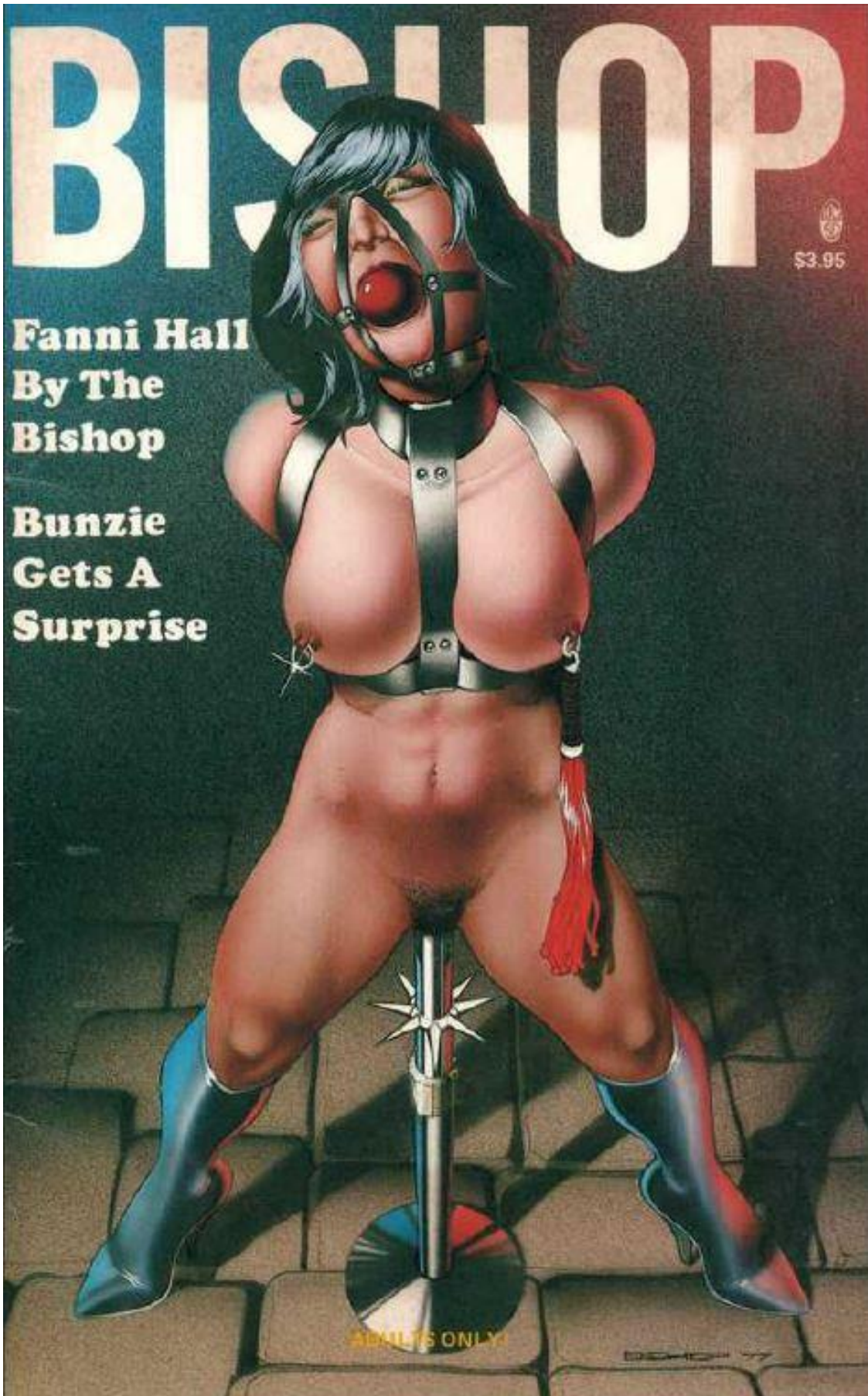


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**Fanni Hall
By The
Bishop**

**Bunzie
Gets A
Surprise**



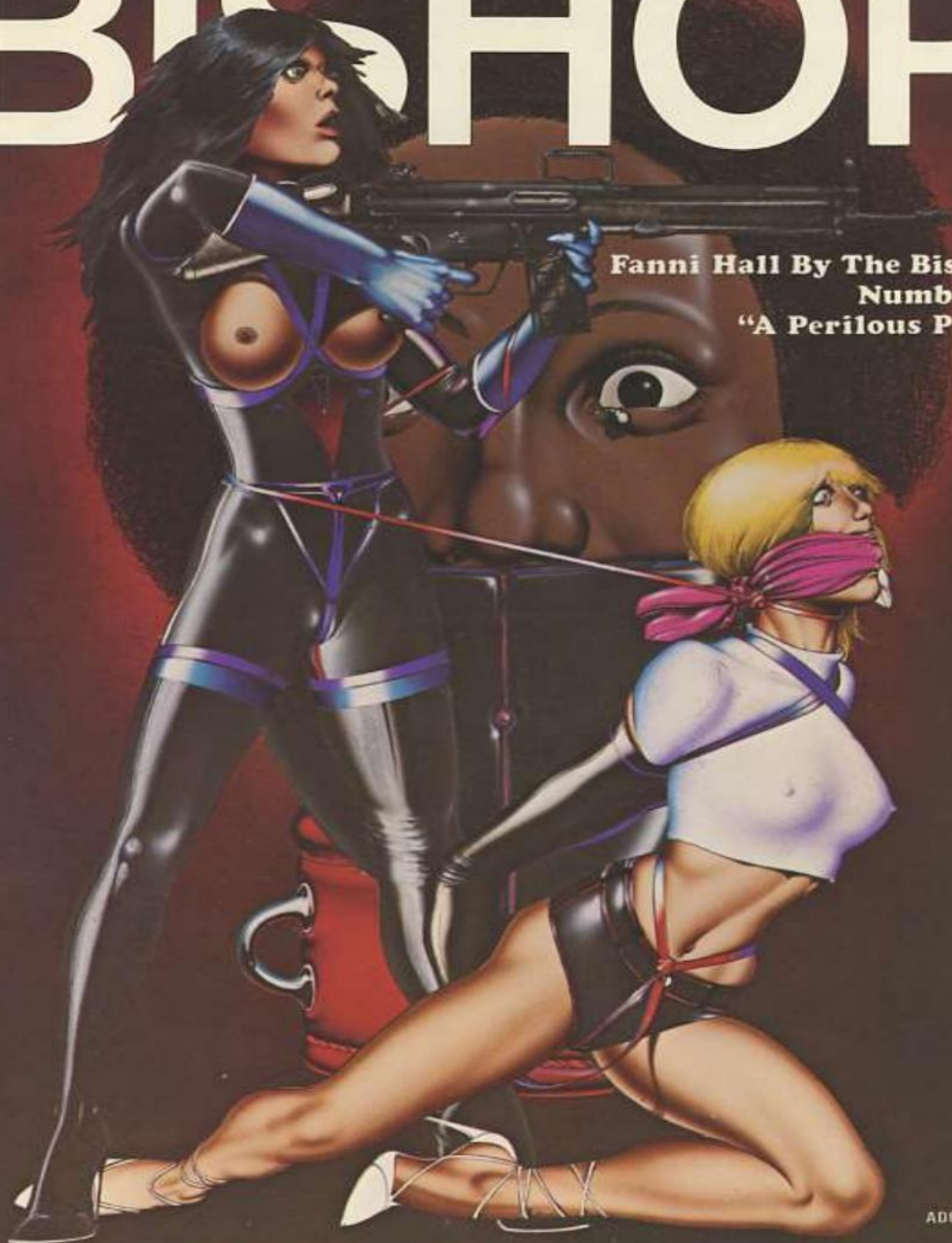
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Fanni Hall By The Bishop
Number 4
"A Perilous Plot"



ADULTS ONLY

ALTA GLAMOUR INC.

ESR-1012

Fanni Hall - A Perilous Plot

by Bishop

Part One

Ah, there you are my little house, Fanni was thinking to herself as another in a relatively consistent succession of small bushes and trees blazed its splintery trail of The-Journey-to-and-From-Town; never a particularly fastidious rider of the trails and byways, Fanni would simply mow down anything smaller than herself and bounce off anything bigger. Inevitably a certain fluttering process was brought into play; certain hitherto silent parts of the brain-stem were speaking in most forceful terms to the effect that the broad may be an out-and-out loon but that house-sized boulders and redwoods were to be avoided assiduously. Most of the time. Fanni spat out a few more pine needles and lumped into the yard-like clearing before the cabin.

Bertram B. Bertram. The old man had a name, courtesy of some of Suni's cajolery on Dawnelle and armed with same, the task precipitating the over the hill and through the woods dash had become to find out as much as possible about the bad guys. And Bertram B. in particular. No phone in the cabin meant that it was off to Chas Grey's house/lodging/fleabag, depending on whether you were the owner of one of the guests.

It had a phone, though, old and beaten and dog-gnawed, but it worked. And she'd been able to get through to Alissa. And Alissa could find out about anything. For a price. She would be at Chas' place in a few days with as much as she could find.

Fanni was pleased; finally, something seemed to be going right. She glanced around the clearing and bounced over to the Gazelle still squatting under its tangle of branches. Its windows were fogged with condensation and great clear drops of water bombed from the tips of the rotors. The wind was coming up again, sodden and moaning through the trees and rustling the branches stacked around the helicopter. Fanni wrapped her arms around herself and scurried toward the house. Goddamn weather. The newest armies of raindrops were the size of marbles.

She ducked in the rear door, down a very short corridor from the main room and out of sight of same and into the bathroom. Suni would be anxious to hear the news, but first things first and the first thing was a shower. She kicked her clothes into a heap by the door and then stood and soaked till the steam was so thick she couldn't see across the room. The clothes were probably ruined.

The bathroom opened directly onto the cabins single bedroom and she strode into it naked and glowing and warm. A little too warm, she thought to herself. Damn, Suni must love heat. Jesus.

From beneath the closed door she could see the red and orange flickering's of what must be an immense blaze in the fireplace. She'll burn the goddamn place down, Fanni thought, irritated.

The only things in the drawers were wool or thermal-insulated or goose-down. Not appropriate. She moved to the other set of drawers and rummaged around in the few bits and pieces of summer-weight gear she'd brought up of the years and finally settled on the teensy leather postage stamp of a bikini she'd worn several years before in Europe. The straps even had wee gold buckles on them. Fanni grinned to herself; Suni'd get a good snicker out of this one. She fitted herself into the absurdly small bra, brushed her hair a couple of licks before the mirror and turned to the door.

The fire was as big as she'd thought and Suni was curled directly in front of it still wearing the heavy terry cloth robe. Fanni shook her head in faint awe and only then noticed the figure dangling from the ceiling in the corner. It twisted slowly against the ropes that bound it and moaned softly into the huge gag stuffed into its mouth. The face was blinded by a broad band of cloth over the eyes and the dark hair was tied tightly back to the cord holding it off the floor. A rope tied around the belly dived deeply down into the crotch and emerged behind, hidden, to hold the hands well into the buttocks. Fanni walked closer.

"She's been a bad girl?" it was more a statement than a question. The figure in the chair shifted position slightly and said nothing. Fanni was immediately in front of the figure, now. Dark hair! Dawnelle was blond! Instantly, as if running up from behind and suddenly appearing at her shoulder, Fanni noticed the differences in stature between she two women and the coloring of skin, subtle and hard to define in the shifty light of the fire. The figure was Suni.



“Oops,” Fanni froze, arms still crossed across her stomach.

“Oops is right, you dirty, rotten bitch! And stupid, too.” Dawnelle’s voice raged at her with a mixture of gloating and loathing. Fanni’s eyes jerked around the room, hidden from Dawnelle’s searching or place to jump to. Nada. Zilch. Dawnelle had done her homework. An A+.

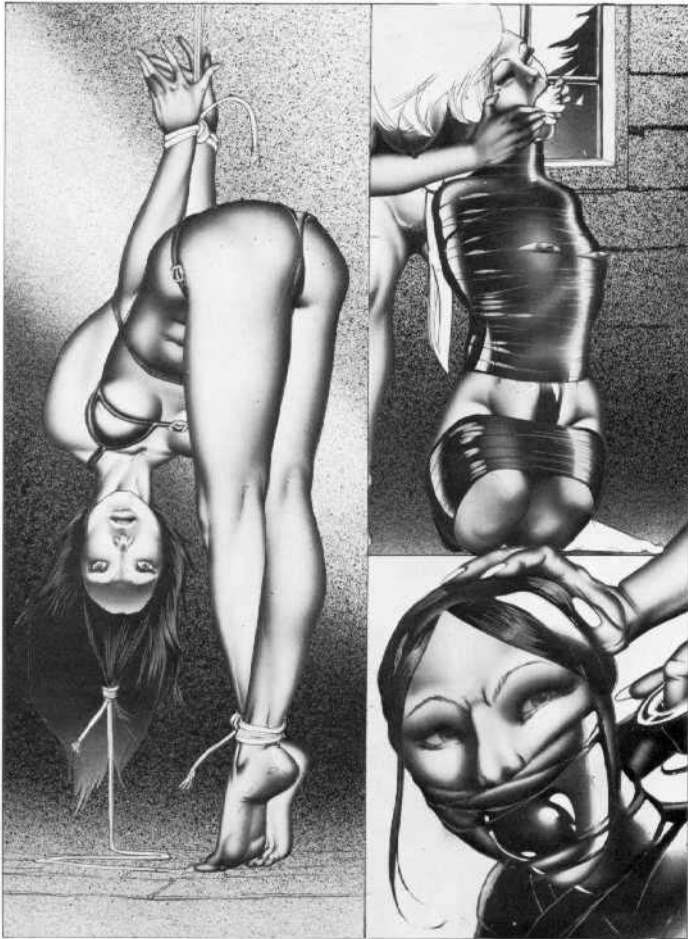
“if you make even the slightest move before I tell you to, I’ll shoot. Do you understand that?” the voice bordered on hysteria. Fanni nodded her head almost imperceptibly, Dawnelle was off the chair and moving around behind her. Suni seemed to be listening to the interchange, although blindfolded and gagged as she was it was hard to tell.

A short piece of cord whipped into Fanni’s legs and dropped to the floor at her feet. She glanced down. “Cross your ankles and tie ‘em together.” Fanni cautiously did as she was told, finding the thin hard twine more by feel than with her eyes then, bending at both the waist and at her knees, she carefully placed one ankle of then other and circled them several times with the rope.

“I want it tight, bitch,” was the hissed command.

Fanni grimaced beneath the falls of her hair and tugged the cord until it bit into her legs and knotted it. She then stood, awkward and groping for her balance.

Another bit of cord, longer but no thicker, snaked through the air and snared itself around her neck and shoulders. “Tie your arms to your sides, and I want that tighter than the rope on your feet! Move!”



Dawnelle had already tied a loop into end of the cord. Fanni draped the rope around her back and pulled the ends tight around her arms and sides with her hands and slipped the other end of the cord through the loop and pulled it tight. With her upper arms pinned down at her sides it was difficult to tie off the loop, but she managed. And it was tighter than the banding on her ankles.

Dawnelle's hands were hard and expert as they jerked Fanni's wrists behind her back. Fanni bit her lip against the pain of the rope burning her arms as they were shifted back but that pain was as nothing compared to the searing bite of the cording on her wrists. Dawnelle had practice. Lots of it. Four turns went around the wrists and then another four cinched the binding and Fanni's hand were lost to her.

And there as more to come.

With a dry slithering susurration, the end of a stout line vaulted the main beam running length of the ceiling and whacked back down onto the floor. Dawnelle pounced on it and dragged it to Fanni's wrists and wound it round and round into a balled knot. She then got hold of the other end and pulled down hard.

The rope around Fanni's chest prevented her arms from lifting and so all she could do was bend straight forward from the waist as her arms were wrenched up and then higher still.

When Dawnelle finally tied off the bitter end of the rope, Fanni was bent into a sharply inverted "V". already the backs of her knees were on fire and her legs had begun to tremble.

Dawnelle delivered a vicious kick to the poised and wholly vulnerable behind arrayed for her and Fanni instantly lost what precarious balance she had maintained throughout the development of this excruciating position and, in so doing, put the full weight of her body into her arms and wrists. The pain was almost enough to make her scream and she thumped and bumped around on her single leg with the two feet choking back the sobs. There was still more to come.

Dawnelle bundled Fanni's mop of hair and laced more of the wire-thin cord into it and then pulled the other end, and Fanni's head, up and back and tied it to the ceiling rope, where it laced her hands. It was another of those positions that are immediately intolerable but, as had been the case earlier on at Madame's place, tolerate was exactly what she would have to do. Fanni panted like a dog, the pain coming in waves. Suni could hear the pain but was immersed in her own private hell: the rope running under her arms was slowly cutting her shoulders from her body. She bit down hard on the gag and endured.

Dawnelle let the robe slip to the floor in a soft bundle and stretched like a cat, almost. Her eyes glowed in the dark. She walked around the room, examining the walls and the fixtures, ignoring the two women roped like packages. She stopped at one of the windows and drew little pictures in the condensation her breath produced. The Gazelle peered out at her. She stared at it, then turned and walked to the Chinese bitch. Dawnelle thought she might well hum like some great single-stringed musical instrument if she was plucked just right.

The afterglow she was experiencing was almost like after sex. All the fury was gone; all the banging at the walls finished. It had quite gone by the time the Asian had roped her to the chair and now, with the two women nicely dispatched, she sank into a kind of euphoria normally reserved for an unusually devious ploy that worked her higher in the structure of the old man's business, or being personally present at the death of an enemy. She hadn't got where she was by

being stupid. The name of the game was power and stupid people didn't get powerful. Neither did unluck ones and here the euphoria ran into its snag; old Bert didn't like fuck-ups, no matter what the excuse.

First his factory gets blown to hell and gone and now this. To say that the old man was security conscious was to stretch euphemism to the breaking point and she just plain knew too damned much.

On the one hand she could give herself a good pat on the back for turning the tables on these two buffoons, but would that be enough? The old man had considered her expendable the other night in the car, and at the recurrence of that thought; of that ovoid grenade banging down out of the rain with the old man's hand behind it; she ground her teeth and the old rage roiled to the surface. She fought it back down.

Would it be enough to just snuff these tow fuckers or would he want 'em back alive and squirming? None of it would be any good if he suspected even for the least little bit that she'd compromised hem to this pair. His "special-action" people could wring anything out of anybody and if the old man was suspicious, they'd sing any damned son he wanted to hear. You dirty, rotten stupid, stupid, stupid cunts, she rages. Everything she worked for gone. Everything. But maybe, just maybe not. If she ran, the old man's paranoia would be confirmed and she'd run the rest of her life. She couldn't even run to the cops; they wouldn't believe her in the first place and even if they did, her word would be unsupported and they would be able to prove nothing. Even now, the old man was probably moving the stuff that she knew about. Big job, but possible. But the whole thing would be unnecessary if she could convince him, or if he killed her. She'd wandered back before the window. She stared at the helicopter some more.

"Which one of you assholes flies that thing, just the Asian over there of both of you?" Fanni's pans were the only sound in the room. Suni had stiffened at the question. "I want an answer, honey buns, and you'd better be producing it damned fast."

"Both of us," Fanni lied. Could the woman not have heard Suni and she talking when they got away from the car?

"Then one of you is expendable," Dawnelle purred more to herself than to the captives.

"You need two people to fly it," Fanni lied again. Fanni had very, very good ears.

"Bullshit."

"It's true. Besides, there's no place you can run and you must know you can't go back to him. Not now." The last two words came out in a gasping rush; Fanni's legs were beginning to fail her.

"Yes, slut, and I've got you to thank for that, don't I?" Dawnelle said, turning away from the window. "In effect you've done me in rather nicely." The germ of hope was still there, but fading as the truth of what the woman was saying sank in, reinforcing her own fears and drawing a

black pall of the world. Done for. Fucked over good and thoroughly. The rage began again. “One wonders what one might do to repay in kind,” she snarled, bending and putting her mouth close to Fanni’s ear.

“One wonders.” The pistol had a soft kind of gleam in the feeble light from the window.

“Killing us isn’t going to help you, and you know it,” Fanni gasped. “You don’t know where you are, the nearest people are fifteen miles away over dirt trails, and you don’t know how to fly the helicopter. Kill us, either one of use, and you’re stuck here. For good.” Fanni thought she was going to lose consciousness in another few minutes.

“Who said anything about killing, honey? Who said anything about killing?”

Came a rattling and clanking from the kitchen and Dawnelle padded back into the room with one of the Henckels’ paring knives. A dull flash of light in the room and the line holding Fanni in her embrace with the ceiling bar snapped with an audible twang and she collapsed with a thump onto the floor. A stools piney legs dragged over the floor and Dawnelle hopped up onto it and severed the rope holding Suni aloft and she, too, clumped to the floor, her scream of pain and surprise soaked up by the wadding still jammed as tightly as ever into her mouth.

“Who said anything about killing?” she said, arms akimbo and still perched on the stool.

She hopped down next to Suni, writhing slowly on the floor like a worm and quickly hogtied her, then strode to Fanni and repeated the process, embellishing the restraint with a white hiking sock stuffed into Fanni’s mouth and the belt from the robe to hold the gag in place.

“I’ve got lots better ideas than that.”

Just at that moment, Fanni couldn’t have cared less.

Dawnelle stood, threw on some of the heavy clothes in the other room and a raincoat and went out into the rain, slamming the door behind her.

Fanni rolled slightly to her side and turned her face to the door. Movement of her head was possible but difficult and painful because of the cord still holding her head up. She tensed in the ropes and found no slack. She turned her head back the other way to Suni. No movement there at all. Her wrists and elbows were tied with the same thin cord that bound Fanni and she knew that efforts to undo the small hard knots with her fingers would be useless. The paring knife was sitting on the linoleum counter top by the door, but with her ankles tied to her wrists, there was no way to reach it.

At that moment, Dawnelle walked back into the cabin preceded by a blast of rain-sodden air. The ends of the raincoat flapped like wings. The small cardboard box she’d brought with her plunked onto the counter with the knife. From it she produced several rolls of very broad black plastic rope and great lengths of electrical wire wound onto spools. Fanni had noticed the box

dimly in the flight to the cabin but hadn't paid it much attention. Dawnelle had obviously noticed it, too, and had paid it considerable attention. She gave Fanni a poisonous smirk and began reeling off some of the wire and cutting it into short bits with a small pair of wire-cutters.

She tended to Suni first, beginning with the tips of her fingers and working up her arms with windings of black tape, sealing her arms into a gleaming cocoon. She paused momentarily when the level of the tape was just beneath the cords holding her elbows hard together and snipped the lines apart with a scissors. The marks of the ropes looked as if they'd been branded into her skin. The tape held her elbows just as effectively. The climbing and winding continued and when it was through it was as if Suni wore a seamless single-sleeve from her fingers to her upper arms.

The next stop was to cut and remove both the rope at her waist and that dividing her crotch. Dawnelle carefully cut the bonds first in front and pulled them from Suni's body, then snipped off the line where it erupted from beneath the covering of tape over the ropes still on her wrists. More of the tape was wound around the hidden hands and then pulled between the legs and pulled hard up her belly. Never endowed with much pubic hair in the first place, Suni looked to lose it all when the tape was finally removed. Dawnelle patted and smoothed as she pulled and when she was done the strip of tape resembled some really scandalous bikini for the new bathing year. She stuck the tongue of the tape up the center of Suni's belly to just below her gracefully indented navel, then carefully wound the end of the tape around a crosspiece which she then wound around and around the girl's waist, duplicating in tape what had previously existed in rope. Such a craftsman, Fanni thought. She eyed the coils of wire sitting next to her as Dawnelle prepared to continue on Suni; it looked as if the latter was going to get the better end of the deal.

Dawnelle wound poor Suni up like a mummy beginning at the waist band and continuing up her rib cage, running the tape completely around her arms in back and pinning them even more helplessly than they already were. When she had finally finished, just the tips of the dainty breasts were left exposed and the pressure of the yards of tape caused them to jut like two soft fingers.

The feet were next, starting at the toes and continuing to the ankles. Dawnelle bent the legs double after that, digging Suni's heels into her bottom and ran a couple of turns of the tape clear around her legs, holding them in that position. More mummification, then, all the way down to her knees.

The cloth gag and blindfold were ripped away then, the blindfold first. Suni's eyes blinked like semaphores as she glared first up at a smiling Dawnelle, then down at herself encased in the plastic and finally over at Fanni lying on her belly with her hands and feet pulled back to meet one another, mouth stuffed to overflowing with the dingy sock. As Suni's gag fell away, she stretched her jaws and ran her tongue over her lips and seemed on the point of saying something when Dawnelle jammed first one and then two large kitchen sponges into her mouth. Suni jerked and fought but the other woman merely stuffed harder with both hands and got the whole enormous wad into Suni's mouth in what seemed to be only seconds. A single turn of tape centered over the stuffing held it in place. Dawnelle shifted her tactics then, and wound a number of turns of tape over the top of Suni's head and wound under her chin and then up again, forcing

her to bite down harder and harder on the sponges. She used the last of the tape to form a broad gleaming back band covering the whole of Suni's lower face from just below her nostrils to just above her chin. Suni's silence was to be assured, come hell or high water.



