to be there. Two weeks. It was very nice. I swam in the ocean. It was salty.”

“They are good to you?” Mother asks. “Are they?”

“Yes.”

The Petrosyans have showered Hannah with favors and privileges, a life of wealth she never imagined, pleasures of every kind, from the base and carnal to the high and intellectual. In exchange, she strips when she is told. She goes to her cage when she is told. She holds still to be chained, without protest. She tutors Athena, pushing the girl to four A’s and a B, her best grades ever. She performs chores without question, establishing such a talent for laundering Laura’s things that only she is allowed to touch them. And she serves intimately, pouring her body over Allain every weekend, bending at the bars of her cage once or twice a week for

Ormek – without touching, for the most part. Without speaking, for the most part – each word and brushing of hand against hand, hand against breast, hand against cheek, a small betrayal of Laura, which is another trade in Hannah’s mind, because Laura has earned minor treason.

It is an equal exchange to Hannah, but she’s well aware how vulnerable she is.

Allain could meet someone at college, fall in love and marry her, and if she were jealous of Hannah or hated Hannah, she would at best just have her sold off. At worst, she’d keep Hannah so she could torment her.

Indeed, at least a hundred things could happen that could result in her sale – to a factory, a breeder, a cruel family, a lab – each possibility so terrifying in its own way Hannah resolves never to think about them.

“Do they love you?”

“Yes, Ma’am.”

“Do you love them?”

Mother chokes on the words, and her eyes brim with tears. Hannah struggles to understand Mother’s emotions. There are too many things to figure out at one time, so she sets aside those questions for later.

“Yes,” Hannah says. “In a way.”

Mother looks at Hannah, puzzled.

“Will you have lunch with me?” Hannah asks.

“Yes.”

Hannah motions to one of the servers.

“Their salads are the best in Dallas,” Hannah says. “And you’ll have to share desert with me. They do a really good apple tart.”

END