Dawnelle stood up, dusted imaginary dust from her hands, and looked toward Fanni as if saying, "It's your turn, dummy." Which turned out to be exactly the case.

The blonde kicked the little three-legged stool she'd so recently used on Suni over to the center of the room directly under the ceiling beam and stood up on it again. She tied two short pieces of wire around the beam about six feet apart and formed slip-loops in them with the free end of the wire gangling stiff and hard out from the side. She then shoved the stool to a position below and centered between the two loops and fetched a wooden chair and set beneath one of them.

Next, she cut the cord connecting Fanni's hands to her ankles and dragged her to her feet. The hairline was still knotted hard and tight and Fanni was forced to examine the ceiling as she stood. Dawnelle then hefted Fanni bodily onto the stool and braced her till she'd found her balance. Then, with Fanni desperately teetering back and forth on the stool, she got a long piece of the wire and before Fanni's ever wider eyes fashioned a tight spiraled hangman's noose and threw it over the beam so that it bumped into Fanni's shoulder.

Dawnelle finally cut the hairline, then roughly jerked the loop larger and slipped it around Fanni's throat and drew it tight with the knot at the side of her head. She walked around behind then and drew up the slack of the wire with a brutal jerk, tightening the noose even more.

"Up on your toes."

Fanni stretched for all she was worth, the noose a band of tightening fire around her neck. already there was a bussing in her ears. Dawnelle tied off the rope and walked back around to stand in front of Fanni.

"I'm going to untie your hands now, fool, and when they're free, I want you to put one hand in that loop," she gestured to the wire loop at Fanni's right, "and the other hand in the other loop, like a good little girl. If you fuck around or try anything stupid, I'll kick the stool out from under you and you'll hang yourself. Understand?"

Fanni tried to nod her head, couldn't and grunted a yes into the gag. Yes, yes, yes!

Dawnelle stood on her chair and severed first the wrist cords and then those on Fanni's chest and stood back, expectant, wary, seeming almost to hope for resistance. Fanni could hardly feel her arms at all, let alone her hands, but stuck them out and up, missing the loops completely on the first shot, then steadying herself for the second effort. She turned her head against the fire of the noose and guided one little paw into its slick black loop and instantly Dawnelle vised it home around the wrist and knotted the knot. The chair banged down on the floor beneath the second and unoccupied loop. Fanni turned to it and surrendered her other hand to the restraint. With a quick jerk, it was down.

The next step in the process had Dawnelle tying each of Fanni's ankles separately, the long tails of the wires snaking off into the dimness and over the oak flooring. She walked away and secured the two ends to stout vertical beams supporting the ceiling beam, drawing out all the slack, and returned with the paring knife. The cord holding Fanni's ankles together was cut and the paring knife returned to its spot on the counter. She loosened the noose just a fraction, returned to stand in front of Fanni, gave her an appraising stare and pulled the chair out from beneath Fanni's feet.



The jolting pain in her wrists was unbelievable when she hit the end of what little slack the loops possessed. The noose around her neck snapped her head off to the side; not quite enough slack. The cord bit into her neck under her chin and she sought frantically for the floor with her toes, finding that she was able to attain the barest contact with the wood; she wouldn't strangle, but she wouldn't be taking any deep breaths. She thought.

Dawnelle added the final crowning and ignominious touch to the position, splaying Fanni wide and gaping with the ropes stretching away from her ankles. She pulled and jerked on each of the ropes, adjusting Fanni until her torso was perfectly vertical and her legs formed a gigantic inverted V. her toes could no longer touch the floor and her vision turned a grayish black shot with tiny stars that burst and disappeared with noiseless pings. As the grey faded into the ever-deepening gloom of the encroaching blackness, Dawnelle loosed the coil of rope around her throat and Fanni heaved and gulped at the air. The noose was left still taut around her neck but she was no longer strangling.

The blow, when it struck, was so intense, so terrifyingly unexpected, that Fanni shrieked into the gag and she jerked in the wire's grip. Another excoriating blow and another muffled cry and

tiny twitching and minuscule turnings. The total immobility of the position seemed to exacerbate the pain further; she was denied even the psychological succor of thrashing. She couldn't even throw her head with the noose holding her neck stretched. She clenched her teeth on the sock and blinked her eyes at the pain and the tears. It was all that Dawnelle had left her.

And now, the beating switched to the front. Dawnelle held a six-foot length of hard bristly hemp rope that she'd soaked in a bucket of brine after she'd strung poor Suni from the rafters. Fanni looked with very real and unaffected pleading into Dawnelle's eyes and saw there a cold, controlled fury that told her with a certainty that needed no words that she might come out of this alive, but that she might regret not dying. Dawnelle planted her feet, twisted back from her waist, the muscles beneath the skin firm and supple, and brought the lash hissing out to Fanni with the full force of her strength and the fury of her revenge. It bit into Fanni's belly just above the navel and wrapped around her side like a snake, sinking almost out of sight into her skin. Fanni's scream was a mindless thang.

Dawnelle stood, watching the purplish-red band spring instantly into the tight skin, then examined her target speculatively and her eyes were drawn to the juncture of the legs and its small patch of black curled hair. She hefted the rope and shifted her stance slight.

The front door banged open, admitting rain and light that sprang across the ceiling and the silhouetted shape of a man.

"Right, luv. That'll be enough of that for now." Suni uttered a strange cry, made more so by all the sponge packed into her mouth and Fanni fainted dead away.

Part Two

Madame was well past caring or even thinking. She as now just a pet, an object to be used and then thrown off to the side. She wondered how many times she'd been raped since she and Fanni had parted those days and centuries ago. It didn't seem to matter much, one way or the other.



The tortures had been awful. Sometimes she was amazed she'd lived through them. The whippings and the horrible positions and the faces screaming into hers and always the bland, almost mouse-like pallor and composure of the little man who was the chief architect of tortures at times subtle and then brutal almost in the blink of the eye, lived with her continuously.

It was to this tiny man that she had been delivered, to this man the old man had thundered, "Break her!" and he had. Time after time. She would have told him anything, and did, even inventing something when his ministrations had her screaming and screaming. But always the dull brown eyes seemed to stare into her and through her and he knew. He knew.

Always she was bound and always when she was not either screaming out her pain or eating, she was gagged. During the first days, and some of the worst days, she was chained naked and sitting on the floor with her wrists manacled to her ankles, her thumbs caught up in a dull steel clamp. A metal birdcage-like affair was snapped shut over her head, its leather-covered steel pads pressed down on her eyes, blinding her. The chin of the brank was hinged on a small pin and could be swung out of the way for eating or talking. At the center of the hinged section was

an enormous hard-rubber plug around which she was forced to fit her mouth before the section could be fully closed and padlocked.

At times she would be hung by the links at her hands and feet, at others she would dangle from a chain around her waist for the whips and the prods and the electrodes, but always she was, at first, in the same cell and always in the same position. Her life became continuous pain, even when they left her alone. And always the huge plug of rubber invaded her mouth. Once a day the thing would be pried out, she would be spooned mouthfuls of some viscous slimy goo, and the gag would be put back in. and then the tortures would come and it would be taken out some more and then replaced.

She was still in that position when they raped her the first of many times. They would merely roll her onto her side or all the way over onto her face and knees and pound away at her. And then the torturers would return. And then the rapists would come back. And sometimes they were both. It became routine. She discovered what it was to be truly a slave to men, and to their whims. And to their whips. And she found that the whips spoke to her in a language that, increasingly, existed quite apart from the pain itself.

The footfalls coming down the hall this time were different from those of the men: lighter, more nimble. Even the smell was different. They were women. Two of them. Madame picked up her head and concentrated. They came to the door of the cell and a key rattled in the lock. There was a tiny creak in the top hinge as the plate slowly arched into the room and then silence. Finally, a soft command, "Get her out of the mask."

Madame had definitely heard the voice before. A guard continuously stood without the door. The keys on his belt-ring clinked like tiny bells. The gag was wrestled from her mouth and left to dangle on its hinge. The locks running along the rear seam of the steel harness clinked open one after the other and finally, the thing was free. The guard grabbed both sides of the helmet and swung it open like a clam shell.

Madame's face was streaked with days-old makeup and sweat and tears and the leather blindfold pads had left deep indentations on her cheeks. The lacework of the helmet had, too, left its own private marks and looking as if Madame's face had worn some odd fishnet for months. She didn't care. She could blink her eyes and wiggle her jaw and see. And See!

At first, she didn't even recognize her, so great were the changes. Alissa! Here! The chains and ropes and stripes she'd so cheerfully worn at Madame's were gone, covered with skin-tight leather pants and top so black you could almost imagine yourself falling into it. Her hair, long and luxuriant, floated like a gold cloud about her head and down around her cheeks. And her eyes were cold as ice. Madame meant to gasp with relief but one look at the young woman standing over her shocked her into silence. This was not the Alissa of before, not the elfin sprite she'd thrashed and loved at the house. Alissa was back in her true element: power. Madame grasped it all in the instant they saw one another. No words were needed and none were spoken.

The tableau was ended by the emergence from behind Alissa of an almost carbon copy of herself but for the newcomer's dark hair. Younger, equally as elfin, and wearing a suit visibly a mate for that stretched over Alissa's firm little hide; but beneath the smooth blackness across her belly Madame could immediately see the subtle but distinct ridge of a crotch-strap sinking into the child's skin. The pink flushed features informed her that it probably anchored a friendly little helper deeply within the slave, for that was obviously what she was on further examination: the silvery collar gleamed softly in the mean lighting of the cell and her wrists remained motionless behind her back for reasons other than posture control. Silver links adorned the glistening black ankles. They were unattached from one another, but small snaps sprouted from the sides of the bands could be closed together in an instant.

She stepped around Alissa to a level slightly behind her shoulder and smirked down at Madame. She nuzzled with her chin at the large black ball tied around her neck and glanced first at the back of Alissa's hand, then down at Madame and said with a grin, "She's fine if you like them ancient, love."

Alissa swung like a cat, her arm a dark blur in the mote-filled air and the back of her hand hit the younger girl's face with a meaty crack.

"Shut up!"

The girl staggered back from the blow, then caught herself from falling and huddled back against the wall, shooting Madame a murderous glance as if the blow were her fault. Alissa stared at her and the girl lowered her eyes, frightened, resentful, surprised.

Alissa spun back to Madame and motioned to the guard. The man had watched the entire episode with his arms crossed, visibly bored but attentive; one did not lightly irritate the boss' daughter. He dragged the ring of keys back out from his pocket and stooped to one knee in front of Madame and released the locks on the manacle.

Madame could hardly believe the evidence of her eyes. She slumped within the pile of steel. To be able to stretch her body! She could hardly imagine it. She began to raise her arms to lie back, but the guard was upon her, hands rough under her arms as he pulled her to her feet. She gasped at the cracking of her joints and the pulling of tissues cramped and knotted from being in one position for days on end. Alissa's hard stare never varied.

The guard pulled Madame's hands behind her and snapped them together with a pair of the slim manacles like the other slave-girl wore, then snapped a similar collar about her throat. A short chain hung from the rear of the collar and the guard pulled Madame's coupled wrists high up her back and attached them to its end. Madame grimaced at the pull in her shoulders and at the collar's bite around her neck. He hobbled her with the silver bands and an eight-inch-long light chain and stood behind her. The hood was heavy leather and thickly padded. The man buckled it under Madame's chin first, the halves of the restraint spilling out along Madame's chest. She locked eyes with Alissa as the guard raised the lower face part of the device across Madame's mouth and she opened to receive the packing riveted in place like a huge mushroom.

The one-sided eye combat ended quickly when the man tugged the rest of the face portion of the hood over Madame's forehead and eyes and zipped the thing together down the center of her head and the nape of her neck. There were more tugging and pulling as the zipper was locked and the broad external strap was tightened across her lower face, crushing the gag further into place. The nose opening was carefully adjusted and a leash was attached to the front of the collar with a distinct click that she couldn't hear through all the padding inside the hood. Back to square one. The leash gave a good jerk and they were off. Somewhere.

The car was big and smelled expensive, at least. The thumps as the doors were closed came dimly through the hood. Madame sat between Alissa and her slave and one of them bent down and attached her ankles together. No kicking in the car.

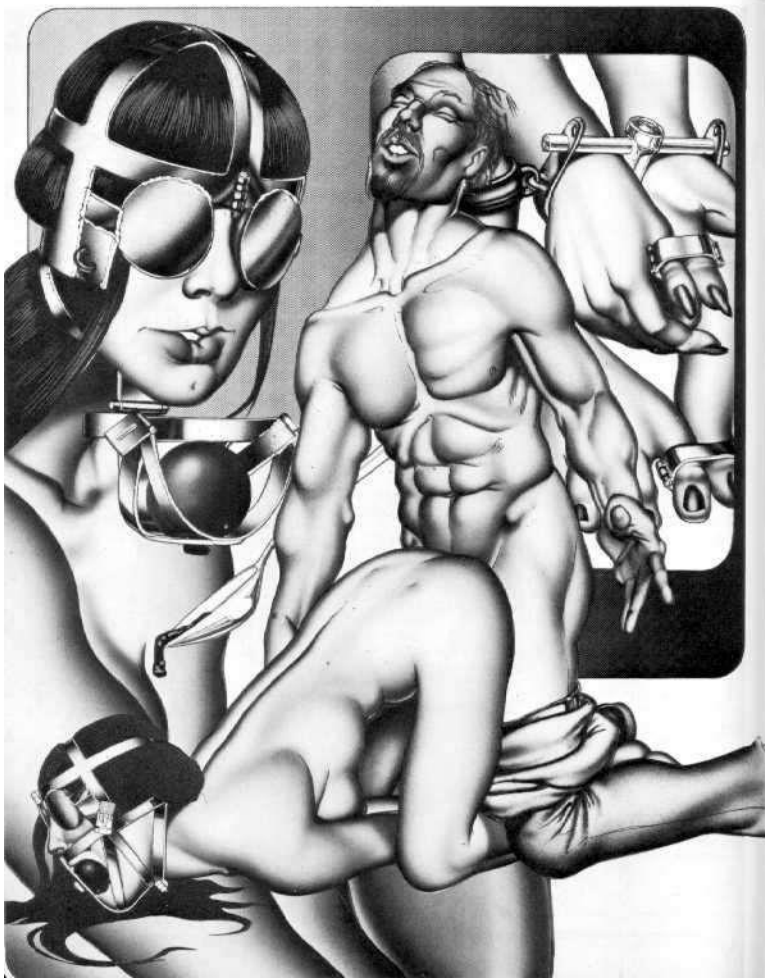
As they moved off from the rest, Madame could vaguely hear what sounded like a rather heated exchange trading sides back and forth across her. She felt like a fence between two feuding families.

The one on her right suddenly lunged across Madame's thighs and delivered what sounded like several solid belts to the other, one after the other in quick, deliberate succession. There was a pause then, and then the one still across her legs seemed to do something to the other. The weight of her was just as suddenly transferred back to its proper place on the seat and the voyage continued on in silence. The new slave wore her gag tightly buckled and her cheeks burned a deep red under the dears dropping into her lap. School was still in session.

The ride ended, eventually, as all rides hopefully do. They were marched upstairs and downstairs and across floors and rugs and things and finally stopped.

Madam's hands were released from the collar but not the manacles. An astonishingly cold metal bar was pressed into her back lengthwise and strapped into place. One went about her waist. Another, jutting from the nether end of the pole, itself aligned with her crotch, was pulled forward between her legs and up her belly to join the waist strap. The ring at the back of the collar was fitted to its mate on the shaft and her torso and the rod were as one. Her wrists were quickly released and reattached in the front and then pulled high over her head and fixed to the very top of the pole. Her elbows were pulled together, forcing her head forward and down onto her chest with more of the manacles, and those too were attached to the pole.

Another strap was attached to the bottom of the pole and was pulled forward through her legs as she was forced to sit. Her legs were bent cross-legged and pulled back into her crotch. The new strap snapped onto her ankle bands and someone standing behind her pulled the strap back under her until her feet dug into her groin. Then and only then were the fastening of the hood loosened.



“Do you like it?” Alissa quipped, the cold of

her eyes leaking into her voice. “Somebody put a lot of time and effort into this joint.”

Madame stared around her. It was her mansion. Or used to be, she thought ruefully.

“Daddy said I could run it after you... vacated... the premises.” She snickered openly at her own wit.

“Its really like a big doll house, you know,” she continued, sweeping her hand around the expansive room. “Even comes complete with the cutest dolls,” she crooned, stepping close to Madame and cupping her chin. “There was ever such a beautiful selection of fluffs left down there that I’d never seen. You’d been holding out on me, naughty slave. Momma must punish.” Her voice lifted on the last words like a solicitous but grimly determined mother explaining to her brat why the beating was coming.

My God, Madame thought to herself, what the hell happened? What had she done so utterly, completely wrong with this one? She would have sworn that Alissa was perfect material, that she had donned the cloak of slavery with complete abandon. The change was incredible, impossible.

She glanced up at the girl still cupping her chin. The eyes glittered back at her like chunks of the south pole. Had it been merely a role, a shivery delicious experiment that, once experienced to the hilt, could be thrown away like a used rag? A vicious, spoiled brat with a spine of steel and an insatiable appetite for the bizarre? She was, after all, her father's child, and a more murderously ruthless sonofabitch Madame had never before met.

Madam's eyes widened in genuine fear. Alissa's grin spread to show her teeth. She clicked the top of the pole into a hood jutting from the wall and brought the nipple-whip back from the desk. The screams went on for a long time.

Mortimer Gans was a thoroughly terrified man. His path down the paneled and carpeted corridor to the oiled rosewood door was audibly punctuated by the mumbles that became weaker and weaker the closer to the door he got. His business was with the machines and voices of people coming out of the telephone, he told himself, but as head of Bertram B. Bertram's business intelligence clearing office, his was the final responsibility of carrying the information gleaned from the network of spies and informants to the old man, not the Bright Young Man scurrying around the office. His. Fifty-six years old and skinny as a rail and with two solitary hairs left still atop his head. And shaking.

Mrs. Washtinaw glanced up at him standing weak-kneed before her desk, and then down at her papers. Mrs. Washtinaw thought Mortimer Gans was a wimp, and didn't mind showing it. "Can I help you, Mortimer?"

Mortimer fidgeted, but finally spoke up. "is Mr. Bertram in his office, Mrs. Washtinaw?"

"Do you have an appointment, Mortimer? Mr. Bertram is a very busy man, just now."

"I have a tape here," Mortimer waved the small Sony in her face, "that Mr. Bertram will want to hear. It's very important, Mrs. Washtinaw," he pleaded.

"Oh," with a sigh, "very well, Mortimer, I'll see if Mr. Bertram is free." Mr. Bertram himself flung open the door.

Five minutes later, the old man punched the STOP button on the tape recorder and looked expectantly over at Mortimer standing by the door.

"We picked that up last night, sir. The call was made to a..." he glanced down at a small sheet of paper in her hand, "...Miss Alissa Black at her apartment. As you could hear, sir, the quality of the connection from the caller to Miss Black wasn't exactly... shall we say... the best, but

since specific mention was made of your name and of obtaining as much information as possible about you, I thought..." Mortimer cocked his head to the side and looked apologetic.

The old man waved his hand in dismissal. "Think nothing of it, Mr. Gans, think nothing of it at all. I'm sure it's nothing, but you ere right in bringing it up. Was that all on the tape?"

Mortimer nodded, some relief beginning to come into his face.

"In that case you'd better...' he stretched over the desk toward Mortimer with the Sone, "...resume your duties. Anything more to this Miss Black you receive should, of course, come straight here." More nodding from Mortimer. "Oh, by the way, do you have the young woman's address there?"

"Oh, of course, sir," Mortimer gasped out, rushing to the desk and extending the slip of paper. The old man took it and leaned back in his chair, smiling up at Mortimer. The meeting was clearly at an end and Mortimer beat a hasty retreat to the door. Mrs. Washtinaw didn't even glance up as he left.

The old man punched a call button on the console and grand his teeth. It had been Hall's voice on the other end of that line. It had indeed been a rotten connection, but the old man was sure of it. Still alive and kicking. And dangerous. The bitch was digging into his business! It had been tried before by some of the best and worst of them. Even the Feds, the bastards, hadn't had any luck. He wasn't particularly concerned on that end, but this Black bitch might lead him to her. After the assholes in the helicopter had lost him a brand-new Gazelle and the broads AND Dawnelle, the old man's rage had threatened to expunge any living organism within arm's reach. Heads had rolled. Literally. The countryside at that end of the state swallowed the women without a trace. Only luck would ferret them out and the old man wasn't a strong believer in luck. Until now.

Burnside came in and sat down without invitation. Security with a capital "S." the goon-squad side of Mortimer's intelligence network. Burnside and the old man went back a long, long time together. The old man slid the piece of paper across the desk and Burnside picked it up. Two minutes later, he walked out of the office and deliberately shut the door. Mrs. Washtinaw watched him walk away down the corridor like a lizard that's jut been missed by the snake.

Alissa Black was almost as dark as her name. she'd grown up skinny and hungry and tough and had developed a deft skill with anything that had an edge on it by the time she'd reached eleven years of age. Her ghetto toughness combined with an IQ of 148 and an ineluctable drive to escape and never, never live the way she'd had to as a kid drove her, by the time she was in

her late twenties, to the pinnacle of a somewhat dubious, but thoroughly useful, occupation of information-monger. With prices to match. Her sources came from the meanest of streets and the plushest of boardrooms and she played no favorites and took no sides. Except when it came to the Feds; she had an ingrained loathing of governments foreign and domestic. Particularly domestic.

She and Fanni had met when they were both in their early twenties and had instantly become attracted to one another. Their business and characters complemented each other. That didn't mean Fanni was going to get a price reduction.

Alissa glanced again at the computer printouts and the scribbled notes puddled around her on the desk. She shook her head to herself. Fanni, baby, she said, this is gonna be one expensive motherfucker. She did not like fucking with Bertram B. Old Bert was one tough, shrew son... of... a... bitch and Alissa had a bad feeling about what she'd gotten herself into. Especially, when she found out who some of Bert's new buddies were. Nasty, nasty shit.

She glanced at the calendar and then at her watch. After the normal interminable waiting and listening to the Muzak, she got through to reservations and arranged a flight for the next morning. Bright and early. She wanted this whole mess out of her hair.

Mortimer listened again to the tape that one of the faceless B.Y.M.s had just brought him, made a note on a log pad and walked to the communications room. Burnside, in the car outside Alissa's flat, picked up the phone and listened. When Mortimer was finished, Burnside set the phone back into its cradle carefully and picked up a walkie-talkie and got the standby car to replace him, then motioned to his driver to start the car; he had a plane to catch.



Part Three

Another in a series of seemingly endless storms screeched and howled through the grass and trees around the cabin. Fanni hadn't seen it so bad in years. And this was only early fall. The few deciduous trees dotting the expanse of conifers were fast losing their leaves to the wind.

Fanni turned from the window back to the center of the cabin's main room. The pain from her three stripes made for cautious movements, but Suni had carefully bathed and disinfected them and there was no infection. She cautiously fingered the end of one as she surveyed the collection of people jammed into the house.



Suni and the MI-6 type were huddled near the fire in animated, to put it mildly, conversation; Fanni gathered that their interest in one another was more than purely business inspired. A second man stood, dripping still, at the side of the room with his hands in his pockets, eyes half closed but flicking now and then to the last remaining person in the assemblage, Dawnelle.

She knelt on the floor with her wrists and her ankles mated by handcuffs. A sturdy padlock joined the restraints. Her elbows, too, were snapped together with cuffs. Her expression of surprise and irritation when first the Englishman had barged in the door had lost its surprise; only the irritation remained. She twisted slightly in the cuffs, shifted her shoulders and grimacing. The guard glanced at her with a kind of professional detachment. Suni and the other one didn't seem to notice. She saw Fanni gingerly examining the stripes and smiled a small smile to herself. Fanni saw it and silently swore to herself that the bitch would have plenty of reason to rue that goddamned smirk.

The two at the fire stood, the man walking to his second and Suni coming to Fanni.

“They’ve been watching us the last several days,” she said, laying a hand on Fanni’s shoulder. “Ian has been out thrashing about the countryside following the movements of Mr. Bertram’s helicopters, but it was John there who actually found us. Ian only arrived yesterday.”

“But how did they know where to come to? Was Fanni's slightly incredulous reply.

Suni smiled, glancing over at Ian. “Such a smart lad, that one. He had the idea of securing small transponders, rather special ones, I might add, on all the B.B. Bertram, Esq., helicopters he could find purely as a ‘general information’ kind of ploy when first he came over here. Then, when you and the other women got shanghaied off from that shootout in the woods, the bugs became rather more a necessity than a gimmick if he were to keep you in view.”

“The only real cock-up, and that was a good one, was that the IFF on the bugs didn’t work, so all he had was a screen lit up with little moving lights, but no way to tell which one was which. The whole thing was a scrub as far as Ian was concerned, but then when you were lifted out by helicopter, it became the only thing he had, he’s been on the run for days.”

“Why didn’t they come right in, then?”

Suni lifted her hands out from her sides, palms up, and cocked her head to the side. “Professional caution? Ian’s been at this rather a long time; he doesn’t like to just go sticking his head into the other man’s game, if you know what I mean.”

“Did he know you were in here?”



“John told him, I imagine.” She grimaced with her lips. “it was the only reason he came in; when he saw our little Miss James, there,” she gestured to Dawnelle, “he knew something had gone off a bit badly for us and came trotting along to the rescue. Not very professional, and all that, but,” and here she glanced pointedly at Fanni, “it’s probably a good thing in the long run. Ian’s known about her for a long time, she’s really not a very nice type. As you may have guessed.”

The man had come up behind them and stood looking down over Suni’s shoulder, a faint smile on his face. Fanni remembered their last meeting when she’d been fitted, sitting, around the shiny metal member on the crossbeam of Madame’s novel “chair.” And then later, when he’d added his little embellishments.

“How’d you like a manicure?” she asked, all sweetness and light.

Suni gasped at the jibe, but the man nodded his head and the grin became an outright laugh. Suni looked from Fanni up at Ian, and then back at Fanni sulking. She knew precisely the horrors

that Ian had gone through and was hurt that Fanni would say something that venomous to him, but Ian, rather than clouting her smartly across the room, was roaring with laughter.

“Ina, what...?”

“it’s all right, luv. Miss Hall and I have met before. Just a little private joke.” Suni was getting suspicious. Ian’s continued mirth didn’t do anything to dispel it. She glanced again at Fanni, but the latter had moved away toward the fire. Ian gave her a sly wink and walked back over to Dawnelle.

“Well, well, well, Miss James, we meet at last. Heard a lot about you. Most of it bad to rotten.”

“My, my, my,” mimicked Dawnelle, smiling sweetly, “we are a glib English cocksucker, aren’t we?”

“I say, John, old bean,” Ian began, affecting an upper-crust accent strong enough to cut with a knife, “these American girls have developed a penchant for most amazingly foul language, what?” John mournfully shook his head and cast his eyes downward.

“Assholes,” was Dawnelle’s last contribution to the conversation for the next several hours. She spent them lying flat on her back chained to one of the beds. In her mouth was a very large, very tight gag of good stout English wool. It might correct some of her diction in the future. The two women and two men set about waiting in the other room. Dawnelle breathed through her nose and watched the rain smearing across the glass. Her curses were many and varied, but silent.

Alissa cursed the rain for her own reasons, wrestling the recalcitrant rental car over the rut that passed for a road down here. She’d been stuck once, but had been able to extricate herself with judiciously applied backs-and-forths. About par for the course, she decided.

Her flight for the wee small hours of the morning had come to bits and pieces one stage at a time with first one delay and then another and then, finally, almost mercifully, a cancellation. She’d come in on another flight with another airline and had holed up at the airport hotel. And now this wretched morning of slipping and slithering on the paved streets and the bog-hopping, mud-slinging gyration on the dirt roads! She mentally jacked up the price of the job.

She finally found the Grey place, quite simply because the road ended in front of it. Charming place, she thought. Probably houses the healthiest cockroaches in the world. She slammed the door and skirted most of the puddles.

The whole place was as gray as the drooping trees and looked as mushy-soaked as the mud itself. A few dead leaves had gotten tangled in the roof shingles and one was plastered square against what little remained of the screen on the stoop. At least there was a light on inside.

An old man the same color as the building turned his head toward her as she came in, eyes rheumy and dull, but beginning to glint fractionally when he saw her. He continued silent and seated behind a counter.

The sign outside had said simply Grey's General store. Judging from appearances, business wasn't too good. The merchandise wasn't exactly overwhelming; a couple of Coleman stoves sat next to three lanterns and some cans of fuel; canned vegetables and some fruit hid up on unfinished pine shelves; a motley assortment of tools and small farm implements littered the floor, and even the gun rack, usually a repository of a fair handful of iron out here in the sticks, showed only an old, old Mossberg .22 and the obligatory 94 Winchester which, if truth be known, looked more like a personal weapon than an item of merchandise.

Her inventory of the contents of the store had taken only the blink of an eye. She turned back to the old man, still staring at her from behind the counter. His mouth had dropped slightly. Probably didn't get many black chicks up here in them thar hills.

"I'm supposed to meet somebody here," she said. "My name's Black." There was a long, uncomfortable pause. Was the old bastard deaf? "A girl named Fanni Hall was supposed to meet me. Here. Today." Unconsciously, her voice had raised and she'd taken a step or two closer to the man. Still the silence. She opened her mouth to try again, her temper failing her by degrees. What the hell was going on!

"Yup." He turned back to his magazine as if he'd made up his mind about something and then dismissed it. Yep what? What the hell was that supposed to mean?

"Y' just missed her. In yestiddy and most of t'day. Said she couldn't stay 'round no longer and headed on back to the cabin. Said she'd be back in the morning."

Jesus Christ, Alissa muttered to herself. Jesus H. Christ, that's all she fucking needed; a drive back over twenty of the worst goddamned miles she'd ever seen in her life, and the light was going and the rain was getting even heavier. Shit. Fuck.

She slumped into one of the old leather chairs near a potbellied stove that had seen decidedly better days. It was getting damned cold at night to be sleeping in the car. Shit! It was already cold in the store.

"Y' can stay the night out in one of the guest houses." She remembered the lean-tos she'd seen as she drove in.

"Fifty bucks."

“Fifty dollars!” the old man’s grin was tiny, but there just the same. He knew he had her by the nice round ass. Hell, even a coon wouldn’t drive on a night like this. She flung the money down onto the counter and kicked her way out through the screen. Grey’s eyes never left her all the way to the car. Goddamn, what an ass, he thought, licking his lips. What a nice round, black ass. His erection was huge and thoroughly gratifying.

The guest house was almost as abysmal on the inside as it was on the outside; a bare bulb and an army cot and one blanket at the foot of the bed. No water, no toilet. Ah, the wonders of the woods! Alissa ground her teeth and thought that howling like a dog would be appropriate but then decided that would probably just turn on that filthy old degenerate in the store. She felt dirtied by his scrutiny.

She turned and closed the door, looking with stupefaction at the door lock, a hook and an eye bolt. Right straight back to the stone ages in one big step. With exaggerated care, she inserted the hook into the eye and sat on the edge of the bed, wrapping herself in the blanket, shaking her head at the infinite perversity of the universe. And at the scumbag in the store in particular. She finally leaned back and fell asleep.

The old man in the store hadn’t bothered to tell her about the two “hunters” in the next lean-to, and so Alissa didn’t know about them, obviously. They did, however, know about her. They’d been waiting for the last day-and-a-half and had even observed Fanni walking up and down the decrepit steps at the front of the store. Fortunately, they were locals and had been told only to expect a black woman. Burnside was waiting at the airport and had followed Alissa in the rental car, so aside from some lecherous commentary when she showed up, Fanni went unrecognized and unmolested.

The three of them silently surrounded the shanty, Burnside taking the front door. All of them scanned the store, now black and silent several hours, and then all sides of the clearing. Burnside nodded with his head and his two men went in through the door in one quick lunge. The sound of the torn hinges and the whump as it hit the back wall were totally drowned out in the wind’s yowling.

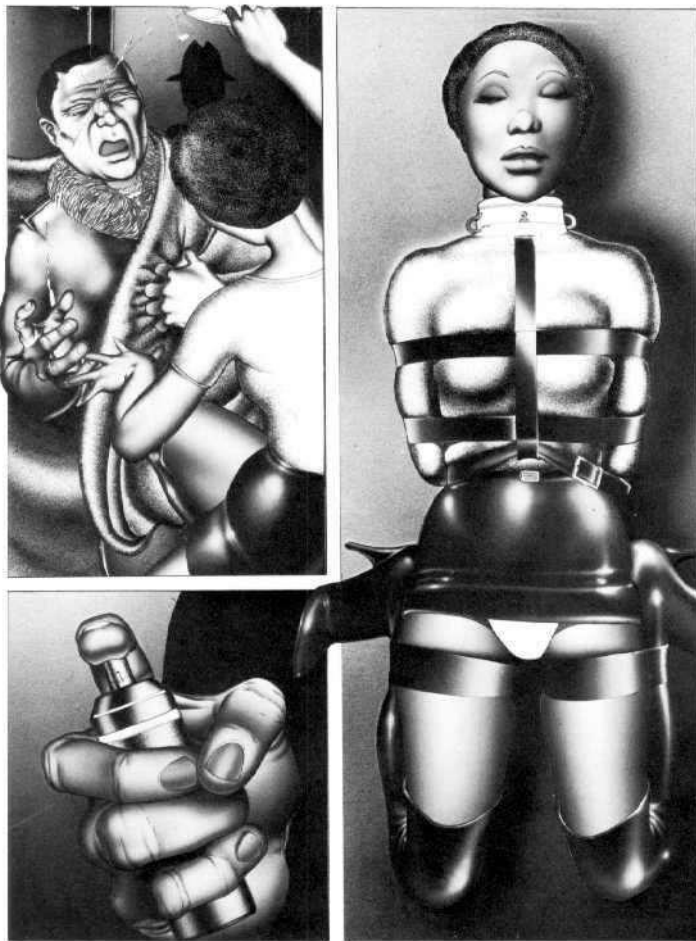
The sound effects were not lost on Alissa, though. Her reflexes were those of a cat and her sleep was congenitally so light that a joke among her friends was to the effect that she was the only person they knew who could sleep with both eyes open.

The men lunged for her and she lunged for her purse. The blanket foiled her, snaring her legs and pinning one arm partially to her side. She bumped out onto the floor as the first of the three men tackled the spot on the bed where she’d just been.

She got the bag by one strap as the second man came around the end of the bed and went for her. He aimed a kick for her belly and instinctively she rolled her knees up to protect herself. His blow banked into her shins, the grit and mud on the soles of his shoes jamming into her skin. She swung the bag up in a short arc and caught him square on the side of the head, surprising him

more than damaging him, but it was enough to back him up a couple of steps. The first man was scrambling over the top of the bed toward her and the third one stood by the door watching.

The second man bore back in, head low and arms outstretched. The first man was on the floor now and grabbing for her legs. She hurled herself against the wall and threw the entangling blanket on the one's face while jamming a heel into the other's eye. And still the third man just watched.



And Alissa finally had the skeleton-knife from out of the purse. She'd had it bench-made in California and it was simply a single piece of 440C stainless, five inches long, contoured for her small hand along the first three inches of its length and formed into a hollow-ground drop-point edge along the remaining two. Three large lightning holes gave it its distinctive appearance and name. Alissa had found that muggers did not like getting stuck in the eye with it, particularly when it was a better blade than their own. The only time it had ever failed her was when the mugger had a gun, and that time she'd got herself raped. That time the knife stayed in the purse.

Until the fool got a little careless and a lot stupid as he prepared to say his goodbyes. He'd also leaked his life away in the alley as Alissa beat it for a cab.

The man with the blanket still partially over his head kept bumbling toward her, one hand still clawing for her waist. She flicked the knife across his wrist and then across his face, aiming for the eyes, with on blurred movement of her arm, the blade gleaming like an eye. The man gasped and then squealed like a pig, straightening explosively. As he did, Alissa aimed a short punching slash into the inside of the man's right thigh, searching for the femoral artery. The man jerked frantically away. She flicked a blow at the first man's head as he scrambled back, but missed.

The four of them stood frozen for some seconds, Alissa balanced lightly on her feet, left hand partially in front of her and the knife held out slightly forward roughly at the level of her waist. The man she'd hit was slumped up on the other side of the room. The right hand hung from his arm limp and useless and dripping. She'd missed his eyes, but she'd opened him up like a can in a line running up from just below his right cheekbone, over the bridge of his nose and out onto his forehead. Blood poured down his face and onto his shirt. She had very high hopes for the leg wound, the man clutched it in a frenzy, but she didn't think she'd found the artery; the goddamned blanket had fouled the stroke. One down, at least.

The first man had recovered from his fright and was now well and truly pissed. One of Sam Colt's very own Combat Commanders sprang suddenly into the picture.

"No guns," said the third man. "She is to be alive and unharmed."

"Jesus Christ, Burnside," the man frothed, "did you see what that cunt did to Charlie? You goddamned black bitch..." He turned back to Alissa, pulling the slide back and letting it go with a clank.

"Peters! You knew the job when you came in. You know it now. We'll get Charlie all nice and stitched up. The woman stays alive! Put the gun away." Peters didn't seem able to quite make up his mind on whether or not to pull the trigger. "you can deal with her later, when we've done with her."

A sudden gleam came into Peters' eyes and his mouth twitched up at the corners. He nodded his head once and the pistol disappeared. He shrugged out of his leather coat and wrapped it around his left arm and, retrieving a sap from a back pocket, began sidling toward Alissa. The third man began moving, too, edging toward her from the other side of the room. Alissa couldn't retreat any further, but braced herself against the wall and flicked her eyes back and forth between the two men.

One of the old adages of hand-to-hand combat is that if you should have the misfortune to find yourself up against two opponents simultaneously, you should keep them separated and to for the weakest one first. Nice theory.

Alissa and Burnside were on the same side of the bed; Peters would have to go around or come across. Peters was well juiced up for a fight and the rolled jacket and the sap went a long way toward evening things up. Burnside, on the other hand, was closer and appeared to have made no preparations at all other than the fact that he was definitely getting closer.

Her decision seemed almost made for her. She leapt out from the wall in a bound, closing the distance to Burnside in a second. As she did, his hand came up from his side with a black cylinder in it. Mace! Alissa swung at him at the same instant the stuff struck her in the face and chest. She felt the knife bite home, but not enough. Her face was blinding agony and her eyes felt as if somebody had stuck them with a hot poker. She choked in a spasm, the stuff getting into her lungs and she fell against the man, writhing and gasping, and then down to the floor. She couldn't believe the pain.

Peters would have a certain small amount of immediate revenge and slammed the point of his boot into her kidneys and back. Alissa curled into a defensive ball and absorbed the kicks with shrill grunts of pain. Burnside reached across her and shoved Peters away and that was the last she remembered as she dropped down into a well of blackness.

She regained consciousness, finally. The sky was still pitch-black; she didn't know whether she'd been out for minutes, or hours. A figure sat in a chair, the red eye of his cigarette the only light. She couldn't see anybody else. The effects of the Mace still lingered, but the searing pain was gone. Her eyes felt puffy, as if someone had stuffed cotton up under the lids.

Thick straps held her arms crushed down to her sides, with her forearms pressed tightly together behind her back. Each of her wrists wore a leather bracelet and straps attached to each of them had been pulled around the front of her body and buckled. Another strap, this one from the buckle, stretched it way up her chest between her breasts and circled her neck. Her legs were separately bent back and strapped so that her thighs and calves pressed together. She tried to wiggle.

"No moving. If you try to scream, nobody will hear you over the wind and you'll wear a gag, permanently."

Alissa twisted her neck and sought out the man behind the cigarette eye. She was pretty sure she could see the attaché case with the information Fanni wanted on the floor at his side.

"Where's your friend, Peters, and the other one?"

"By this time, I imagine 'the other one', as you put it, is either dead of loss of blood, or filled with more stitches than Frankenstein's friend. At any rate, he won't be back here. Peters will."

"What are you going to do to me?"

"Why nothing, Miss Black. Nothing at all. We're just going to sit around here pleurably and wait for your little girlfriend to show up this morning. Once I've made her acquaintance, we're

all going to troop off into the woods and meet all her other little flown and hard-to-find friends, and then we're all going to go off and have a nice long talk with my employer. Simple." He waved the cigarette for emphasis.

Yeah, honey, Alissa thought, and then one black girl, wone white girl and one Asian girl will get themselves run through the nearest one of the old man's meat processing plants. Very integrated. She tried to imagine herself as a sausage.

"Could you loosen these chest straps a little, please? They're really tight."

"Excellent. Good for the posture, I've heard."

Shit

Later, she couldn't tell how long, a car pulled cautiously to the side of the shack. Burnside was listening intently. A vague click as the car door was closed and then a harsh whisper through the door.

"Burnside! Everything okay in there?"

"Come on out of the rain, Peters."

Even in the dimness, Alissa could see Peters was a little the worse for wear. He was obviously soaked to the bone and the lower half of his pants legs were clotted with mud.

"I got stuck twice out there. Charlie's gonna make it, they think. Michaelson ain't too pleased about his getting' carved up, I can tell ya." His eyes never left Alissa.

"Is the little bitch awake yet?"

"Doubtless hanging on every word, I expect." Burnside was bored. There was a brief tiny flicker as he triggered the light button on the side of his watch. The sun would be up in a couple of hours.

"Hanging on every word, eh? Imagine that, just imagine that." He sat on the edge of the bed, looking Alissa up and down. She met his gaze. His hand slid up the side of her leg, over the strap and up under the short skirt and stopped, resting on top of the mound of her sex. He ran his fingers back and forth over the pantie for a bit, then took the hand back out and ran it over her breasts. "These straps make your tits stick out pretty, bitch. Real nice." He gave them both a squeeze.

"Peters."

“Oh, come off it, Mr. Burnside. They didn’t say nothin’ at all about using her a little, now, did they?” it wasn’t a question. “Just alive and kicking.” Peters was dead serious. “And I never heard that a little porkin’ ever hurt a gal, especially...” he turned back to Alissa, “...a nigger.”

“Why you fucking cracker coc...”

The man’s vicious open-handed slap snapped her head hard to the side and in the pitch blackness she saw a lot of popping and flashing. Peters’ breath was coming faster.

Burnside’s hand was clenched on the silenced .22 automatic target pistol under his coat. Why did they saddle him with these goddamned shit-kickers? The old man’s organization must be going straight to fuck if this was all the better it could do for soldiers. Burnside knew he was fast losing control of the situation and would very cheerfully have shot Peters dead on the spot. But he was afraid he’d need the stupid asshole come the dawn. Fuckin’ amateurs and incompetent farm boys. Jesus Christ, what the hell was the world coming to!

“Al right, Peters. I don’t want her hurt, though, do you understand that?” Peters was smiling and rocking back and forth over Alissa. “here,” he added, throwing a tangled object across over onto the bed. “I don’t want any unnecessary noise, and I don’t think you want any unnecessary biting.”

The object was a large pear-shaped gag and with it quickly buckled, firm and smooth, in her mouth, Alissa surrendered to the inevitable.

Burnside was glad the room was black so that his contempt wouldn’t be quite so obvious as Peters rutted away on the black woman. She lay like a limp sack of meal, staring at the ceiling as Peters exhausted himself in her, her jaws occasionally clenching on the plug in her mouth. Peters had just a wonderful time. Burnside looked at his watch again. The wait went on. And on.

Dawn finally snuck in the back way, filtering through the gloom almost like somebody sneaking home very, very late at night. The rain still thumped on the leaves. Burnside was worried, and getting quickly more so; how the hell was anybody going to get through that? Miserable goddamn weather. The temperature had gone down precipitously in the night, which struck Burnside as rather odd; it wasn’t supposed to get cold until after a storm. He thought.

Peters came back from their shack, a satisfied smile on his face. Alissa lay quietly on the bed, the gag resting nest to her cheek. Burnside glanced at both of them and then back out the window.

“She may not be able to get through this rain.”

“Oh yeah?” Peters drawled. “hot damn, that would mean I’d have to spend another night riding over little knife-fighter here, now wouldn’t it? That would just break my heart, ya know?” Peters was clearly depressed at the prospect. Burnside began slowly banging his head against the wall. He didn’t know how much more of this moron he could take.

The motorcycle appeared through the mist at the edge of the forest as if it had been a light bulb that somebody had just turned on. The rider paused at the clearing and looked around from beneath the hood of the poncho. Not necessarily suspicious, thought Burnside, more like professional cautiousness. The rider came on, then, and Burnside strode quickly to Alissa's side and gagged her with the pair. Resistance was useless and they both knew it. She opened her mouth wide for the gag.

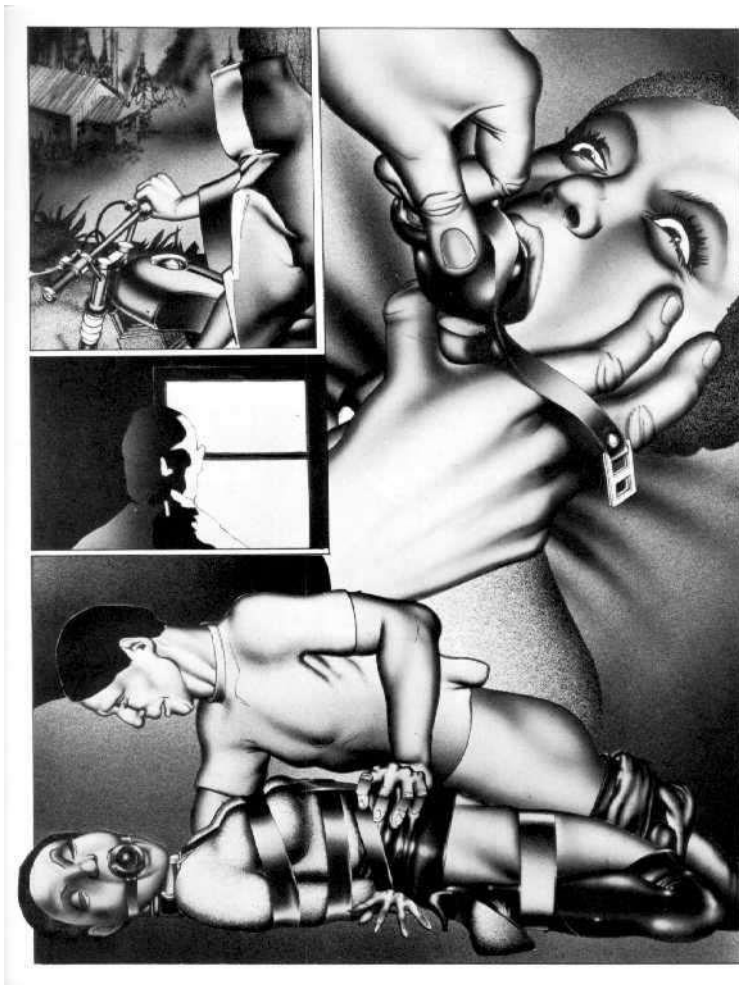
The figure on the bike switched off the ignition ten yards from the store and coasted to the foot of the steps, still turning its head back and forth, sweeping the buildings and as much of the general area as it could see. The bike sagged onto its stand and the figure disappeared up the steps and into the building.

Burnside glanced over at Peters, all tense and sweaty by the door; the boob was as ready as he'd ever be, Burnside decided. Shit. Alissa moaned, softly, and Burnside was by her side like a panther.

“One noise from you, Miss Black, and she's dead, do you understand?”

Alissa nodded her head.

“And if she goes, you go. Remember that. We take both of you out of here alive, or we leave both of you dead. It's up to you.”



Alissa nodded again. Burnside stood and went back to the window.

The figure was already out of the store and headed toward the cabins. It paused at the first of the two little shacks, Burnside's, then continued onto the second in line. Theirs.

Burnside lost sight of her as she stepped up to the door. He could hear her footsteps, though, making wet sucking sounds in the mud. He walked to Alissa's side and put the muzzle of the silenced piston to her temple and waited. Peters looked over at him, running his tongue over his lips, tense and expectant.

"Miss Black. Alissa Black. Are you in there?" The voice was pitched low, barely above a whisper. The woman rapped her knuckles lightly against the door.

Peters looked again to Burnside. Burnside nodded and Peters jerked in the door. The woman was poised, one hand raised, to knock again at the door, and at the sight of the men, she froze. Peters had a short-barreled 12-gauge shotgun aimed square at her belly. Her eyes darted first

from Peters to the shotgun and then into the room. Burnside could see in her eyes that she was going to run for it.

“If you move, Miss Hall, I’ll put a bullet right through Miss Black’s head.” He wiggled the piston to reinforce the command. The woman’s eyes darted back to Alissa, eyes big and white over the gag. Alissa moaned and shook her head.

It seemed as if nobody was going to move at all and then Peters broke the stasis with a quick one-handed lunge and grabbed the girl by the front of her poncho. Instantly, it seemed, she twisted his arm with both of her hands, kicked the shotgun onto the floor with a side kick and dropped Peters to the floor with a leg tangled behind his knees. The move was so professionally slick and effortless that it seemed more instinct than deliberate. Burnside jerked Alissa’s head by the air and snapped of the safety with a click.

“Right! There’s not need for that. I’ll do what you want,” the woman barked, dropping Peters and stepping away from him with her hands out to the side.

Peters had risen to his feet in a rage, blood thick in his face and lips working as he massaged his wrist. He picked up the shotgun, club-like, and came up behind the girl.

“Peters,” Burnside hissed, “you’ve already fucked up things enough as it is! Put the fucking gun down. Now!”

Peters slowly obeyed, leaning the gun up against the wall.

“If anybody saw what just happened, Peters, I would shoot you myself before we left here.”

Burnside’s voice was flat and emotionless, but his eyes were like a snake’s, boring into Peters’ with an intensity both vicious and cunning. Peters quailed under the glare.

“You are a totally incompetent asshole, Peters. You fuck things up one more time and you’re dead, guaranteed. Now see if you can manage to get that poncho off her without breaking your neck!”

It was Suni. Burnside cursed inwardly. Somehow, he’d known when he’d first seen her walking toward the cabin that it wouldn’t be the right one. He sighed o himself; at least she knew where the others were. He didn’t think she’d just cough up their location, though.

“You would be Miss Ling, I suppose.”

Suni stared back at him. Burnside knew that she was just looking and waiting for a chance at him. He still had the target piston pressed to the side of Alissa’s head.

“Tie her,” Burnside commanded.

Suni tensed, knowing that there was nothing she could do in her head but knowing that as soon as the ropes went on, that there would then be nothing she could do with her body. Her eyes danced back and forth between the men as Peters pulled out a pile of leather straps. She had to do something!

Burnside read the signs. “Easy, lady. Easy!” he dug the piston into the side of Alissa’s head. Suni suddenly relaxed, her shoulders sagging and her head drooping. The pile of straps produced a straitjacket.

“Where’s Miss Hall?” Burnside asked. Suni tossed her head to get strands of her hair out of her face and worked her neck around in the collar of leather. She looked back at him without expression.

They regarded each other for a minute. The woman was a professional, he thought. This is not going to be easy.

“We’ve got to understand one another, Miss Ling. I don’t have much time to fuck around playing games with you. There are ways of forcing you to tell me what I want to know. And you will. It will be a lot easier on the both of us if you just get it over with.” His voice had an almost pleading tone to it, and he cursed to himself about that.



“I’ve had some of the best torturers in the world flail away at me,” she said, conversationally, her voice made husky by the leather strap cutting into the skin. “With notable lack of success, I might add. Besides which, sport, if I read my Bertram B. Bertram right, and I rather guess I do, I think he’d take a rather a dim view of one of his employees damaging me before he could do it himself.”

“True enough, Miss Ling, true enough. But,” he bent and brought his face close to hers, “he didn’t say anything about your little black friend over there.”

“I’ve never met the lady, I’m afraid,” Suni sniffed. Alissa jerked on the bed at this latest exchange.

“I think we’ll just find out how much ‘sisterly love’ you have, Miss Ling. Peters!”

In five minutes, Peters had constructed a pyramid-shaped affair made out of light aluminum snap-together tubing he'd taken from a surprisingly small bag. Each of the four apexes of the device was well endowed with round and rectangular eyelets for straps and rope. Each of the legs was nearly five feet in length, giving the whole thing a height of just slightly below that figure.

Burnside lifted Alissa off the bed and held her aloft while Peters untied one leg. Alissa immediately thrashed with it as much as possible, but Peters had her ankle in both hands and guided it to one of the bottom apex rings. He tightened a single strap with a jerk and the foot was secured. He treated the second foot similarly. Alissa put up a good fight, Suni had to admit; her squirms and thwarted kicks had both men struggling and the aluminum frame sliding around the floor in jerks.

A very broad strap, now was used to replace the one that had formerly collared her and from a ring at its base in the back, another strap was run to and through a ring partially down the central leg of the pyramid directly behind her back. Peters pulled with customary enthusiasm and Alissa's head was pulled back in an arch till her chin pointed to the ceiling.

The next step was securing her arms, and they ended up banded together from the wrists to the elbows with strapping and clamped on top of the central leg with ever more straps. The last of the restraint straps went from her hands clean to the bottom of the center-rear leg and through another of the ubiquitous rings and was cinched off, pulling her arms down the leg.

When Peters and Burnside finally stood back, Alissa had effectively become an integral part of the pyramid, legs grotesquely splayed to reach the rings at the ends of the base leg. She was moaning slightly in the back of her throat.

Burnside plucked out the pear-gag and threw it into the bag and came back with another. He released the collar for a moment, letting her raise her head. Tears of agony and frustration streaked Alissa's face as she looked out at them.

Burnside brought out a very heavily padded cloth and leather gag and walked back to Alissa, who could only shake her head in mute protest and pleading. Burnside grabbed the scruff of her neck with one hand and jammed the balled padding against her teeth. At first Suni didn't think a human being could accommodate that much packing in one's mouth, but gradually Burnside worked it all in, then set about buckling the soft, thick face mask portion of the gag into place.

It sank into Alissa's cheeks and made what was left of her face bulge over the top of the pad. With the gag finally in place to his satisfaction, he pulled the collar strap back to its original place and again pointed her chin to the sky, jamming the gag even tighter into her mouth and face.

Quickly, economically, then, Peters snipped off her clothes with a scissors and she stood nude, helpless. Peters didn't even bother to hide an interest that became more and more pronounced with the passing second.

Burnside brought another bundle from the bag and laid it out on the floor at Suni's knees. It contained several packets of sewing needles, some lengths of extremely thin wire, a pair of Inox folding scissors and a hefty pair of tin snips. She was glad Alissa couldn't see the collection.

"The long and short of it, Miss Ling," Burnside said, "is that I need that information. And I need it now, right now. I'm going to assume for the sake of argument, that you were telling the truth when you said you'd undergone torture before. Maybe you wouldn't break. Probably you would.

"However, as you yourself pointed out, my employer will prefer to deal with you himself, I imagine, and since I have rather strict orders not to injure you any more than necessary, I find myself in a bit of a bind, so to speak.

"My orders do not include that one over there, on the other hand. My employer might like to dabble with her, but her death would be of no great consequence to him, one way or the other. Specifically, any maiming that might occur to her prior to her death would be equally ignored.

"What I intend to do, Miss Ling, is to cut off her nipples." He clicked the little scissors suggestively, "And then snip off her fingers, one by one. If that isn't enough, I will start on her toes. Her tongue after that."

Alissa had heard every single word. She began screaming and twisting when she found out about her nipples, eyes huge and muscles straining beneath a sheen of sweat pouring down her torso. She succeeded in shifting the pyramid about a tenth of an inch. The big gag was very effective and the only sound she made was a loud keening through her nose.

"You're crazy, sport," Suni said. "You've gone right straight to the loony bin." Fear was beginning to show in her eyes for the first time.

"No, Miss Ling, I am not," Burnside said softly. "What I am is losing my patience. And Miss Black," he gestured back over his shoulder with the scissors, "is in serious risk of losing substantially more than that!

Suni stared at him, still silent.

Burnside stood and walked to Alissa. Her muscles stood out, ropes under the wet skin and she made mewling noises beneath the packing.

"Last chance."

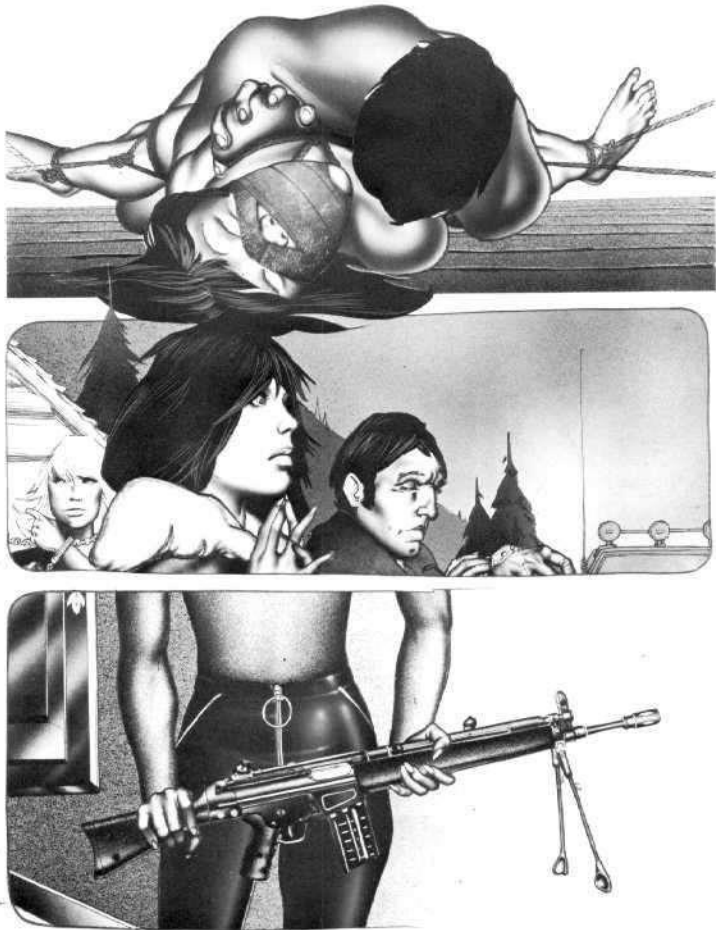
Still Suni stared at him. She frankly couldn't believe it. Burnside grabbed one breast and squeezed the nipple out into prominence between his thumb and forefinger. He brought the scissors up to within inches of the nub and looked back at Suni. Still no reply. The scissor opened like tiny jaws and closed on the nipple at its base. Alissa went wild in the straps, her scream continuous and awful.

“All right!” Suni screamed. Burnside stopped; the scissors still partially closed on the nipple. He wanted more. “I’ll tell you, you bastard, you miserable sick bastard. I’ll tell you. Leave her alone.” Alissa had fainted, more in shock than in pain. A tiny drop of blood stood out from the nipple. No more than a scratch. Suni had spoken in the proverbial nick of time.

It was now late at night. Burnside had gone to old man Grey’s place to use his phone and buy some canned food for their propane stove. In his absence, Peters, never one to waste opportunities, had plunged into Alissa once again with unabated enthusiasm. She still stood mated to the pyramid and Peters had her standing up, sweating and panting like a dog. Suni, gagged now herself, made herself a little promise to relieve Peters of certain rather distinctive parts of his anatomy the first time it was convenient. Peters ignored her and kept pounding away.

Part Four

Fanni and Ian stood in the high grass at the edge of the clearing around the house and stared off into a mist that scraped the mountains and cut off the tops of the trees. The rain had stopped, and in place of its omnipresent drumming, a dead stillness shrouded the place. Water ran in runnels through any exposed ground and the grass had a flattened, gorged look about it. The door to the cabin was wide open for the first time in days to admit some fresh air.



“Something’s gone wrong,” Fanni said, her voice a monotone, devoid of emotion. Her eyes spoke more than her voice of the concern that slowly roiled around in her. She glanced at her watch, then checked herself. A stupid gesture, she thought. Suni’s not a couple of minutes or hours late, she’s a whole goddamned day off.

Ian remained motionless, thinking.

“Anybody know where you are?”

“Alissa knew how to get up to Grey’s place, but that was as much as she knew. That was as much as I told her. Suni knows how to get back. She might have got lost...”

“negative, luv, negative. Not her. Even if she got confused, all she’d have to do is follow the reciprocal of the compass heading to the store to get back into this general area.” He thought some more. “I think I agree; something is a bit off, here.”

“She might have had some mechanical problem with that damned bike. She may even be hurt.”

“Again, unlikely.”

“I’m going back.” Fanni started for the house. Ian turned and caught up with her.

“I think it might be better if I went, Fanni. If there’s anybody unfriendly around to spread the welcoming mat, it’d be better if it were me to handle it.”

“Don’t be ridiculous, Ian. You don’t even know how to get there. I know this area inside and out. I know places around that store where you can see everything for four hundred yards and not be seen. Do you?”

He shook his head no.

“Then it’s settled. Give me the keys to the Blazer.”

Ian fumbled in the pocket of his coat and began removing one key from the ring while Fanni darted to the house.

She swung open the door to the gun cabinet and eeny-meeny-minied over the weapons inside. There were a lot of nice shotguns and a lot of nicer sporting-type rifles, but her eye finally settled on one of her father’s more recent additions, and one of which she was not particularly fond.

She hefted the beast and, with a heartfelt grunt, pried the operating handle out and pulled it back to the bolt-open notch and locked it. The gun was a Heckler & Koch model 91, which is to say nothing much more than a barely “civilianized” version of the G3 assault rifle, which is to say again that the only real difference between the two is that the G3 will fire full automatic and the 91 won’t. Simple.

Another of father’s lethal toys. Except it really wasn’t a toy. But it sure as hell was ugly; sheet metal stamping and plastic and the whole damned thing flat black. It was too muzzle-heavy, and it shoved her around too much if she tried to fire really fast, but as father was wont to say, that’s the difference between a “man’s” .308 and a “pussy’s” .223. her father had gone damn near into coma when the .30-06 was finally supplanted by the .308 and the further reduction to .223 with the mass (finally) introduction of the M-16 had him in a froth that lasted for months.

She snapped the bi-pod into the front of the forearm and carefully clipped the scope onto the flimsy little notches on the top of the receiver. The Krauts didn’t do themselves any great goddamned favors with that piss-ant excuse for a scope mount. The peculiar irony of the 91 was that it was substantially more accurate than the vast majority of civilian sporting rifles for some reason or other, so the scope was fully justified. There were four twenty-round magazines in the drawer and she stuffed three of these into her coat pockets and jammed the other one into the gun.

John was lounging in the other room with Dawnelle when she walked out. He gave her a look of mild surprise and then some amusement as she trudged across the room toward the door.

“Lions? Tigers? Elephants?” he quipped.

She gave him a well-known international sign of disrespect, and he laughed. Dawnelle looked speculative.

Alissa’s problem, Madame concluded, was that her ruthlessness had no direction other than that inspired by the moment. She was an island cast adrift from the continent of her father’s influence, existing within a wholly artificial framework established by her father, funded by her father, guarded by her father. A little girl in a gigantic playpen, one which she was herself finding as constricting as the more formally ensconced occupants; at least they had the consolation, however small, of knowing that they were held against their will and could escape to something better. Alissa didn’t have even that to look forward to. Which made her cruelties just that much more severe and capricious.

Sondra was a good case in point. She, it was, who had accompanied Alissa to Madame’s squalid cell. She, it was, who was the favored pet of the menagerie, a spoiled and willful child, like Alissa herself, reveling in what she imagined to be the charade of her slavery. And then, by degrees, she discovered that the slavery was quite genuine, and by then, of course, it was a little too late.



She and Alissa had grown together as children. Sondra's father had been a boozier who had one night disappeared to leave her and her mother alone. The mother and daughter had existed in service to the old man on one of the more obscure estates, chosen by Bertram B. for just that quality; his rare escapes from pure business chicanery demanded the bucolic sluggishness that the place offered. As often as was possible, he thought along the tiny golden child that was all that was left him of his wife.

When Sondra's mother, too, dropped dead one late afternoon, the child was adopted into the family as easily as if she had been a lost relative, and they became as sisters. Almost. The games they played as children and then as adults were always characterized by small intermittent jabs of cruelty from Alissa. Sondra never understood why and they always hurt.

But always she shrugged and pressed on.

The slave-game seemed a natural to her. The role, the appurtenances, seemed like a second skin. And it was just a game. Walking down the long corridor with her wrists clipped behind her back and the dildo twisting within her under the catsuit, she found herself content but strangely apprehensive. The blow when she had commented, sagely she had thought, on the woman squatting on the floor had hurt savagely, and she had to work to force the glimmerings of suspicion back out of sight. What was wrong with Alissa? In the car, later, the gag had been buckled so tight that the straps had sunk into her cheeks. She didn't understand. But then maybe she did.

She had watched in horrified fascination the beating Alissa had lavished onto Madame. Never, never, had she seen Alissa like this before. Where was her friend?

For a short time, then, Alissa totally ignored Sondra, leaving her, paradoxically, either in the strictest of positions that the human body could attain, or totally free to roam the expansive house. Alissa had the new woman to toy with; Sondra would have to fend for herself in the meantime. The depression grew, then began to fester. Jealousy?

The tides of circumstance changed and she was back under Alissa's control, only now she and the other woman were often as not thrown together, usually humiliatingly and always painfully. The chasm between Sondra and Alissa seemed to have widened to Grand Canyon proportions and, illogically, Sondra blamed the new woman – Madame.

On this day, it amused Alissa to give Sondra a bit of *carte blanche* with Madame.

Sondra was only too happy to comply; the other day it had been Madame's turn.

Alissa had them in identical cells down a short corridor from the rest of the slave quarters. They were, at the moment, her very special playthings. For the last several mornings, Alissa would pick them up, usually Madame first, and then walk them down to the very end of the walkway and through the door into the chamber she used exclusively, their leashes dangling back from her small fist.

This morning was to be no different. The key rasped in the lock the same as usual and, after a short pause, Alissa stepped gingerly into the cell as if expecting an attack. That always struck Sondra as somehow amusing; the collar around her neck weighed a good ten pounds and was secured to the wall by a chain that must have exceeded her body weight. What did Alissa think she was going to do, chew through the damned thing? After a careful glance to make sure all was as it should be, Alissa stepped all the way into the cell, the slim bracelets open and dangling from one hand. Sondra turned her back and put her hands behind her. Her ankles were already hobbled.

The huge collar fell away to be immediately replaced by the light steel one, complete with its leash. The obligatory gag came next, and Alissa turned her around to appraise her efforts. Apparently satisfied, she turned her back on Sondra and let her out of the cell.

Madame, similarly bound, had been left standing out in the hall. Her eyes lifted for a second and the two women looked at each other. Alissa gave both leashed a jerk and they were off to another day of diversions.

In the center of the “playroom” was a longish wooden plank set up parallel to the floor and about a foot and a half above it, supported by heavy wooden legs. Coils of rope sat on it near one end.

Alissa separated the women, leading Sondra to the side of the room and attaching the end of her leash to a hook in the wall. She then approached Madame and shortened up the hobble to one link. She came back to Sondra with the key to the bracelets and locked her hands out in front of her.

“Your turn, sweetie,” she said, simply, hooking a thumb over her shoulder at Madame. Madame got a rather caged look in her eyes with those words. The tone of Alissa’s voice was bantering, but the words were a definite command, not a suggestion; less than wholehearted cooperation from Sondra and she knew she’d get a lot worse than she gave.

Madam’s attentions of the other day were still fresh in her memory, and on her body, and she got down to Alissa’s business with alacrity. The latter leaned against a wall and watched.

Sondra laid Madame back on the wooden slab and bound her upper body firmly to the board with some of the rope. She took another length of the rope, tied it around the ankle cuff and pulled Madame’s feet up and back and doubled her legs up against her chest. Then kept pulling until her shins were pressed into the side of her face. Only then did she tie off the rope. Another rope wound around her legs just behind the knees and the position was completed. Alissa nodded and a short cane clattered onto the floor.

Madame clearly was not enjoying this to the hilt; the backs of her legs were totally exposed and taut as wire from her heels to her bottom. Worse, her bare sex stuck out as if it were a side show all by itself. This was going to be very, very entertaining.

“Take out the gag. I want a little background music,” Alissa commented. Sondra fumbled with the buckle, largely hidden behind Madame’s head and tangled in her hair. “We’ll just leave yours on, Sondra, old chum.”

The first stroke was about as bad as she’d expected, and the second and third predictably more so, especially with her legs so stretched. It wasn’t until the cane sought out that part of her so conspicuously arrayed that she began to scream and beg.

Sondra was like a machine, the cane rising and falling with what would doubtless have been boring regularity to any disinterested observer. Neither of the two observers was disinterested. Not in the slightest. Sondra could see in Alissa’s contented slouch and the glittering eyes that she’d saved herself for the day.

The next day found the two of them dangling from the ceiling. They faced each other, joined at their heads by a gag that had a pear on both sides and double straps to hold two mouths about the pears.

Their weights were held up by an enormously thick rubber strap stretching from one side of the cell to the other. This they sat astride, as well as the anchored dildoes, one for each. Their ankles were stretched wide to the walls at the sides of the strap. Their arms were caught up in leather pouches behind their backs.



For hours they bobbed and swayed on the perch, coming to increasingly violent orgasms as the gentle undulations of the strap worked the rubber phallus's deep into their bodies. At intervals, Alissa would brand white-hot lines across their legs and flanks with another of the canes. The pain seemed somehow to work as an absolutely perfect counterpoint to the

overwhelming erotica of the ride on the strap. Neither of the two women would have believed such vividly intense sensations to be possible at all, let alone desirable. Or survivable.

The look Alissa directed up to them was smug, almost loquacious in its aura of contentment. And something else, Sondra dimly perceived. She struggled against the waves of sexual explosions that seemed somehow to go right to the top of her head and then all the way back to the tips of her toes and then back again, always returning to and originating from between her legs even the slight turning of her head to better see Alissa's upturned face brought forth a paroxysm of sweating, writhing delight. Alissa was extremely pleased about something. Her stare was fixed on Madame.

"Daddy knows where your girlfriend is, bitch." Instantly, Madame stiffened, whether from orgasm or from the import of the words, Sondra couldn't tell. Madame's eyes had flown open and looked squarely into hers. "He just called to tell me. He's going to bring her here."

Madame had a strange expression in her eyes, one that Sondra had not seen before. Fear? For herself or for the other one? She couldn't tell for sure. A flicker of emotion equally indecipherable flickered across Alissa's face as she saw Madame respond. Sondra had the absurd impression that it might have been jealousy. Another surge of heat ballooned out from her crotch and she surrendered to it fully. Priorities were priorities. After all.

Like insects, they had come. Locusts. Fleas in the fall. Gorilla had fled for his life after Madame had been spirited away by the Bertram Boys, but hadn't gone as far as they had hoped. The old man's attentions had been diverted so rapidly by subsequent events that the army of clean-shaven goons had accomplished little more than consolidating their position in the house and grounds. Digging out the employees hadn't been very high on the list. Which was exceedingly fortunate for Gorilla; the old man knew a great deal about him and didn't like what he read. Gorilla was slated for a one-way to the nearest lime pit.

He knew Madame would be back. Somehow. Some way. And he waited. On the outside, but with a conduit, risky and fraught with security pitfalls, to the inside. Her name was Maria and she was without doubt the smallest of all the slaves Madame had ever possessed. And the only one she had ever freed. And nobody but Gorilla and Madame, hopefully, knew about her. She wore the chains and endured Alissa's whippings as did all the other women in the compound. And she watched, and Gorilla knew all that she did.

When Madame had been dropped back into the compound, Gorilla had all but danced for joy, then had caught sight of his near three hundred pounds of bulk flouncing around the room in the mirror and desisted. Even big ugly men have some decorum. He had to know more, a lot more.

Maria's specific problem was that she existed on the periphery of the hierarchy that now ruled extant in the house and, perforce, some of her information was inevitably sketchy. It did provide Gorilla with enough background "ambiance" information to tell him that things had well and truly

gone down the tubes, especially where Alissa was concerned. He too, like Madame, had thought the transformation was complete with the brat. They were both, it seemed, completely wrong.

That stung Gorila's pride, more than anything else. He had adjudged himself a better judge of character than that. He would, it seemed, have to turn serious energies to the problem. And get Madame the hell out of there, by the way.

At the same time, the shrewd component of Gorila's brain-works, so skillfully disguised under the overt trappings of ogre, warned him that extricating Madame and tending to the brat would only be scaling the tip of the iceberg. The kid's old man was the real problem here.

The Hall woman offered promise; her short tenure had convinced him of that, if nothing else. He was convinced that a linkup would be to the advantage of both sides. But how to accomplish it? He didn't even know if she were still alive, although he suspected that she was. And how would he broach the subject to the woman, knowing as he did the personal and professional enmities involved between Madame and Hall? It wasn't the kind of additional encumbrance he needed at the moment. His real problems were a lot closer to home.



And then Maria told him that Madame was to be branded. His time for dithering was at an end. She said she'd know exactly when in a couple of days at most.

Madame herself got the cheery news while wearing and being worn by a novel device that she had started years ago and which Alissa had improved on during her stay as Madame's slave. They had both provided input during the design and construction stages and Alissa had used it on many occasions. It was Madame's turn, this cycle.

The device was simply a two-inch-thick hollow steel tube erupting from the cement floor at a 60-degree angle. The "user" would be strapped to this pole, feet toward the top end and buttocks held several inches from the bottom of the pole and the floor itself. A ring at the top of the pole would be used as the anchoring point for another strap that was attached to the "user's" hair. The strap was shortened until the unfortunate on the pole would be forced to bend sharply forward from the waist, the weight of her torso, sympathetic to the simple demand of gravity, would then be held up either by the girl's hair or the strength of her belly muscles. Or both. Her little hands, needless to say, would be tucked carefully out of the way of trouble. Madame had said that it was

just peachy wonderful for meditation. Particularly when, as now, a pivoting plugger had been attached near the bottom.

Madame had been part of the device for several hours when Alissa found her way through the door of the cell. She watched Madame squirming and sweating for a couple of minutes, musing. Madame only dimly registered her entrance. The muscles in her stomach had long since ceased any effective countermeasures to the pull coming from the ground and now she hung from the strap in her hair as much as anything else. As long as she remained perfectly motionless, the pain was at least marginally tolerable. The long greasy dildo made that difficult.

Alissa continued to say nothing. She stepped, instead, to the top of the pole and unbuckled the strap and let Madame's back swing slowly backward until it touched the floor. Madame's belly muscles were a screaming wall of pain from her crotch clear to her sternum. She gasped in short little breaths of air as Alissa released her legs and swung them, too, to the floor.

Alissa's movements were almost languid as she stood Madame up on her feet and began walking her toward the door of the cell, one hand on her arm, gentle, solicitous, almost. Madame should have been instantly suspicious, but the effects of having spent an afternoon on the pole had rendered her normal perceptions and subsequent reactions dormant. Moribund would have been more like it.

The room they finally entered was new to Madame's experience and her interest flared, she had built the place, after all. It reminded her vaguely of those movable walls in modern buildings so that the tenants can make whatever beehive they want without affecting the basic structure. She moved her face around the walls, trying to remember where she was, trying to figure out where Alissa had thrown this together. Sweat ran into her eyes and she shook her head against it. Alissa left her standing in the center of the room and walked to the side to stand, watching.

The brazier was electric and squat like a box against one side of the room. Its bricks were an odd off-white and looked dusty. A door was set into the front and was opened by a black plastic handle running horizontally across the top. Below that was a smallish window into the interior of the furnace.

A stout electrical cable drooped down the wall from behind the box and the knobbed, tongued end sat under its wall socket. A bulky pair of insulated mittens hung from a hood on the right side of the thing. It was an oddly muted little display of purpose. Perhaps because in its utilitarian mundanity it was so far over-shadowed by the remainder of the display in the room.

And that display was what had Madame's attention from virtually the first second she walked into the place. It was the reaction to the appearance of that display that so enraptured and held Alissa's attention. The brands. The irons hanging black and clean and variegated from their small hooks.

And Madame finally fully understood the solicitude; Alissa had wanted her fully off guard for the moment of the unveiling. That she had been. She whirled and caught the Cheshire Cat grin,

the slouched but menacing lean into the wall. The sense of almost infinite boredom suddenly enlightened by a purpose. Short-lived to be sure, but a purpose. The branding, the searing of the authority figure that she would subdue, that Alissa could defeat. Madame. The one-time mistress reduced to abject, and initiated, chattel. Madame, the surrogate father-figure that had failed, ultimately, that she could lash out at, finally, that she could eradicate, utterly.

And the poor stupid asshole had it all wrong, Madame told herself. The irons terrified her in a frank, raw way. The pain and the mark would be awful, horrendous, but Madame's psyche was far too well established with itself and with its innate flaws and few superiorities and with a basic ability to face itself in a mirror to feel the utter character destruction, the stigma, the abyss that Alissa seemed to seek for her.

Madame's surmise about her character, astute or otherwise, wouldn't have had any effect on Alissa's decision, even had she known. Introspection was something that rarely went beyond a questioning of other people's motives for causing her irritations. And now wasn't the time for that.

She walked to the racks of irons and ran her fingertips lightly over the knobs at the ends of the hafts, pausing, starting again, choosing. "What would you think would be appropriate? How about a 'B' for bitch, or... a 'C' for cunt... or..." She walked to another rack.

"A.' For Alissa's property." She held the rod with its crude heavy letter out aimed at Madame's face. "Do you like that?"

Madame said nothing and stared off into space, avoiding the iron with her gaze. Alissa meant it and Madame knew it.

"And now, where do we put it?" she walked around Madame in a tightening circle, one hand under her chin and the iron waving from the other over her shoulder.

She was interrupted by the sudden entrance of one of her women guards banging into the cell without the usual enforced formality of knocking and asking permission. The woman propelled a tiny waif of a slave before her so that the latter skidded across the tile and into a huddle at Alissa's feet. Alissa's face was a mask of anger and questioning surprise.

"She's been sending out little messages to the outside, this one," the guard barked, furious and glaring at the slave.

Alissa's eyes bulged but she stifled the gasp of rage, and fear, that would have come. Maria! It wasn't possible!

"I have the message, or most of it, anyway. We caught her just before she finished!" the beefy woman handed a tiny slip of paper across the room to Alissa. Alissa was still staring a Maria in shock. If Daddy found out about this! She took the paper and smoothed it out. Maria was a small quivering ball under her feet. The guard, enraged, thumped a hefty kick into her side and would

have delivered another, curses a continuous stream from her lips, but Alissa waved her off and turned to the words Maria had penciled.

G.

Don't know how much longer can keep comm. All suspicious around me. M. to be branded tonight!! A. says BBB knows where Hall is. Bringing her here som

The message ended abruptly. The little bitch, the dirty little bitch. Alissa felt empty, devoid of emotions. How much more had she sent off and to whom? It just wasn't fair. Tears welled from her eyes. Just when everything was starting to go right, this happens. Daddy would never trust her again. Never!

Her gaze finally dropped to the girl hunched below her and the rage she felt swelled up like a balloon. Her hands shook so that she was in danger of ripping the fragile message but somehow, from somewhere within her, she got hold of herself. She couldn't destroy the message. It had to go out. It must! As long as the parties on the outside thought things were still normal, they would probably either not act or might even be enticed into making a stupid mistake.

She glared again at the message. Who the hell was "G"? what did it stand for? Gastropod, George, Geoffrey, Ginger, Gerry, Garage Sale... Gorila. Gorila. He'd disappeared when Daddy's people got there. She figured he'd be smart enough to hightail it to the woods and that was apparently what he'd done. She squinted up her eyes in thought, she'd never noticed any particularly partiality extended toward Maria, or any of the other slaves for that matter. And yet, common sense dictated that Madame must have had at least one deep plant amongst the girls. Certainly, she always seemed well on top of things. But Maria? Why would she take the risk for a mistress? And why would Gorila stick around for a defunct employer? It made only a very flimsy amount of sense that there might possibly be some additional attachment between the three of them, but she really couldn't see it.

"How is Gorila, these days?" she asked lightly. Maria's accompanying jerk confirmed the suspicion, and it all began to click in her head.

Gorilla probably didn't give a damn about Hall or anything else. He wanted Madame out of there. Both of them did. She glanced at maria. Why else the emphasis on the branding? And how much else did Gorila know? She grabbed a pencil and erased the notations about the branding coming tonight and wrote in instead that it was to occur tomorrow. At the end of the message, she continued with the interrupted writing, saying that Fanni would be in sometime next week.

"How did you usually end the message?" maria hunched herself deeper into a ball and refused to say anything.

“Robin, her cell mate, say that she always put ‘MR’ at the ending,” the guard volunteered. Maria had been betrayed by one of her own, just as Gorila had secretly feared.

“How does she deliver it?” she asked, no longer talking to Maria.

“It goes out in the garbage, usually in an empty cereal carton.” My, my, Gorila must love message-pickup time, Alissa thought.

“Very well. Get Cheevers to take a couple of his people and watch that truck and where it goes and to pick up anybody who noses around in the garbage. I want them brought here, and I want them brought in alive! Do you understand that?”

The guard nodded her head yes.

“Make damned sure that Cheevers does, too. Here!” She threw the message to the guard, who snatched it out of the air and left.

“You’re going to tell me everything I want to know, aren’t you, Maria, my sweet.” Maria said nothing. Alissa wound her fingers in the hair on the small head and jerked her to her feet.

Thirty seconds later, they were in another small room, accompanied by another guard. Alissa expertly threw Maria to the floor and, aided by the guard, roped her legs together at the ankles and knees.

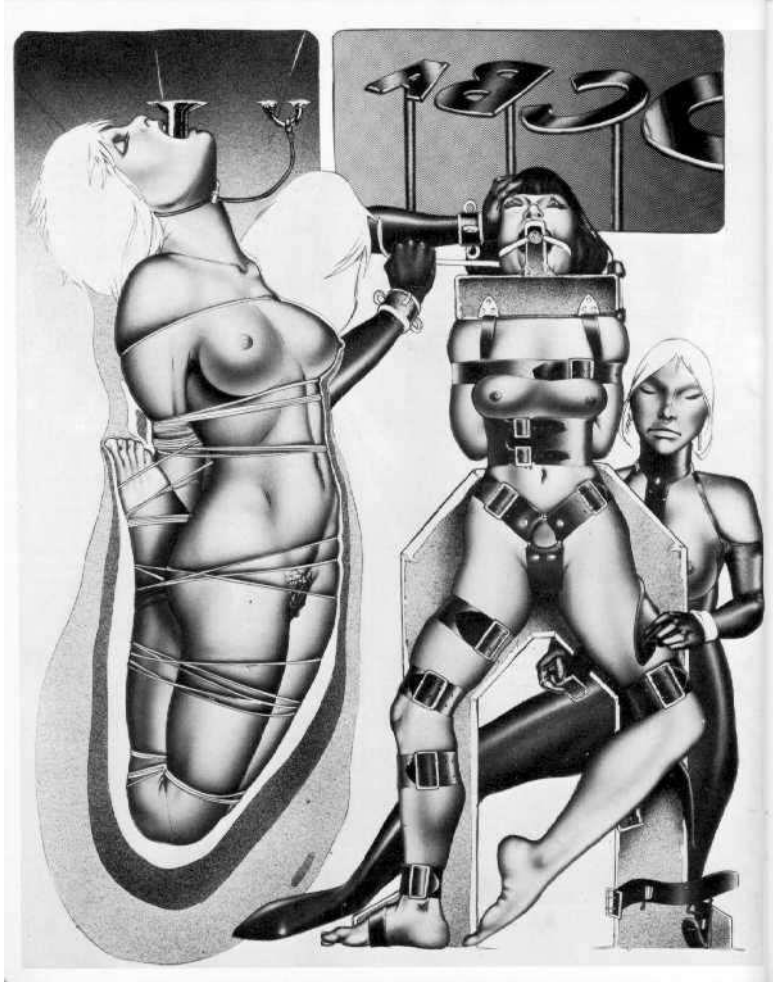
She ran a cord between the braceleted wrists and pulled the ankles up to meet them. Another cord went clear around Maria’s already doubled legs and added extra, redundant, security. Alissa then spun a cocoon of rope around the arms and chest, the elbows already pressed hard together by a single cord.

The ceiling of the room was quite low, relative to the floor. From the center of the ceiling protruded a polished brass knob, striking similar to a doorknob in both size and shape. Next to it sprung a sturdy eye-bolt of plain galvanized steel.

Alissa and the guard hoisted Maria up onto a wooden stand immediately below the knob and coaxed her jaws apart enough to get the bulk of the knob into her mouth. In a smoothly rehearsed motion, the guard snapped the end of a short length of quarter-inch steel cable through the eye-bolt and pulled the other end around Maria’s throat and snapped it into place in a slipknot.

Alissa jerked the wooden stand out from under Maria’s knees and with a bump she found her entire weight supported by her mouth’s grasp of the knob. The presence of the cable around her neck explained itself instantly, let go of the knob and hang herself.

“When you feel like doing what I want, just signal the guard here.” Alissa headed for the door.



“What do I do if she can’t hang on?” asked the guard. She hadn’t really intended the pun.

“Watch. Make sure she’s dead before you let her down.” And with that cheery sentiment she was gone.

Maria was terrified to a degree that she would never have believed. She still found herself dazed by the brutal quickness with which it had happened. To Alissa she was nothing more than a traitorous piece of meat; she wanted her information, but if she wouldn’t give it up, she’d hang from the cable and Alissa wouldn’t care less. All her steeling herself to the ideas of torture had dealt with conventional coercion and with, ultimately, the belief that she would come out of it alive. She bit on the knob in desperation. She knew she couldn’t hold it for more than a few minutes. The guard was watching with a kind of fascination. If Alissa had at least stayed in the

room, Maria might have held out some hope, but she'd left her to an ignominious and agonizing death on the end of a steel cable with no more thought than that which she might have expended on an arrant fly. Only the guard would be witness to her life's end. And she didn't want to die! God, she didn't want to die!

Part Five

Cheevers and his men watched the truck drive in and then drive out and they followed it and watched and waited. Nobody came. And they went back to the house and reported to a visibly disappointed Alissa. Cheevers himself marked the carton as it tumbled with the rest of the refuse from the back of the boxlike truck. It was not molested. Alissa chewed her knuckles and went ahead with the performance she'd slated for the evening. A private and very, very intimate concatenation between herself and Madame.

The hardest moment for Gorila occurred when he realized that the garbage truck was being watched, seriously watched for the first time since the new "owners" had set up shop. Something was badly off here. He'd dumped the garbage and seen the goons scrambling for position as he drove away. Maria had been made. He didn't need the note to know that the time for any action was now.

Madame found herself stretched and strapped and, for all intents and purposes, glued to a low, broad, bench-like affair before the brazier. The program had begun to get rather depersonalized; guards had done the dirty work, not Alissa.

The guards left and Madame had the variable solace of being left to herself before the moment of slaughter, the instant of irrevocable demarcation and the patina that it would lend to her life from that time on. She shifted and pulled at the restraints and none of them would budge in the slightest, weeniest bit. Never had her skin borne the tiniest of blemishes, the merest of flaws. And now... Jesus Christ, now...

Alissa clacked into the room on boots astoundingly high and polished so that the yellow eye of the brazier was reflected back to her. Her expression was oddly unformed. Madame didn't know what to make of that. The nebulous information conveyed by the bland looks didn't stay her from a quick reconnoiter to the iron-racks, however, almost as if she had some last-minute doubts about the precise letter to be engraved into Madame's hide. The "A" iron was still the one she picked up, finally. The little door was opened and the figured end of the rod disappeared into the glare inside.

Alissa pounded back and forth across the room, seeming to ignore the body bound to the table for her ministrations. Madame thought she might have something a bit weighty on her mind. The weightier the better, she thought.

Gorila had the place so well cased that he figured it would be something like sticking out your hand and plucking one grape out of the bunch to enter anywhere he chose. That was on the surface, and it was tempting, but for had never been a surface-dweller. There was a catch in there, somewhere. He'd find it. The man and the time he'd chosen almost on first impressions. Most of the time his first impressions, but that was still the surface.

There were six goons at the mansion, as far as Gorila could tell. If there were more than the six, they hid in the house like moles, so six it was. Figuring a normal eight-hour working day within a framework of round-the-clock security, that would logically mean that only two of the fuckers would necessarily be up and around. Two of the remaining four would probably be asleep, and the other two were probably either sleeping themselves, or off the grounds of fucking-off someplace.

One of the two guards on the early evening shift had a scrofulous old MGB parked in the underground garage and, true to its British heritage, brought to its owner an entirely new meaning to the word perverse. It had run on only one other occasion that Gorila knew about and he'd been close enough as the thing clanked by to see the half-relieved, half-smug expression on the driver's face; an expression much seen on the visages of those who have a taste for masochism and English cars. A fanatic, Gorila thought. Poor bastard. And he'd made his choice on the spot.

Tonight, as usual, the boob was at it again, his upper body disappearing into the open engine bay as if the damned thing had eaten him. The goon's "uniform" of casual clothes was hidden under the coveralls he'd worn since he'd gotten the car and which looked even more scroungy than the car. Bertram B. would not have appreciated the attention lavished on the car at the expense of the attention that should have been lavished on the fact that Gorila had just strolled in through the open garage door. He'd made sure that the other guard was watching his end of the house as he was supposed to, and then came calling on this one, who wasn't.

Gorila bopped him with a wrench and dropped him down into the trench in the floor which served the place rather than a hoist. No hue and cry.

Gorila immediately spotted a small portable transmitter/receiver the guards used to talk to one another while they were on duty in the house, and the larger set for calling the cavalry when things got a bit rough. An innocuous black button set into a separate box next to the radio was probably some kind of panic-button. A sheet of cheap typing paper had been taped onto the wall over the radio and contained call signs and frequencies.



One of the abbreviated call signs attracted Gorila's immediate attention; BBB. Someone had gone over it with a broad-tipped dye marker and drawn the transparent line clean over to frequency itself. It was the only such indicator on the sheet of paper and clearly said, "Call if you must, but you'd better have a damned good reason!" Interesting.

He picked up the guard's keys and stole into the house. The other goons had to be accounted for. Quickly. The guard on the bottom of the grease rack stirred.

Mari again flew into the cell, propelled into the opposing wall with some enthusiasm by the same woman guard who'd brought her in the first time. Alissa ceased her pacing and glared at the girl, signaling to the guard with a jerk of her chin. The guard hauled Maria to her feet and banged her back into a corner of the room. Tears of rage and humiliation poured from Maria's eyes and streaked her cheeks. She hated, despised herself for her weakness on the knob. Now the bitch knew about her and Gorila and that she worked for Madame. She couldn't meet Madame's eyes.

The guard was busy in the meantime. From rings at the sides of the corner, straps dangled and into these Maria was woven like a piece of cloth. Two heavy bands encircled her at waist and throat and pressed her into the angle of the corner, her arms crushed between her back and the juncture. Each knee was lifted to the level of her waist and banded into place against the cold stone so that she was left spread wide and vulnerable. Her ankles were then crossed and strapped together and pulled into the angle of the corner, under her bottom.

“I’m going to let you watch, you little twat,” Alissa threatened. “I’m going to show you exactly what’s coming to her.” She gestured over her shoulder toward Madame, “and then, to you.”

Maria’s whine was a tiny thing in the room, small but distinct. Alissa pressed a gleamy red nail into the doe-soft skin on Maria’s inner thighs to add to her point and to give Maria an exact indication of where she’d be getting the marks. The guard uttered an ill-covered snicker and went to stand by the door.

Alissa walked to the brazier and drew out the iron. A short plank of pine wood was leaning from the brazier’s stand onto the wall at an angle Alissa looked over the glowing end of the iron and then, with a quick movement of her arm, pressed the signature hard into the wood. There came to the listener’s ears the tiniest of sizzles and to their eyes the sight of acrid grey smoke spiraling up from the meeting.

Maria’s whine was more evident now, and Madame jerked her head away and bit her lip. Alissa gave the tow of them a nasty look from over her shoulder, then put the iron back into the furnace. The guard looked disappointed.

The guards downstairs in the prison section were all women, just as Maria had said. Gorila was pleased, but still tense. Three of them he’d already dispensed with, finding two of them asleep in their beds and ambushing one more as she walked down a hallway. This latter had been tougher than Gorila would have expected, but with his combination of speed, agility, and ineluctable strength, it was only seconds before she, too, joined her two sisters in a single, otherwise unoccupied cell.

In this, of all places, Gorila had expected, and encountered, absolutely no difficulty in obtaining restraints. The choice of the day happened to be sitting in a large cardboard box in the cell, and that was plasti-cuffs in the hundreds, neatly housed in clear plastic envelopes. Several dozens of the new disposable nylon/plastic gags were in a small box in with the cuffs. These were simple hollow pear-section plugs with straps identical to the plasti-cuffs sprouting from the forward edges. At the front edges of the gag, which would protrude slightly from the mouth, shallow grooves had been cast to accommodate teeth so that once forced into the mouth, the teeth would tend to snap down into the depressions and hold the plugs in place. Some of the gags came with the straps and some without. Gorila used the ones with both.

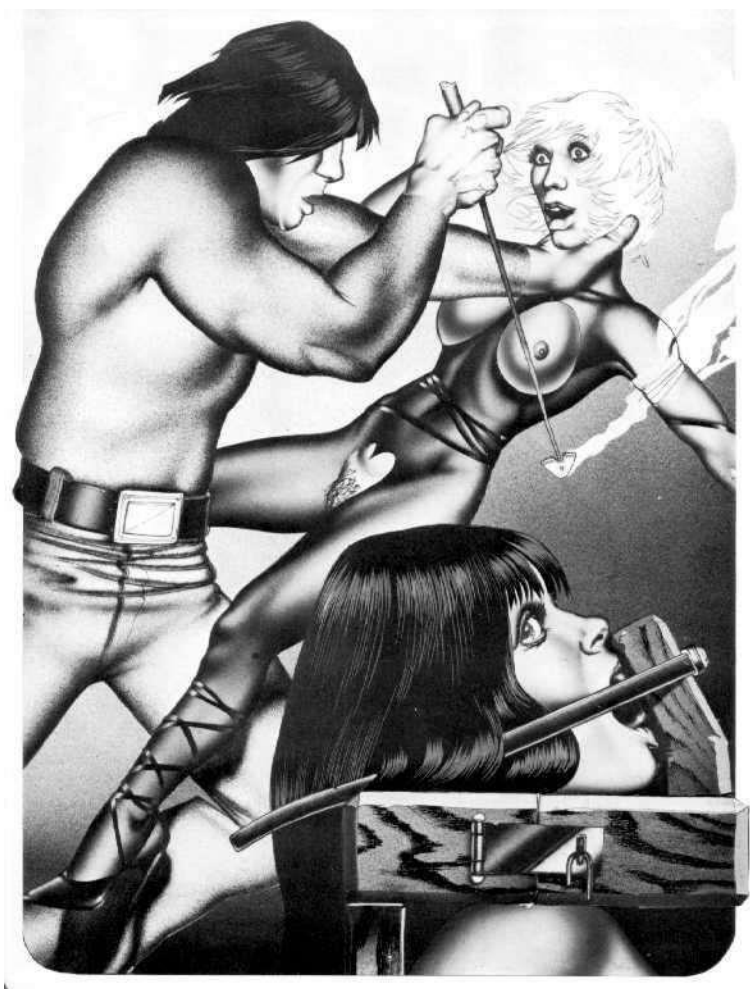
The last of the three women had kicked out savagely with her feet as Gorila had snared her and her scream for help was reduced to a muffled squawk when he popped the translucent pear

into her mouth. The stiff side straps dangled around like a pair of thick whiskers as he threw her to the floor and pulled her arms behind her back. The lock serrations on the inside of the plastic band that bound her hands buzzed through the lock-block and the hard, sharp-edged strap dug into her wrists. He twisted around, then, and entrammeled her feet, she yelling into the gag and clawing at him with her tied hands all the while, leaving a couple of nasty gouges running down his back.

Irritated by this lack of affection and niggardly show of cooperation, Gorila sat astride her arms and pulled another of the bands around her elbows and pulled till they touched one another. That little ploy visibly quieted her rejection. To assure it, he secured her wrists to her ankles with the last of the bands, hogtying her in the middle of the hall. Only then did he fasten the two bands attached to the sides of the gag. She glared up at him and panted, wincing once as the gag straps dug into her cheeks. Gro patted her on the head and then slung her over his shoulder, her feet and hands on top of his shoulder and the rest of her describing and attractive, but grunting, bow at his waist. Then he plopped her into the cell with her two girlfriends. It was then that he heard the scream.

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Madame jerked and thrashed at the thick strapping. The iron was coming closer and closer and suddenly it touched, ever so lightly. Her scream was a wild tearing thing in the silence. Another scream of sympathy and fear, seeped its way through the wad in Maria's mouth. Her eyes were as huge and wide as Madame's. Alissa pulled the iron away, bending over the thigh to examine the touch. Light as it had been, the flesh was clearly imprinted with the big "A" and was already red and blistered. A real lasting brand had to be applied with some force and some waiting, she knew. She again poised the iron, directly over the mark. She smiled at Madame. It was a joy to be happy in one's work.



Shed had eyes only for the job at hand and didn't, thus, see the huge paw reach past the open door and pluck the last of her guards. She did, however, vaguely hear a small scuffling and then a decidedly solid thump. She glanced around the room, failing at first to notice that she was now alone with Madame and the still whining Maria. At first, she was nothing more than irked by the woman's absence; the two slaves were well secured and she would need no real assistance. Still though...

"Gretchen?" she said, voice hard and authoritative. Silence. "Gretchen!" Her voice was now an admixture of command and a sneaking fear. Still nothing. Madame seemed unaware of anything other than that she was going to get another taste of the brand momentarily, but Maria had stopped her whining, Maria had noticed a couple of things. Alissa looked at her and walked over to the open door, the brand still in her hand.

As she began to peer around the sill, an enormous form filled the opening, huge and amorphous and moving fast. One hand reached under the brand and crushed her hand in his, her small fist disappearing completely within his grasp. The other grabbed her by the belt around her waist and bore her up straight off the floor and held her as one of his feet kicked hers out from

beneath her. She was swept back onto the floor with her body flat to the surface. Her head cracked onto the tiles with a painful smack. Gorila! Here! The other guards!

Almost as if reading her thoughts, Gorila put his face to hers and growled, “All your helpers have been taken care of, little slave.” He pried the iron out of her hand and threw it across the floor then dragged her back to her feet and pushed her across the room and into the corner by Maria.

“Untie her. Quick.”

Alissa stood wither mouth open, eyes blank as Gorila turned to Madame. He saw her still gawking and picking up the iron, still hot to the touch but no longer glowing, and jammed it into the rounded leather-covered bottom that was half turned to him. Alissa yelped and jumped away as the hid burned away from the iron.

“I said move, little slave. Now.”

Alissa turned and began tugging at Maria’s bindings.

Gorila gazed at the “A” tentatively burned into Madame’s skin and felt a kind of empty despair at its ugliness, but at least it had a chance of heling up into healthy invisibility and for that, at least, he could be happy. He released Madame carefully, solicitously, but with disarming speed, nonetheless. He had dallied long enough and he remembered bleakly that he had done nothing to secure the first guard in the garage.

Madame seemed in a daze and was flaccid to his touch as he helped her up off the table. The shock of the pain and the speed of the turn of her situation had her punchy. As usual, though, ti took her little time to begin stabilizing. The Madame of yore and olde began to manifest herself.

After assuring herself that the apparition that stood before her was indeed Gorila, she turned to Maria, now down from the wall and standing behind Alissa, now suddenly very meek and mild-mannered with her eyes cast to the ground. Gorila stood between her and the door, but she showed no tendency toward moving.

“Where to?” Madame asked, voice flat. Gorila fidgeted and rubbed his face.



“Almost anyplace but here, but...”

“What?” Madame said, turning to face him.

“As crazy as this might sound, it might be better if we try to get together with Hall... maybe try to work out something so that we can work like some kind of team...” Madame made a face and thought about it and then slowly nodded, still watching Gorila. “The only thing is I don’t know where the hell she is...”

“She does,” Madame finished for him, nodding toward Alissa. Alissa seemed to shrink a couple of inches, standing there. “And I think that with a little prodding and poking...”

“Or maybe just a little hanging around!” Maria interjected. “You know just what I mean, don’t you, bitch!”

“We might coax our rebellious little slave to draw us the nicest map, Madame continued. She walked slowly to the discarded iron and picked it up. “I wonder if there’s a letter “M” around here some place...?”

“I’ll tell you,” Alissa surrendered, her voice so soft that one had to strain to the ears to hear it.

“I’ll tell you.”

“A great pity,” Madame said. She’d found her letter “M”. “A genuine shame.”

The whole crowd of them stumped up the stairs leading to the main house. Gorila had introduced Alissa to the joys of the plasti-cuffs downstairs and she stood with her arms pulled hard behind her back, her small breast jutting. Maria walked beside her with a long rope of Alissa’s hair in one hand like a leash. Her ankles were presently unfettered, but surrounded by three people as she was, kicking would produce more pain than pleasure.

Gorila held them up at the head of the stairs, pausing with his hand on the doorknob. He looked back at Maria. “Gag her. Tight.”

Maria instantly did as she was told. The plastic pear was the biggest she had been able to find and it was an agonizing stretch for Alissa to get her mouth around it; her teeth clicked almost mechanically into the slots. There was no way she’d ever be able to spit it out. It was a long time since she’d worn a gag; nothing had changed. Maria locked the device more firmly into Alissa’s mouth with the two side-bands pulled into face-squeezing tightness. Over this, finally, went a heavily padded face mask of foam-filled leather.

When it was buckled into place, Gorila took his gaze from her and slowly, cautiously pried open the door. He looked out, gradually swinging the door further and further open. Nothing.

###

The door to the garage was open! Gorila knew it! The little bastard had recovered from the conk on the head. He could just barely make out the sound of the man’s voice talking.

Gorila could hear no reply. The radio! He motioned the women to stay back and he glided up to the door like a shark.

“No, goddamnit, I just came to, for Christ’s sake... No, no, I haven’t checked the goddamned place out yet, Simonds.... I tried that but I can’t raise Howards on the fuggin’ walkie-talkie. I can’t get hold of anybody else, either.”

“Bullshit! You call the old man, I sure as fuck ain’t!... Look asshole, I’m gonna check the house; whoever hit me didn’t take my gun. I’m going to check this out first, before I start hollering to Mr. Bertram!” there was another pause as the person on the other end of the connection said something and then the guard slammed down the mike with a clatter and picked up the Ingram machine gun. Gorila’s sharp little ears heard the brittle snickering as the bolt was pulled back. The guard’s muttered oaths almost covered it.

It was at this time that Gorila made a rather unpleasant discovery, his gun was gone. The little snubby .38 that fit right in his pocket. Only it wasn’t right in his pocket at all. Jesus Christ, he swore to himself, and his hands flashed around his pockets hoping that he’d merely dropped it into the wrong hole. No go. He must have lost it scuffling with those damned broads down in the basement. Fuck!

Light as a three-hundred-pound feather, he scampered back down the corridor to the women and bundled them back to the interior of the house, talking fast and low to Madame, who trotted at his side and kept still.

The guard slithered through the house like a snake, always with the gun’s stubby muzzle pointed to cover an arc in front of him. This was bad, bad, bad, fucking around with that miserable car and letting some sonofabitch just walk right in and bash him on the head.

The man lived in a genuine horror of pissing off the boss. He’d known the pilot of that helicopter that’d got ripped off by the broads and the rumors of what had happened to him subsequent to the event were rife and embellished and mostly true. The man bit down a scream of rage and id what he was supposed to have been doing when Gorila made his sly entrance earlier.



He heard a woman's voice coming toward him and ducked behind a counter. The woman's voice was accompanied by the sounds of more than one pair of feet and the odd soft sound a woman makes when she's gagged and more than casually uncomfortable. The guard peered around the counter a little further.

Three women suddenly came into view on the other side of the room. The man instantly recognized the boss's kid, all tied up like a Christmas package, with some kind of leather mask over her lower face. Alissa got herself shoved vigorously and she stumbled into the second of the three women, this one tiny and naked and tied up with some kind of thin red cord.

A wash cloth had been stuffed into her mouth and was held in place with what looked like a small towel. The tow of them went down in a pile.

The third woman was the one that really got the man's attention, though. It was the tall brunette, the one who used to run the place. She was wearing what appeared to be one of the kinky uniforms that Alissa had her women guards wear, the uniform that always got him all hot

and bothered on those few occasions that he got to see any of them. And she most definitely wasn't tied up at all.

Madame slashed at the two on the floor with a short whip, with most of the blows ending up on Alissa. The other slave rolled adroitly away and tried to stand.

The guard glared at Madame, fuming. A goddamned broad had hit him. A fuckin' woman! Now he regretted making that call to Simonds. Oh shit, did he ever regret making that call! And it was the boss's kid getting her ass thrashed! And it was his fault that the broad had got out. But maybe not. It appeared that somehow the itch must have got free of the basement and then hit him over the head to clear the way (but how the hell did she get all the others!) and was just now trying to get away for real with Alissa.

It didn't work and he knew it even as he thought it, but they were now right on top of him and it was all he had. He jumped out from behind the counter and leveled the gun at the woman.

"Hold it!" Madame froze on the spot, her eyes widening.

"Drop the whip!" it clattered onto the ground and the woman really looked scared and started backing away from him. Alissa was making wild sounds behind the gag and gesturing with her head, but the guard just thought she was being hysterical.

The woman kept inching away, her eyes huge and tearing, great gasps of fear wracking her body.

"Stop moving, goddamnit!" he snarled. The little slave ran to him and knelt at his feet, resting her bound face on the front of his thigh in gratitude and Alissa was turning red in the face with her stifled shouts and Madame kept getting further and further away, sniffing and shaking her head in terror. Fucking broads!

He kicked the small figure from him and walked out into the middle of the room shouting a Madame to stop moving or he'd shoot. She held out her hands to him piteously and begged him not to hurt her. The other slave began some garbled recitation behind her gag too, and the place was filled with the cacophony of a nuthouse. He almost wanted to put his hands over his ears. Jesus Christ, he couldn't believe it!

He pounced on the woman, finally, and rolled her onto her stomach and handcuffed her. Her screams of fear hurt his ears and he cracked her across the side of the head with his hand and screamed at her to shut the fuck up. The broad was acting as crazy as Mr. Bertram's little bitch! What the hell was going on?

Madame suddenly went wild beneath him, clawing at him from behind her back with her manacled hands, screaming full into his face and kicking at anything solid. One of her feet thumped into his groin perilously close to home and he finally, completely, lost what little temper he had left and began swinging. A solid left caught her on the side of the face and she

slammed back onto the floor, but he had only just begun and cocked back his right as he lifted her head by the hair.

And he felt himself lifted right off the ground from behind and all of a sudden, the far wall of the study was getting very close very fast. And that was about all he was ever to remember of the whole shoddy escapade as he ended his short flight over the chairs and the coffee table. He didn't even twitch when he finally hit the floor.

When the man had put down the gun, Gorila had finally elected to make his entrance from behind one of the gigantic wing chairs at the other side of the chamber. Ah, Madame the actress, he thought, she of the thousand-and-one small homey skills. Gorila dusted his hands and fetched out a handcuff key, then turned to his (mostly) admiring audience with a flourish. Time was wasting.

###

The trucks had been K5s like hers, Fanni thought. Two of 'em off in the distance ghosting through the trees. And headed in the opposite direction, toward the cabin. She had been slightly closer to Grey's place than to the cabin at the time. Her indecision was awful for a few minutes. Should she go back? She grabbed the microphone off its little hook and held the thing poised in front of her mouth with her thumb on the transmit button, but then held back.



If they were the bad guys, they could very possibly hear her transmission. If they were on the same channel. If they were listening at all. On the other hand, if they were nothing more than hunters, the call would be wasted, anyway. They were going awfully slowly and didn't seem too familiar with the route they'd chosen.

Fanni stuck the mike back onto its hook and slammed the truck into gear and spun gravel and muck for fifty yards. She had to know what was going on at Grey's. She would just have to trust to luck on those damnable trucks.

She parked well away from the buildings and slunk under the dripping trees into a tiny enclave surrounded by morose evergreens and brush. She snapped open the legs of the bipod and propped the HK on a sodden log and squinted through the sight. From here, she could see the entire clearing, and by spinning the concentric ring at the rear of the scope, she ran the magnification from three-power up to nine and slowly swung her circular field of view back and forth.

No people. No sign of the bike. A bilious green Chevy four-door added its dubious coloring to the grays and browns. A wan glow from one of old man Grey's Colemans leaked through the front window. Lots of tire tracks. Nice and new, too.

Fanni pried the operating handle out from its hold-open notch by pulling it back and down and let the bolt slide forward slowly, looking in through the breech to make sure that it picked up a round off the top of the magazine, then let go of the handle and the bolt snapped forward and locked up with a very Germanic clank. Properly melodramatic enough for the most devout of fanatics, she thought. No wonder Daddy loved the fucker. She snapped the bipod back along the forearm and snuck closer to the clearing.

The house finally bulked before her. Her head never stopped turning; her eyes never ceased their darting. It would seem that there was nobody about. Or else they were very, very sneaky. She hoped for the former and suspected the latter.

The bush she was behind screened her from most of the immediate area, and it was but a short run to the side door of the place, hopefully left unlocked. She looked around again, listening for the faintest sound, the slightest anomaly. Nothing.

She sprang out from the bush and banged through the door in what was only a matter of seconds. It felt longer. It was warm and humid and close inside the store. Old Grey was only just now turning his head toward the commotion. Fanni scanned the interior of the place with two quick shakes of her head and was satisfied, but stayed in the shadows.

Old man Grey was finally up on his feet, peering at her. "Where are the two women who were here, Mr. Grey?"

"Hun? Who is that? Is that you, Miss Hall? I can't see you too good back there."

"The two women who were here, Mr. Grey?" Fanni bored on. "A black woman name Black, and an Asian named Ling. Where are they!"

"Oh! It is you, Miss Hall. Yup," he said, straightening up and walking over to the grubby counter.

"The women, Mr. Grey!" the old man walked over a little closer to Fanni and finally noticed the lumpish rifle and the basilisk stare that flicked over him and the store and out the windows.

"Missed 'em," he said he smiled to himself and went on. "That's the same thing I said to that little niggra gal that drove up here just after you'd left two days ago." Fanni jerked at the information. Two days!

"What do you mean, 'missed 'em'?"

“Well, funny thing, that. The little niggra gal comes in here all het up ‘bout somethin’ to do with meetin’ you and then has to stay the night in one of mah cabins out there and then the next day, yer slant-eye friend shows up – say, she ain’t some Commie, is she? Never liked gooks mahself; and then she goes on down to meet her and then neither one of ‘em so much as takes a step outside the whole next day. Course, I can’t say as I blame ‘em much, the weather bein’ so bad and all.

“Then just a hour or so ago, these two fancy rigs pulls up in front of mah place and out hops this bunch of the meanest, orneriest lookin’ fellers I ever lays eyes on, and a couple of ‘em stays out in the middle of the parking lot and just looks around while the rest of ‘em goes into the cabins. Hell, lady, I was afraid to poke this old head o’ mine out the door, so I watched ‘em through the winders, like.

“Then the whole bunch of ‘em comes back out the cabin and piles into the trucks. Yer two friends was with ‘em and they wasn’t lookin’ too awful pleased by the company. They wasn’t fightin’ or kickin’ like, but they sure as hell didn’t look none too happy about it, if ya know what I mean.”

“Why didn’t you call the police?”

Fanni snarled.

“Hell’s bells, lady, them dudes wasn’t doin’ nothin’ wrong that I could see. Besides, they was carrin’ enough guns for a army and by the time old Archy Crews coulda got up here in his constable’s car they’d a been long gone or maybe ‘a just shot him dead on the spot; Archy don’t even carry no gun no more! Anyway, they all took off up toward yer daddy’s cabin.”

“All of them?”

“Well, all but two of ‘em. They kinda snuck off into the woods down by the road.” Fanni snapped off the safety with a dull click.

As she did, a man, huge and bundled in a down-filled coat, smashed in through the door and ran right out into the middle of the store waving a pistol around. In the seconds that it took for his eyes to adjust to the relative dark and to see Fanni by the side door, she had swung the gun down at him and leaned forward, her left hand pushing down on the forearm just behind the front sight and her right arm pushing the stock tightly into her right side.

The man had a funny gleam in his eyes and a tight grin on his lips as he swung the pistol toward Fanni. He intended to shoot. The range was only about fifteen feet; he could hardly miss, but then again, neither could she.

She fired eight times; a burst of three, fractions of a second apart, then another group of three just as fast with a pause just long enough to get the gun back in battery for the second time, and

then two shots and the gun had finally pushed her back onto one foot and she had to stop shooting or lose her balance completely and fall down.

The man with the pistol had caught at least five of the pills and was, as a fairly predictable result, not up to much more horsing around. In fact, he was, literally, shot to shit. Old man Grey dolefully regarded the three small, and five very much larger, holes in his wall. A conversation piece for the lonely winter months.

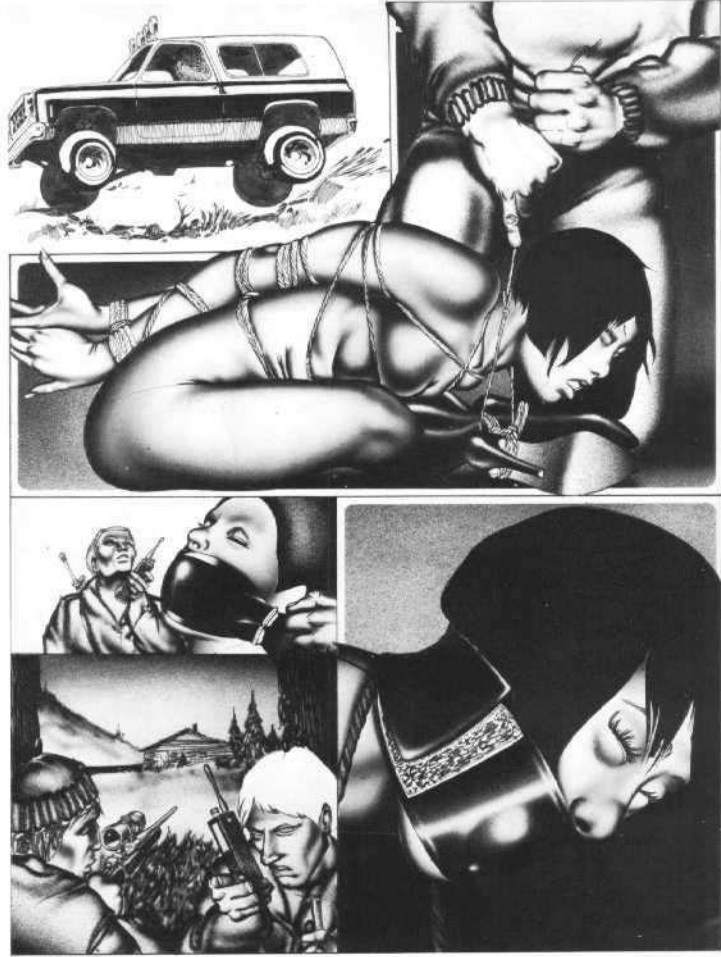
The man's buddy running for the back door came to a screeching halt at the racket inside; somebody in there had a big gun. All of a sudden, his P-38 didn't look like much more than a convincing water pistol. Shit. This wasn't fair. A broad with an assault gun.

Fanni saw him before he saw her. His first warning of the wrath of God coming his way was the screech of the side door and the vision of the broad swinging a garganzo black thing to her shoulder with hi in mind and he ran for the trees like a rabbit.

Amazingly, she let him get behind an oak that must have been a couple of hundred years old. Emboldened by this, he stuck the pistol around the tree and popped off a couple of rounds. The response to this folly was instantaneous and truly spectacular to behold.

One of the few, but repeated, criticisms of the HK91/G3 rifle is that the bolt doesn't stay open after the last show and the infantryman using it thus has no way of knowing whether or not he has anything left in the magazine. A similar criticism was leveled at the M16 in Vietnam. Canny veterans in Southeast Asia simply made sure that the last two or three rounds in the magazine were tracers, and when you saw the lights, your changed mags. Old Dad had gone one step further; they were all tracers. You were still left with the problem of no knowing when you were empty until the hammer clicked on a deserted chamber, but it sure made for a neat light show.

The man's eyes were like saucers as a continuous roar of .308s bashed into the other side of the tree or howled past as iridescent red lines. If the things didn't immediately hit a tree they seemed to go on and on forever, gradually dwindling into red dots. He thought he peed his pants.



All good things must eventually come to an end. The firing stopped and he heaved a sigh of relief only to freeze once more at the sound of the empty magazine hitting the floor and the metallic “snick” as a new one was inserted into the gun. Christ, she was reloading!”

He dropped his gun and bolted back into the woods. A job was a job, but this was ridiculous!

When she was sure he was ell and truly gone, Fanni pelted back to the truck and frantically grabbed the microphone. She got only static. The mountains or the weather or something. She couldn’t get through to the cabin!

She threw the gun into the passenger’s seat and drove as she had never driven before. She had to get back!

###

Suni chewed on the gag and jerked against the ropes. She was exhausted by the effort, but she had to keep on trying. They’d laced her into a cross-legged sitting position with her ankles pulled

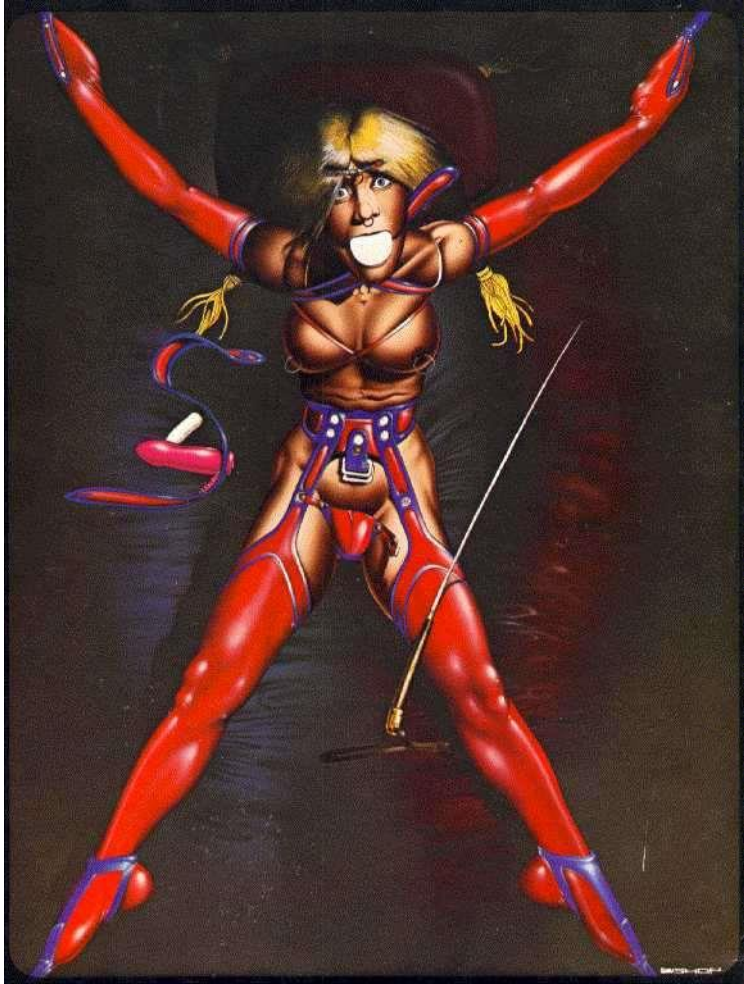
up almost to her face. Her corded wrists and arms were held in position by a rope that ran from them between her legs and up to meet her ankles as well. She couldn't move an inch and howled into the packing in her mouth in frustration. She supposed that Alissa was similarly bound in the other truck.

The men who'd arrived at the cabin in the morning were some of the old man's best shock troops and they were thorough to excess. She and Alissa had been laced like fishnets in the dingy little hovel by one of the men who appeared to specialize in restraints. They'd even been hobbled with a heavy, clear nylon fishing line as they were escorted to the waiting trucks.

Coats had been thrown over their shoulders to hide their bindings. The hobbles were uncovered, but largely invisible at any distance. There were no gags, but none were needed; if she attracted the Grey man's attention, the killers would shoot him with no more qualms than they expend on a dog. And Alissa had enough horror for this time around. She just hoped there would be others. They were put into separate trucks, Suni in the lead to show the way. The bike was thrown into the second truck, and all signs of her having been there were erased.

Their only chance, their only chance would be Ian's instincts and his uncanny knack for instantaneous right decisions under stress. That and the fact that the goons didn't know of his existence; they hadn't asked, and she sure as hell want about to volunteer. They had eyes and intentions only for Fanni and Dawnelle and herself.

She strained against the ropes again, wincing as the thin cords bit into her. And she had already been taken out of the picture. She realized. It was all up to them, now. All to them. Another moan of frustration filtered out from behind the gag.



BUNZIE STRIKES BACK

By THE BISHOP



PART ONE

Where does the time go? For one very special villain, the time had been used to regroup, to pick up the pieces of her perfectly ruined life, then to charge back into the fray and reclaim her slimy empire. That hardly left time for a hobby, but our lady indulged herself in her latest pastime, a fun-drenched romp which involved finding and destroying that merry band of dipshits who had ruined her once very perfect existence. Years of work had circled the drain while she was strung up in Old Man Bertram's 'guest room,' and there remained a few wee reckonings to be reckoned with, and in a rather stern manner.

Madame La Boundy is the lady we discuss. Is she the hero of the story? Depends on your definition of the word. Your humble and frequently-addled author occasionally thinks highly of the dear lady and her steel-eyed dedication to her chosen profession. Who wouldn't respect that? Well, most people wouldn't. Most would describe her as Fiendish. Or evil. Sadistic. Barbarous. Wicked. The Devil Herself. Of course she was all of those, and then some. And then some more. But beyond those humble accolades, Madame La Boundy considered her finest trait to be her single-minded devotion to holding a damn grudge. To cultivate that grievance, feed and water it daily, give it all the hateful attention it deserves. To grasp that grudge like a puppy in a hungry crocodile's jaws. To have the pure predatory nature to pursue the source of that grudge to the very ends of the earth and further if needed. *To know that Fanni Hall was out there somewhere.*

Fighting back the rising tide of rage, Madame recalled that day when Fanni and her miserable gang of half-tard mercenaries had left her to a very gloomy fate in Old Man Bertram's shit-crypt of a mansion while they skittered off to live another day. Selfish to the extreme and not worthy of the noble profession of... well, whatever it is they do. Madame was entitled to her well-earned grudge and by god she would keep that grudge to the end. Fanni Hall! What a miserable and insolent bitch. And then the other thing, the undeniable fact that this insolent bitch was birth-gifted such a perfect set of skin and bones. Ah! The perfectest perfect perfection, clearly an oversight by her creator who must have known building this flawless a beast would only bring her to the attention of every long-tongued, short scrupled pervert out there. Because of this perfection Fanni Hall was obviously fair game to every predatory pervert out there. Case in point: Madame herself, who had decided to make it her life's work to possess Miss Fanni Hall. To possess first the flesh, then the spirit, then the whole. Wherever she was, Fanni Hall would be her guest again, that the Madame was certain of. She got a tingle in all those tingly places at the thought of Fanni's flesh and bones and wiggly little tongue again at her mercy.

Her entire life's work had been ruined by the girl, and she only barely escaped with her mind and body intact, or at least relatively so. But she had walked through the fire and lived to prey another day. Like many a stomped-on cockroach, The Madame had seemed dead for a minute only to slink away into a convenient dark space.

It hadn't been easy at first. She was near penniless and had lost her right-hand goon, the affably moronic A Gorilla. But henchman of his low character were a penny a dozen, as were those nubilicious young country girls that were suddenly disappearing throughout the Midwest, only to reappear in their new and unchosen careers in Russian dachas, Mid East harems, or Chinese dungeons. After suitable and excruciating training, of course, training that the Madame was all-too-qualified to provide free of charge. Their fates were of no consequence to Madame, but the large sums of money paid for them were. She enjoyed her chosen profession and it is without question she would have undertaken certain aspects of it without being paid at all. But paid she was, vast sums offered and received from the cretinous dregs of high society and finance, semi-humans that she loathed but very much needed to build her own empire. The Madame was back, dungeon, slaves, henchmen - er, henchpeople - and all. But something was missing and that something had a name: Fanni Hall.

The phone call hadn't gone directly to Madame. She was far too careful, so the answering service passed the message to a loyal goon with the delightfully appropriate name of Jack Asser - ya can't make these things up! The message was a simple 'In possession of FH. Please call.' Given the message, Madame simply shrugged, playing it cool but fooling no one. Blood vessels clenched and muscles shrunk for an instant giving our precious Villain a rare case of what normal humans call 'the butterflies.' She calmed herself, aware that the number of false alarms had been piling up lately, much to the chagrin of some innocently bewildered Fanni look-alikes

who were now unhappily (but very securely) caged in Madame's cellars, or already situated in some exotically terrifying locale in Asia.

She had been looking for Fanni Hall for years, three years to be precise. This was not some static search based on hope, luck and prayer services. No, this was a continent-wide hunt that was active everywhere and all times. Every P.I. in the country had a very accurate sketch of Fanni, and sketches of her various shithead sidekicks. Madame knew that Fanni wouldn't be able to abandon her love of being an interfering dipshit, so it was assumed she was still doing P.I. work somewhere. It was also assumed that Fanni was clever enough to be working under an alias, something nondescript like Mary Higgins or Carla Johnson. Or maybe her jolly self wouldn't be able to stifle her innate wise-assidness and simply called herself Fan E'Hall, or Madame Slayer. She was brazen, probably too so for her own good.

Madame was right about some things. Fanni was still a private eye. And she was working under an alias, actually a number of fake identities that she juggled like tennis balls. Yes, Fanni Hall was fully aware of the woman-hunt underway, with her rather attractive ass the target of that hunt. She was careful and she was smart, and always vigilant. But she also had a certain flair when she worked, and it was becoming increasingly difficult to avoid attention. It was time to move on, she decided. Little did she know that the pack of beasts was already circling. At that very moment, across the street from her office a lone figure sat atop a crate, binoculars aiming through a torn curtain at Miss Fanni Hall herself. A half a million dollars beckoned. He called the number that would guide him to that money.

CHAPTER TWO

They were in an abandoned garage in Philadelphia, a place chosen for its privacy. It was the first and last time Madame intended to be in the decrepit place. She attended with two of her 'employees.' The man they were meeting was a middle aged geezer with not-quite buckteeth. "My name's Tommy Smith, and this here's Gary Jones." Jones nodded at The Madame. Two fake names, she gathered, but no surprise. The bulky 'Gary Jones' was muscle while 'Smith' was the guy who was leading this show.

Madame stared at the two, her own two goons on either side of her. She was anxious to see the girl, but refused to show it. She nodded at the goon on her left, a well-trained thug who bellowed "Show us the damned girl!"

Smith about jumped out of his skin. Jones tilted his head and looked pissed off at the tone of the command. Smith spoke up. "Yes yes. She's in the trunk. Get her Gary." Without turning Gary backed up to the car. He opened the trunk, never taking his eyes off Madame or her bodyguards. Madame respected the professionalism. The girl was jerked out of the trunk and dropped on the floor, her tightly hogtied body slowly writhing in the dusty filth of the garage. She wore nothing but panties and a ripped tee shirt. Oh, and a thousand yards of fine twine. Jones grabbed the girls hair and dragged her over and plopped her down at Madame's feet. Kneeling, Madame looked at

the girl, wiping hair from her face to get a good look. "Hello, sweetie. You must have had a long trip, all the way from Boston." A pair of brown eyes stared back in defiance. There was no way for her to respond, a pair of men's size 44 underwear in her mouth held in place by a belt.

Madame stood, then nodded to the goon on her right. He removed the pistol from his waistband and put two bullets in Mr. Jones's heart before the unlucky fool could register a threat. He was dead before his body hit the floor. Smith stood stock still, too shocked to do anything else.

"Does this look like Fanni Hall?" Madame asked in an even voice. "Does Fanni Hall have blond hair? Does she have brown eyes? You miserable toad! Are you trying to pull one over on me, like I'm some moron you can trifle with!" She nodded at the goon, a gesture that Smith saw. "Wait wait! This is the real Fanni Hall. She dyed her hair, and maybe she has brown contact lenses. I swear it's her. For god's sake, she goes by the name Hanna Fall and she works as a private eye up in Boston. It's her! It's Fanni Hall!"

With a sigh Madame realized she had hit another dead end. Did this fool really think she wouldn't recognize Fanni? The Hanna Fall name was curious, but this girl was not Fanni.

Smith saw Madame look towards her bodyguard and knew his end was seconds away. "Hold on, lemme show you something." He very slowly pulled some crumpled papers from his pocket. "Lookit." A goon retrieved the papers and Madame unfolded one of them. "I found them in her office," Smith said hopefully. "It's her." The sheet Madame was looking at held a handwritten list of names, all female, and more than a few were variations of Fanni Hall - names like Annie Small, Franny Long, Janni Fall. Curious now, Madame unfolded a second sheet of the paper, a laminated card falling to the floor in the process. She picked it up. A small picture stared back at her, Fanni Hall herself. A driver's license, recently issued, an address in Boston. "Well hello my little Bunzie," Madame muttered.

CHAPTER THREE

Fanni Hall was the ultimate survivor, and then some. She had escaped multiple visits to various 'training facilities' operated by Madame La Boundy. Madame's dungeons were no picnic, but she (and Madame herself) had experienced worse at the hands of a slime-turd gun runner and his mentally-gone-astray daughter. Old Man Bertram's country villa was just another day at the park -- if that park included whips, chains, and insane sadists. Like every other dip into the torture pool, Fanni had persevered (barely), dried herself off and went about the jolly business of kicking cretins back into the gutters they had slithered from. She liked doing it and had no intention of retiring to some cabin in the woods simply because a shithead like the Madame was looking for her.

When she had last seen Boundy, the merciless hag was stretched out in a cell and about to fall into the clutches of some sketchy employees of the Old Man's. Their intentions were unknown at the time. Without actually seeing Madame meet her maker, Fanni had assumed it was so. But her

demise was not as demisey as hoped, and it became increasingly obvious that the she-devil was alive and back to her old 'tricks.' But what to do about her?

After paying off Mr. Smith (with an ounce of lead to the brain), the uber-recalcitrant "Hanna Fall" had spit at their attempts to question her about Fanni, so she would have to be dealt with at another time and place. The place would be Madame's well-equipped 'play room' hundreds of miles to the west, where the suitably (read massively) restrained girl was now headed in the company of a chubby but loyal mid-level henchman of The Madame's. Madame herself had that other issue to deal with.

The address on the license led them to an upscale apartment building in a town outside of Boston. The three of them sat in the SUV, tinted windows concealing their presence. Diplomatic tags (provided by the Sultan of Something-or-another-stan as payment for a juicy redhead) guaranteed that no cops would come knocking at the darkened windows. It had been hours and no sign of Hall, and Madame was growing impatient. So they hatched a plan. The two beefy goons went to the fifth floor and stood on either side of Fanni's door. Madame herself went into the building's lobby and waited for a suitable moment, then pulled the fire alarm. The plan was for Fanni to exit into the arms of the two goons, who would use a hankie well perfumed with chloroform to make their victim more pliable as they carried her out to the SUV. It was a clumsy plan, but Madame well understood that people focused on their own well-being in a time of crisis and rarely noticed what was happening to anyone around them.

As the alarm blared Madame calmly walked to the building's exit, with other residents beginning to emerge from apartments. She crossed the street heading for the SUV. Was Fanni even home, she wondered. And if she was, could her two men handle the little spitfire. The girl had serious spunk she had to admit, and the skills to turn that spunk deadly. She opened the car door and settled into the passenger seat to await the results. But the wait was already over. Two hands dropped a loop of wire over her head and tightened it around her throat, then with a yank forced a trailing length of wire through the headrest. Madame did the 100% predictable thing and reached behind the headrest to loosen the wire, and a pair of handcuffs snapped onto her wrists before she could react. The wire itself was tied off to the cuffs and our poor Madame was now helpless, a band of wire threatening to strangle her and any fidgeting with her hands sure to make it worse.

"Looks like you found me, Boundy," Fanni said with a sneer. But she was in a hurry, having watched the six hundred pounds of pure lummoX go into her building and knowing they might return any moment. Madame was gasping and sputtering as Fanni climbed into the driver's seat. "Thanks for leaving the keys in the ignition. Makes for a fast getaway, but I guess that's what you were planning."

Well ain't this a bitch, especially so for the unfortunate Madame

CHAPTER FOUR

The ride went downhill from there for our unfortunate villainess. Fanni pulled the car over and did a more thorough job of securing the wiggling Madame. It seemed that Fanni had brought along an infinite supply of that wire and it had found its way around Madame's body to an overly-excessive extent. Ankles were tightly tied, and then hitched off to the wiring under her seat. Knees were also tied, fifteen turns being deemed sufficient before Fanni knotted her work. Designer jeans and fashionable boots had protected some soft flesh from the worst of the wire's bite. Not so her thumbs which had been circled with the wire and a trailing line worked back around the headrest where it took a half dozen turns around Madame's mouth before being tied off. A mouth that was stuffed with Madame's own wallet taken from her purse. With her hands still trapped in steel cuffs and her neck tethered to those manacles, every bump in the highway seemed to tighten the noose. Fanni had dropped the seat back so the entirety of her entertainment was to stare at the ceiling of the car.

Where were they going? Only Fanni knew the answer to that and she was not saying. She was talking, though.

"You should've let things go, Boundy, but you gotta hold a grudge. You know I could've tossed a few slugs into that evil brain of yours back at Bertram's shack, but I let you go. So why so pissed off at me?" It was rhetorical, Madame was nowhere near able to answer with her mouth chewing on leather and credit cards and probably a few Whips 'R' Us receipts. Fanni continued. "I know what you've been up to with your white slaving. I guess you're getting rich, but the job is far too risky for a screw-up like you. Maybe try banking or advertising as your next career. Or better yet, go for it and get that dream job as a respectable prostitute." She reached over and squeezed Madame's breast through her blouse, "You got the melons for it."

Madame bit down on expensive Italian cowhide and cursed inwardly. Fanni kept yapping, slowly making her head ache.

"Clever girl, getting these diplomatic tags. Makes for a nice worry-free ride. What are you supposed to be, the third attache in charge of buffoonery from Libya?" She laughed again. "Ya think your two boys are still waiting for you back at my apartment? They seem real bright, the type that'll stay there for a week or two before they realize you ain't coming back for them. And I got a little confession - that wasn't my apartment. Nope. just an address I put on a fake ID. I left it at the office as bait for any fishies looking for me, and I caught me a real bottom feeder. You see, my assistant and I have a very strict protocol with checking in on each other, and when she missed two check-ins, well I knew there was trouble. So I went and staked out that building which I conveniently left you a clue about." Another laugh. "And you fell for it like a runny-nosed rookie! Classic! You're a real hoot, Boundy."

Shut Up Hall! Madame wanted to scream. Wasn't it enough to truss her like a damned pork roast, but all this bragging was going too far. It barely needs to be said that her options were limited. Fuckin' Hall knew how to tie a knot and Madame was not going to escape on her own. She had resources that would be on the lookout for the car, but Fanni was right that her

employees were not known for (or trained in) taking the initiative. Those two knuckleheads may not have even made the call, and it was even money that no one was looking for her yet. She squirmed for the millionth time and swallowed another round of drool. And on they drove, Madame the captive of the very pig she had been hunting for years. Eventually the highway turned into local roads, as Madame realized by the number of stops and starts. Further along the paved road switched into a crunching gravel, then a rough mile or so of shaded, rutted dirt lane, then finally a stop. Without a word Fanni got out and strode to the decrepit cabin, one of a half dozen she kept for occasions like this.

With the car engine off the SUV heated up in seconds. There was nothing for it but to just sweat in silence, and Madame did just that. She was anxious to get out of the car, but not at all anxious to find out what Hall had planned for her. Fanni returned and suitably (and very roughly) rearranged her prisoner. Wires were cut free from Madame's legs and then her throat. Her hands were cuffed, this time simply behind her back, with thumbs retied with more wire. Clothing was removed, every stitch sliced off by Fanni's prized SRK knife. Then Madame's wallet had been spit out in all its saliva-marinated glory, forever ruined.

"You owe me a grand for the wallet, Hall, and another six thousand for the clothes. That blouse cost more than all the catsuits in your closet." Madame had her voice back and she intended to use it.

"How about the boots?" Fanni asked picking up one of the still-unmarred black leather knee high boot. She easily ran the sharp edge of the knife down the side of one, then the other. She flung the destroyed remnants into the nearby woods. "Maybe you should have planned your wardrobe better when you dressed this morning for your kidnapping caper."

"Thar's okay, Fanni. I'll figure another way for you to pay me back. I recall something you do with that wiggly pink thing in your mouth besides yammering on and on. I think a few..."

"Shut up," Fanni growled, grabbing a large fistful of Madame's long black hair. She quick-walked her prisoner towards the house but kept going by the entrance door and dragged her to a spot behind the cabin. "I'll let you rest a while, sweetie."

Resting would involve laying the naked woman down on her belly. Then she was dragged by her feet backwards until her progress was stopped by the sapling that suddenly made itself known between her legs. Like a rodeo cowboy Fanni went to work, crossing Madame's thin ankles and binding them, this time with some twine she had stored in the cabin. Her legs were pulled back and ankles hitched to the sapling leaving her in a hogtied pose. The wire was back, now noosing two big toes and tying them to the sapling. More cord went around her knees, then the cuffs were removed and the helpless Madame had her wrists tied together between her shoulder blades and finally her thumbs were retied. Fanni lay on the ground in front of Madame's face. "Open wide for a nice chewy treat."

"Fuck you" was not the most clever retort, but Madame might be excused due to the circumstances. "You will regret this moment," was also more of a cliché than intended, but it

came from an honest place. But she opened her mouth, all too aware of the down side of resisting, maybe a broken tooth or a bloody mouthful of rags. "Good girl," Fanni said as she fed the start of a large wad of material in, using both thumbs to work it into cheeks and behind the teeth. Too late Madame realized what she was being gagged with. "Enjoy it," Fanni said. "I guess that's the most expensive meal you've ever had, huh? Does expensive silk taste better than cotton? But only bill me for half of the blouse, the other half is down in the shitter if you want it." The thin belt holding the ruined blouse securely in place was also her own, a theme, Madame realized.

Fanni went off on her own, but not before working a three foot length of a thin, rough branch under Madame's ribs. It seemed gratuitous but at least in the short term Madame could deal with it by pushing up with her chin and shoulders. Having been tortured by the Old Man and his pain-loving daughter, this was just a nuisance, but one that was becoming increasingly nuisance. The sound of glass breaking was disconcerting -- what the hell was Fanni doing? It sounded like two or three glass bottles were shattered. Then it was quiet again. The shadows were getting long as the day grew late. Fanni finally returned, and she knelt in front of Madame.

"Comfy, old girl?"

Madame shot her a 'I could care less' look. Fanni took Madame's head in both hands and leaned in close. Her look sent a small chill through Madame's entire being. "Ya stole something of mine and I want her back," Fanni growled.

CHAPTER FIVE

Her name was Mia James. It was Mia that the goons had seen through the binoculars, and it was Mia that they snatched up. The Hanna Fall moniker was chosen during a very brief infatuation with one Fanni Hall, private investigator of her dreams. I say brief infatuation only because the infatuation grew into something even stronger, an absolute obsession, to the point Fanni wondered if the girl was going to murder her and take her identity. But the kid had her charms and she turned out to be loyal beyond belief. She worked in Fanni's office, sometimes a bother, borderline incompetent, and always agreeable to do anything Fanni asked. With impending plans to move on, a new state and a new identity, Fanni struggled with thoughts of leaving the girl behind, or maybe bringing her. But she was not going to leave her to the mercy of a toadwart like Boundy. No, never.

Madame had proven to be less than cooperative when it came to Mia's whereabouts, not unexpected. Everyone had a role to play in this world of theirs and certain professional behavior was expected. Mia's role was to be an innocent victim. Fanni's was to ride to her rescue. And Madame's was to be a recalcitrant evil bitch, one who understood her reputation would be ruined if word got out that she broke easily under a bit of soft persuasion.

But make no mistake: Fanni Hall was no bleeding heart. She was a consenting player in this sordid world. A card-carrying member of the league of Give As Good As You Get, though she took it as faith that her own moral compass was a bit more finely calibrated than a snake like Madame Boundy. It had come time to dole out a bit of 'extreme encouragement' to that snake.

Madame stared daggers, nay, shotguns, at Fanni as she knelt in front of her. "I suspect you'll find a way to let me know when you're ready to talk, a vigorous nodding of the noggin, or a howl that'll rattle that blouse in your mouth." *Fuck off, Hall.* A little twig under my ribs ain't gonna get you directions to Burger King from me. Fanni was tying Madame's hair into a ponytail atop her head. She had already replaced the belt around her mouth with a single snug line of twine that worked just as well to hold the gag in. Standing, Fanni gripped Madame's ponytail and lifted her head off the ground. With her foot she pushed her recently created 'arts and crafts' project to a position below Madame's chin.

"Keep that chin up, darlin," Fanni whispered. She let go of Madame's hair. Staring down in horror, Madame understood the danger. Broken glass, glued to a rectangle of thin wood, Fanni's project in all its jagged menace. If she lowered her head her face would be turned into a dripping mess of ground sirloin. She glowered up at Fanni. She wouldn't really do this? Unfair! Not playing by the rules!

Fanni knelt down and smiled. "Not much of a future for a disfigured white slaver, Boundy. Your clients by nature don't like looking at ugly things, do they?"

It was over, Madame knew it. The only question was whether she should prolong this torture to save face (ouch! a pun). Already the branch was digging into her ribs with a new ferocity now that she was unable to take weight off of it by using her shoulders and head to lift up from the ground. Fanni knew her well, Madame realized, and took advantage of her vanity. She turned her face downward, away from Fanni's stare, and faced the jagged glass. Beads of sweat already dripped from her forehead and nose. Fuck it, she decided, let's see how long I can hold out. Not long, it turned out. Fanni sat cross-legged and watched the pathetic creature suffer, never feeling a twinge of mercy. They had both chosen their professions and they both knew how it was played. Mercy was a fatal handicap. Twisting her neck to relieve the cramps, Madame quietly endured, unwilling to give Hall the satisfaction of seeing her surrender too easily. When the inevitable came she simply looked at Fanni and, with the fiercest glare she could conjure under the circumstances, slowly nodded her head. Consider it an agreement to temporarily submit, not a surrender. No, The Madame was not beaten, not by a long shot. Currently indisposed, certainly. But looking at Fanni she knew with no doubt that this bitch with the smug grin would pay, then pay some more. From unfortunate experience Fanni was acutely and spine-shiveringly aware that things have a way of changing in the blink of an eye, such was the nature of The Game. Not this time she vowed. Not this time she hoped. Not this time, unless I fuck up royally. Like I've done in too many times in the past.

CHAPTER SIX

Mia had made it to Madame's Fine School For The Breaking Of Unwilling Girls. The trip had been uneventful, boring even. Being hogtied and gagged in the trunk of a hot car left little room for eventfulness and plenty of room for mindless boredom and heavy fear. She had arrived in one tightly tied and compacted piece, but as destinations go, this was one of the least desirable.

She had been whipped on her first day, a rigorous flogging administered as she hung by her thumbs with her legs spread wide to rings in the floor. There was no real reason for this whipping - just a polite introduction to her new reality. Her guards got a surprise after they cut her down and she plopped to the floor. They let her lie there for a few minutes, Mia silently recovering her wits and mobility, then reached down to lift her up. Instead of whimpering and pleading, Mia came up kicking and punching, spitting and cursing. It took four of them to finally get her subdued. She was bound with thin straps, an even dozen of them. Her hands were jammed into tight leather mitts, then her already strapped arms were squeezed into a sheath. This sheath had a long tail that went between Mia's legs and was tied off to a strap around her waist. That crotch strap had two plugs attached, now hidden inside cavities that had not welcomed them. These uninvited guests were a first for Mia James and she fought the urge to panic. The goons were not done. Maybe it was routine, or maybe because of the black eyes and deep scratches that Mia had inflicted on them, but the leather sheath they laid on the floor was going to make things considerably worse for Mia. She was stuffed into the sheath, lashing out with her legs and trying a few clumsy head butts. But into the bag she finally went. Rolled into a face-down position, two of the beefier guards used their considerable strength to tighten the lacing up the back of the sheath, and then the same two pulled the eight incorporated straps to squeeze Mia into a near-breathless embrace, a full-body bear hug no real bear could ever accomplish. A much-too-big hunk of leather was mashed into her mouth, then a leather hood was pulled over her head and laced up. Again straps were yanked to the extreme, around her eyes, her mouth, then around her chin and head, this last one forcing her to bite the leather chew toy until it felt ready to work its way out her nose. A stiff collar surrounded her neck, forcing her chin upwards. It would have been enough to toss this bundle of defiance into a cell for the night, free to flop around blindly. Instead she was hung by straps at the shoulders and the top of her hood, with another strap at the bottom of the sheath pulling her toes straight towards the ring it was attached to below. Hung from the ceiling and helpless, the person inside was exhausted, sore and struggling just to breathe. But she didn't feel even slightly defeated. Meet Mia James.

Fanni slept on the cot, her new favorite a dependable and lethal Smith and Wesson .38 tucked beneath her. Madame lay spreadeagled on the floor beneath the cot, shackled to the four corners. After rummaging through the SUV Fanni had found a treasure trove of rope, chains, tape, and all manner of leather and metal, each and every bit intended for the enjoyment of little ol' me, Fanni realized. It was a pleasure to turn those items into better use, and The Madame now wore four steel bracelets, each attached to a leg of the cot. She also chewed on a ball gag, a size six Fanni thought, the better to ensure a peaceful night's sleep, at least for one of them.

With her face still intact, Madame regained her confidence and set her slimy brain to what it did best: scheme. Yes, under extreme coercion she had agreed to take Fanni to her little sidekick,

a girl Madame was beginning to wonder about. Hall seemed quite anxious to get her back. Did this Mia James have some little charm that might interest her? She hoped to find out, but just letting her go free wouldn't accomplish that, would it?

Fanni was not interested in a simple Mia for Madame swap. No offence to Mia, but The Madame was a much bigger fish in this odiferous pond. No, it was time to shut down this bitch and her vile organization once and for all. With all that desolate woodland around them it had crossed Fanni's mind that an unmarked grave might be the easiest solution, but that would not get Mia back. Nor did Fanni consider herself a murderer. Yes, she had killed, but never a helpless prisoner.

With the help of that wee persuasion The Madame had given detailed directions to her current viper's lair, a gated mansion at the foot of a mountain. Fanni was of no doubt that it would be populated by a baker's dozen or so of Heff's lost bunnies, all of them properly restrained and in various manner of distress. It would also be surrounded by a small legion of Madame's goons and goonettes, and that was a problem.

Daylight came, and Madame was still twiddling her thumbs under the cot. Besides the gag, she was now blindfolded and had cotton stuffed in her ears. She played with her restraints, but they weren't budging. The cot itself had been bolted to the floor of the cabin, and it also refused to budge despite some rigorous effort on Madame's part. Where the hell was Fanni, she wondered, either gone or ignoring her.

That question was answered soon enough. Despite the stuffing in her ears Madame could make out the sound of car wheels over gravel. An hour later Fanni returned to the 'bedroom' and removed the gag, blindfold and ear stuffing. "Wakey, wakey, sweetie. I got you some breakfast." Madame could smell it, and it was wonderful. "I'll free those hands of yours if you behave. Understand?" Fanni punctuated that offer with the .38 pointed at Madame. Carefully going to the top of the cot Fanni uncuffed one hand, then stepped back. She kicked the bag of food to Madame, who was busy shaking life back into her freed wrist.

"Eat up, then we'll get you set up for a nice long ride."

Madame needn't ask where they were going, she already knew that. Inside the bag was an orange juice in a bottle, and some sort of fast food breakfast sandwich. Tasted like cheese, egg and burlap, but it served its purpose. "You going to let me get dressed Hall? A girl needs her dignity." Fanni shook her head. "September, 1979. You kept me in a cell naked for nine days. Except for the one day you stuffed me in a rubber sack and dropped me into a well with a rubber hose in my mouth keeping me alive. Remember that? Or how about in '83 when you had that pet ape of yours string me up by my thumbs and toes and have at it with me. By the way, where is that pet Gorila you used to keep around? Oh, right, he's in that cemetery for failed henchmen otherwise known as a shallow ditch near a swamp. Do you miss him, Boundy?" Madame snickered. "I think you were more intimate with the dear boy, god rest his soul, than I was, Hall. So show some respect. And I appreciate that you remember the dates of all our lovely get-togethers. I hope you remember them as fondly as I do. Do you keep a scrapbook?"

"Nah, just a mental list of everyone who needs an ass-kickin' and guess who is at the top of the list."

"What's the matter, Hall? Lost your sense of humor?"

Fanni chuckled, "Madame La Boundy, Queen of Comedy is it? And if her audience forgets to laugh they get the tip of the whip and sharpened branches up their arses. A real hoot! Keep those happy thoughts sweetie, yer gonna need them the next few days. Now let's get you nice 'n' cozy for your trip."

They were outside, next to a rusty old car, a car that hadn't been there the day before. Madame realized that unless that old heap walked here, Fanni had someone helping her. The sack was already laid out, the leather sheath taken from Madame's collection of restraints stashed in the back of her SUV. It had been meant to transport Fanny herself. Madame looked at it and shook her head.

"Sorry, I'm afraid that one's not gonna fit me. It was custom made for you Fanni - you're welcome. I'm a couple inches taller than you and all the squishing in the world won't get me in there. It would've hugged you nice and snug though."

"Betcha a hundred dollars I can shoehorn you in," Fanni replied. "It might mean hammering your skull down your throat a bit." But first...

Tape. Aware that Madame's well-made body sheaths were flawless and escapeless (lord, Fanni had tried escaping them on more than a few occasions!) there was no great need for taping Madame before bagging her up. But tape she did, arms from fingertips to shoulders, legs from toes to thighs.

"Sorry 'bout the ducky tape," Fanni joked, "But it'll help me concentrate on the road instead of on you flopping around in the trunk."

Madame gave the car a once over. "It appears your career is taking off, Hall, able to afford a car like this."

"Very funny. Joke if you want but this car is in perfect condition except for the rust and dents. Cops like to pull over expensive cars to fuck with the assholes driving them. We'll make it to Casa Agony no problem." She rolled Madame to a spot next to the sheath.

Madame heard it first, a slight sound of wheels over gravel. And she didn't want Fanni hearing it. Raising her voice she taunted Fanni. "You'll find out all about my new estate, bitch. And your little friend, too. You'll find out just how much trouble you caused me and how much I'm gonna make you pay for it. By the way, who delivered this metal heap of a car to you? Suni? That black bitch, whatsername? Or do you have some new temp working at your agency of meddling assholes? You think those little cotton balls you put in my ears..."

"Shuddup," Fanni snarled in a whispered voice, both her hands pressed hard against Madame's mouth. It was the change in Madame's demeanor that alerted her, not a noise. Fanni had noticed it when Madame's eyes began searching about, her voice louder, her body stiffened with alertness. But now she heard it too, a well muffled car engine moving slowly. Fuck! Fanni understood her blunder immediately. No one had followed her or knew where this cabin was. No, fuckin' Madame had placed a tracker on her own car! Careless. Incredibly careless and then some. Fanni promised herself to never let Mia James in on this little 'oversight' lest the girl go searching out some other female PI to worship and get coffee for.

No time to get Madame in the bag or the leather gag in her mouth. A close-by greasy shop rag would have to do. The duct tape made too much noise as it unspooled so Fanni peeled off her tank top and tied it around Madame's mouth, a very temporary solution to a sudden problem. Finding adrenaline-fueled strength, Fanni pushed Madame under the car in one swift action.

"You fucking move and you'll be dead. And then all my problems will be over. Get it!? Not a squeek from you!"

Madame understood. She believed Fanni would kill her if she found the slightest excuse to. So she resigned herself to being a spectator.

No voices were heard, but Fanni followed the sound of breaking twigs and heavy boots on soft leaves. Two, maybe three of them, so it was a fairly even match between Miss Hall, Mister Smith and Mister Wesson against these goons.

By the time that the two intruders came into view it was obvious they were fish out of water or more accurately city goons out of their urban comfort zone. They didn't seem to be aware that leaves and twigs made more noise than walking on sidewalks. Black suits and ties were odd attire for Madame's hired goons, but these two were wearing expensive funeral suits. They looked more like ex-military or non-Italian Mafia. Fanni had worked - quietly - to a position behind a tree that would put her behind them when they entered the clearing. There was no debating their fate; Fanni knew she would have to kill them. They had seen her car, though they gave no indication of having seen Madame beneath it. It was never her style to end a life with a shot in the back, so when the two drew even, fifteen yards away, Fanni whistled. Both of the men wheeled, pistols searching for a target. On her knees behind the tree Fanni fired her first slug into the torso of one, then the other man. At that range a .38 slug into the large part of the body is going to find a lot of organs to destroy. Neither man moved.

Fanni sprinted to the car and dragged Madame roughly from under it. Fifteen seconds later Fanni was peeling away from the scene in the rusty sedan. With an active tracking device on the SUV it was anybody's guess as to how many tons of goonery were headed for it. Breathing a sigh of relief Fanni finally pulled onto the main road and slowed down to obey the speed limit. Wouldn't want to be pulled over by some country sheriff. It would be hard to explain why she was wearing only a bra from the waist up. Harder to explain the taped up woman in the trunk.

CHAPTER SEVEN

They hadn't driven far before Fanni found a nice quiet spot and pulled over. Opening the trunk, Fanni had the pistol at the ready and aimed at the occupant. Unsatisfied with her very incomplete binding job, Fanni worried that the trunk would open and a crowbar would swing at her head. But even the cagey viper Madame needed more time to slip the tape. She had worked her gag off though.

"Thanks," Fanni said as she grabbed her knotted up tank top. "I need that."

"My, that was exciting. You do love your action, huh Hall? Hope those men didn't have families. Or were cops."

"Shut it," Fanni replied. She knew cops when she saw them, and those two were definitely not. Expensive suits, unshaven faces, bad tactics. As to their 'families' that was on them, they chose the profession.

The contents of the car were inventoried and left Fanni worried. Her gun and knife, of course. She had thrown the remains of the duct tape roll plus two new rolls of one-inch black electrical tape in the back seat. But she had been in too great a hurry to grab the rope or any of Madame's 'supplies.'

"Change of plans, grandma. Hope I have enough tape."

Grandma? Ouch, she had jabbed Madame in a sensitive spot. "I dare say we're about the same age, Fanni." Her voice suddenly hardened. "We both know that whatever happens on this little adventure, you and I will meet again under vastly different circumstances. So I suggest you keep things professional, your smart mouth under control and nfhmph..."

"Huh?" Fanni asked as she jammed the rag back into Madame's irritating yapper. "Honey, you and I ain't the same age, not by a longshot. I suspect your birthday has a *b.c.* after it. Sure, you sold your soul to the devil so you could stay young-looking, but I suspect you were torturing runaway cavegirls way back in the day."

The rag was a fair amount of stuffing but Fanni decided it needed 'topping off.' Removing her boots two sizeable socks were made available. "One for now, and a second one later if I hear noise back here." It took patience, determination and strong thumbs to fit the sock in. "Hardly enough, but it'll do for now." The electrical tape sealed in the stuffing, many turns of it. Many more turns of duct tape followed, around her head and eyes.

Ducttaped as she already was, Madame considered it overkill that Fanni decided to reinforce it all with the black tape. Arms were taped again, from the tips of her already-taped fingers all the way to her already-taped shoulders. The magic of the electrical tape was its combination of strength and pliability. It allowed Fanni to pull it to an absurd tightness, each winding a bit

tighter than the previous. *Fuck! Ease up Hall. My shoulders are gonna pop out.* Fanni could not hear those thoughts, and it would not have made a difference.

Madame's long legs were next, tight as her arms had been tied. Then her legs had been bent and her calves forced to meet the back of her thighs. Ten minutes of taping and it was done, Madame now unable to straighten her legs at all.

"Do you remember Dawnelle?" Fanni asked. No answer was expected, or even possible. Madame remembered her.

"I watched her turn a friend into a tiny little package using nothing but this tape. Now of course Dawnelle was a vicious piece of work, may she rest in peace, but she had the right idea - why bother tying someone up unless they're gonna stay tied up. Right? Oh, that Dawnelle was a different breed, all anger and hatred, no nuance. Like an evil version of you." Fanni laughed at her attempt at a joke.

Madame had no choice but to be the subject in this re-enactment, as her legs were maneuvered up against her chest. Starting down at the front of her ankles the tape was stretched completely around her body then meticulously worked upward all the way to knee level. She ended up looking like a shiny black garden ornament. Every part of her body that could have been squished together, *was* squished together!

"Ah, wonderful," Fanni said as she smoothed the tape. "I think you might fit in my purse."

You cretinous turd, Madame wanted to scream. *How fucking dare you!* The position she had been crammed into was untenable. Cramps were already stabbing at her. It would be a few days in this car, at least. There was no way she would survive.

Fanni laid her on her side in the trunk. "I guess we better skeedaddle. Your men have probably found those bodies by now and will be in a sour mood. Then again, if they're as inept as those dead goons we got nothing to worry about. Word to the wise, genius, find a better quality of henchmen."

The thing is, those weren't Madame's henchmen and it worried her. The trunk lid slammed shut above her and she began worrying about more immediate concerns.

FANNI HALL AND THE RANSOM NOTE

by THE BISHOP

Her name was Alicia. As a gestalt, as a viewed, not touched, not really even gotten very close to gestalt, she could be characterized as gold and blue, honey and tan; the best of youth; barely a woman; definitely not a child; a warm wind over sand; softly blowing hair; the sparkle of a child's laugh counterpointed, when you got that little too close, by an all too knowing and slightly cynical gaze. Her breasts and legs and belly and hips were what men (and women of suitable persuasion) saw and appreciated most. And the face. The gentle/cruel face. She enjoyed the attention, reveled in it. She had not, prior to the moment, been taken truly to task for her less and less naive flirtations. Nor did she expect to be. She was, to be somewhat vulgar, a prickteaser. One of the most important single reasons for same was the fact that her father was filthy rich and so, by association, was she. Rich, that is. Money can and often does buy an insularity from the world of the

“common” man and leads those to whom discipline is a forgotten word in the English language to flaunt a certain cocksureness that lends itself especially well to a thorough pranging. Especially to the pranger. And sometimes to the prangee.

With the aforementioned in mind, gentle readers, one needs not be particularly astute to see the possible monetary and erotic (the two can be interchangeable in importance) contingencies of snatching up such a morsel of over-privileged baggage. Obviously, for the sake of this little tome, that possibility had not escaped the notice of the villains of our unfolding tale. Alicia was to face a rude awakening to the vagaries of the world.

She had been edging around a car parked in the center of one of her back alley shortcuts, peering over her shoulder with some little apprehension at the stone wall with its attendant dust and grime as it flitted past the black leather covered hillocks of her bottom. There wasn't much room; the car looked decently clean, so she didn't mind rubbing herself down the length of its fenders. She liked rubbing things, especially when

she was wearing the leather.

“Why the hell do you wear a leather bikini?” Daddy always asked. “You can't even swim in the damned thing!” Swimming had nothing to do with leather bikinis, Daddy, she told herself. A sea of staring male eyeballs and a forest of erections ill concealed by hastily shifted newspapers and towels were



what leather bikinis were all about, especially when she tied it extra, extra tight and up between the sun-brown cheeks of her buttocks. Their eyeballs were sticking out so far that she could knock them off with a stick, she concluded. Silly.

The hands that yanked her through the back door of the car that yawned suddenly open and banged into the wall she was so assiduously avoiding weren't silly at all. Not even a little bit. One hand went to her hair, the other grasped the leather strap that circled her hips and she was hefted clear of the road- way and plumped down into the car by a man whom she at first took to be a gorilla that had suffered the woes of elec- trolysis. Always the perceptive child, she had, all unwittingly, hit precisely on his title: A. Gorilla (shortened from the old country and somewhat unwieldy Andryonovitch Gorilasli-vitchowskovoskeritch XVII) - the title was popular, the

result of predilections motivated by the pervasive maudlin leanings of the east European mentality and a diet of turnips and vodka in predilections motivated by the pervasive maudlin leanings of the east European mentality and a diet of turnips and vodka in roughly equal amounts - but shortened by the lad's emigrating and hugely sophisticated father (he knew two words of the English language: Huh? and Fuck? with suitable gestures) in deference to American tastes to the some what more palatable Andryonovitch Gorrila. It was further shortened to A.G. for his friends, of whom he had none. The father expired shortly thereafter and A.G. moved west seeking his fortunes. The other one was as disparate from his mate as is conceivable; your basic weasel or vole. She was close, but no cigar. The name of this apparition was Easa Ferret, a man of, at best, questionable (and some rumored, English) background. And no morals. Un-savory. He was also the one doing all the jabbering and drooling. A. Gorrila pulled her head down into his lap (which smelled as if he were a rather indifferent bather) and twisted one of her arms up her back. Her disbelief and germinating panic were focused by the sickening jolting pain. "No move," Gorrila intoned. Mr. Ferret grabbed the other arm and brought it up behind her, slipped one loop of what she later discovered was a rope "handcuff" onto the wrist and tightened it. She had once touched a hot pan mistakenly at her grandmother's home and the bite of the single strand of nylon cord bit with the same fury. Were they trying to dismember her?

Her initial shocked immobility was gone by now, all gone. This very definitely was happening to her. It was not a dream. Came the Panic. She thrashed up with her legs as best she could, contacting some- thing solid that went "ooff". Weasel-face, she hoped. At any rate, Weasel-face was not pleased; the jabbering was replaced by an oddly effeminate cursing. Gorrila tightened up and she thought she would lose the arm. She heard a distinct cracking from the joint. Stars swam in the blackness of the lap. "I tol' you not move, honey. We can do this the easy way, or we can



do it the hard way, unnerstan'?" She tried to nod but felt more like vomiting, instead. She wondered, dimly, if he would appreciate that. Her throbbing arm was lowered, the other loop of rope was slid into place, tightened to the same searing bite as its mate, and knotted. Locked. Her arms were lost to her. Even clothed, such as that clothing was, it

made her feel some- how naked. Her wrists were to be the least of her travails.

Easa shifted his position and circled her arms with a short, thick leather strap, just below the elbows. As the strap was taken in, drawing the joints together, she almost unconsciously shifted her shoulders back to accommodate its pull; she had always been able to touch her elbows together behind her back, and when the strap was finally buckled, the leather deeply imbedded into the skin, her two arms were as one. Her face was still buried in the odorous lap, her hair serving as a convenient handle. She was finding it very difficult to breathe. Pm passing out, she thought, registering only dimly that her legs were being painfully corded at the knees and ankles. She was all one, now, no longer a biped. A monopod?

Suddenly, the hand in her hair shifted to her neck and she was tilted up and back, affording her an all too quick glimpse of a narrow road flowing by and fields waiting for the plow. Like a curtain dropping, the blindfold, leather and thickly padded, assaulted her eyes and was cinched with the same crushing tightness as the rest of her bondage.

“Please,” she began, “why are you doing this? What do you want?” The panic still colored her words, leaving them sounding like a cross between a gasp and a scream.

“Please ...”

“Open,” came the retort. Weasel-face. Still effeminate. But nasty.

“What?”

“Open your mouth.”

“Why?” Then it dawned on her; she had seen a lot of heroines on a lot of TV. “Oh, God no, you aren’t going to gag me are you? Please! I’m helpless already. I can’t do anything.

I can’t even see! Please, don’t put anything in my mouth!” She heard a muted snicker and a comment that this wasn’t the only thing she was going to have in her mouth. She thought it something Gorrila might say. Ferret pinned her to his chest with one hand and jammed the ball against her mouth with the other. Her lips had been partly open to voice more objections so that, immediately, part of the rubber protruded inward and between her teeth. She couldn’t close her jaws or expel the thing with the man pushing. She fought and thrashed as much as she was able until Gorrila finally grabbed her legs in exasperation.

“Come on, Ferret, for Gris’ sake!” Gorrila was bored. Gradually, with Ferret rocking the ball back and forth and pushing for all he was worth, Alicia’s jaws were pried farther and farther apart until she began to fear that something might tear - the ball was gigantic!

Suddenly, finally, the gag popped into position, pinning her tongue to the bottom of her mouth and filling and stretching her mouth so completely that she couldn’t even pull her lips away from the ball. She bit down, but the surface yielded only slightly. When the straps were buckled, the gag became almost a part of her. I mustn’t vomit, she thought, frantically. Good God, I must not throw up! She whined through her nose.

Lastly, a thin leather cord was attached first to her bound wrists, then pulled down between her legs and then up her sex and belly and knotted around her waist, pinning

her arms to the center of her back. The pain of her wrists was utterly forgotten as this new band of fire invaded her, parting the lips, disappearing into the cleft, leather covered still by the bikini and sundered by this exquisite line of torment. Denied all but her sense of feel, the strap became the center of her universe, at once painful and erotic. She had analyzed the sensation unconsciously, then consciously was vaguely shocked that it should in any way be erotic.

Done with the binding, they propped her against the seat back. She shook her head against the gag and fluttered her shoulders against the fire in her arms. Ferret tittered at her obvious trauma and cradled one of the silken black-covered breasts so appealingly and helplessly jutting and jiggling as the car switched to the gravel back roads.

“Fear not, my dove,” the nasal voice rasped close to her ear. “You will come to no harm.

Permanent harm, at any rate.” He ran his hands lightly over both breasts now, kneading lightly. “I say, these are most excellent, wouldn’t you say, A.G. old man?” A noncommittal grunt. “Splendid shape. Healthy. Looked like she had good teeth when I put on the gag. You see, Alicia . . . yes we do know your name, you have been picked up for purposes not entirely honorable, as you may well have deduced by now, but you see, my colleagues and I have discovered that the exchequer is not exactly in the best of shape. We will, therefore, have to make some fairly substantial deposits in short order.

You will, as a result, undoubtedly find yourself somewhat less than usually comfortable during the course of the next several days (or weeks or months, he thought to himself wistfully). We do so hope that your father is amenable to our terms because the exact parameter of your lack of comfort will, alas, be directly dependent on his intransigence.

Or lack of it.”

This was starkly incredible. Here she was, snatched from the street, tethered and helpless and almost naked in front of two total strangers who no doubt had every intention of raping her (she felt a rather odd thrill at that) and here was the one almost apologizing to her! She was terrified, starkly totally terrified, but even at the exact instant of her capture, when the first single cord had pinioned her wrist and as the subsequent bonds were applied to her struggling limbs and more so, now that



she knew they didn't intend to kill her and she could, by effort of will, choke back and partially control the first horror, she realized that something was happening to her. The first awareness, nearly subliminal in its effect, buried as it was beneath the assault of

sensations and tumult of the abduction was that she was for the first time in her entire life, absolutely, totally helpless. A simple discovery but, for her, profound. The situation, the absolute terrifying novelty of it, now that she could more objectively analyze her straits seemed somehow perversely fitting. Or was that the work? Always, under all circumstances, she had dominated the situation. Now, to an absolute degree, it was she who was being dominated. She had never been bound before, never had the hard bulk of a gag invading her mouth. Never had the sweet terror of utter dependence on another been hers to savor. Some of her friends had alluded to it obliquely in conversations, but she had dismissed it as nonsense other people played. She had wondered about it, though. It was almost thrilling, in its way. And it was more - she was becoming aroused!

The hands at her breasts and the crotch strap in conjunction with the bumpy road produced a most alarming effect. This shouldn't be happening to her, not in front of these strangers. She hoped they couldn't tell. Her nipples were like hard little knobs beneath the leather. Let me out, they seemed to be saying. Ferret was grinning from ear to ear. A pity about the panties: hard to tell if she was as wet as he expected. Too bad about that strap, too - Madame's orders. Madame was no fool when it came to allowing our Mr.

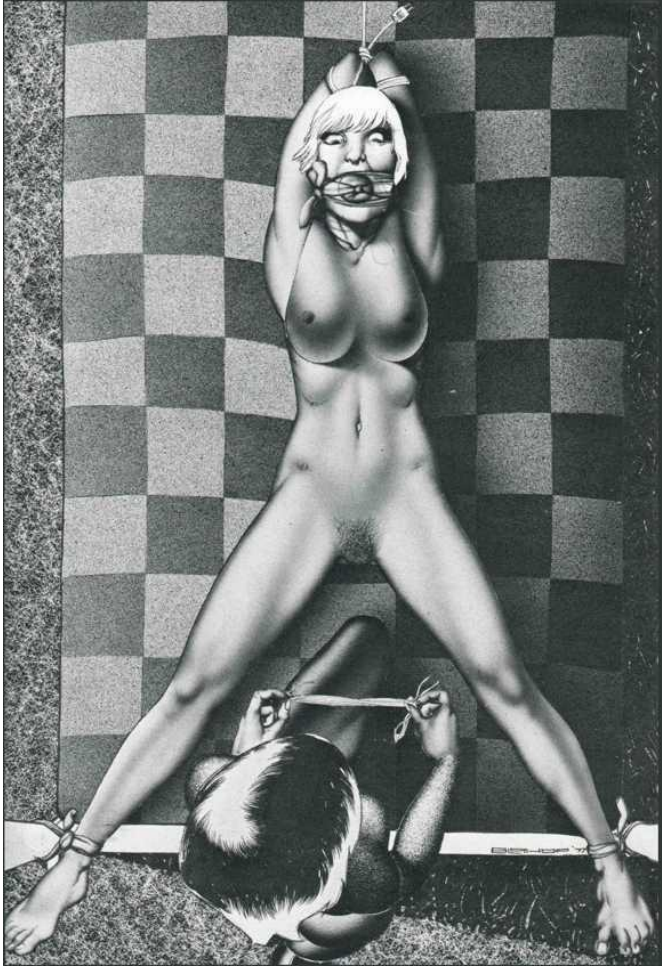
Ferret to pick up new charges with no supervision.

"Sit back and enjoy the tour, he quipped. The tire between her legs would hardly allow her any choice in the matter, she decided. Vaguely, she felt the tingling in her fingertips that presaged her arms falling asleep. She shifted her position. It was the elbow strap.

Thank God it was a strap and not a cord. Ferret began humming to himself. She imagined him licking his lips. Gorilla said nothing. She found herself wondering why. Here she was all trussed and soft and feminine and helpless and it produced no interest? She had never had a man show no interest. She felt almost insulted. Then she tried imagining that hulk pinning her to the floor and rutting away grunting like a hog. She was glad he showed no interest, now that she thought about it.

They stopped finally, inevitably. The cords on her ankles were severed. She thought of kicking but elected not to waste the strength. Her ankles were re-tied, joined by a ten-inch length of cord so that she was able to take steps of a kind. The line on her knees was removed, the men supported and guided her, one to each side, and they, she stumbling and tripping between them, left the car and entered a place of pleasure and pain that she was not destined ever wholly to escape.

"These are some of the pictures they've been sending me,"



the man behind the desk offered. The packet was surprisingly thick.

“I thought she’d only been gone for a few days,” was the reply. “Why so many photographs?”

“Maybe they’ve got stock in Polaroid,” was the reply, angry. “I’m not particularly interested in the quantity of the pictures, Miss Hall. Look what those swines are doing to my daughter!”

Fanni scanned the ensemble, thought about it for a minute and mused, “I hope your daughter has a sense of humor. An innovative crowd if I ever saw one . . . ooohh, look at that one,

I didn’t know you could get one of those in there . . .”

“Miss Hall!” the man screeched, “I was led to believe that you might be able to help me. If I’d known that I was going to get nothing but a bunch of smart-assed crap like ...”

“Not to WORRY, sir,” Fanni mollified. “I meant no offense. Endless apologies. Why haven’t you gone to the police?”

“The usual threats, of course. Besides which, Miss Hall, I am a very wealthy man, if you know what I mean, a VERY wealthy man, and they really aren’t asking all that much for her return. I don’t want to take any chances with her life.”

“How much money?”

“Ten thousand dollars. Hell, I make that much in an hour. Why bring in the cops and make it messy. Can you see my point?”

Ten thousands bucks for the only daughter of a multi- billionaire? Something wasn’t quite right, here, she thought. Why so cheap? And why couldn’t a man with the personal intelligence resources that that kind of money can buy find some simple kidnappers?

Unless the kidnappers weren’t simple at all. Or a setup. She scanned the pictures again, stopping at one and pausing.

“Since you’re going to pay, why do you want me?”

“I want you to find out who these bastards are. I want personal satisfaction. Neither my people nor the cops can turn anything on the people in the pictures. No I.D., no records, no nothing. You were recommended. I want my hands on them!”

He wasn't telling the whole truth.

"Who recommended me?"

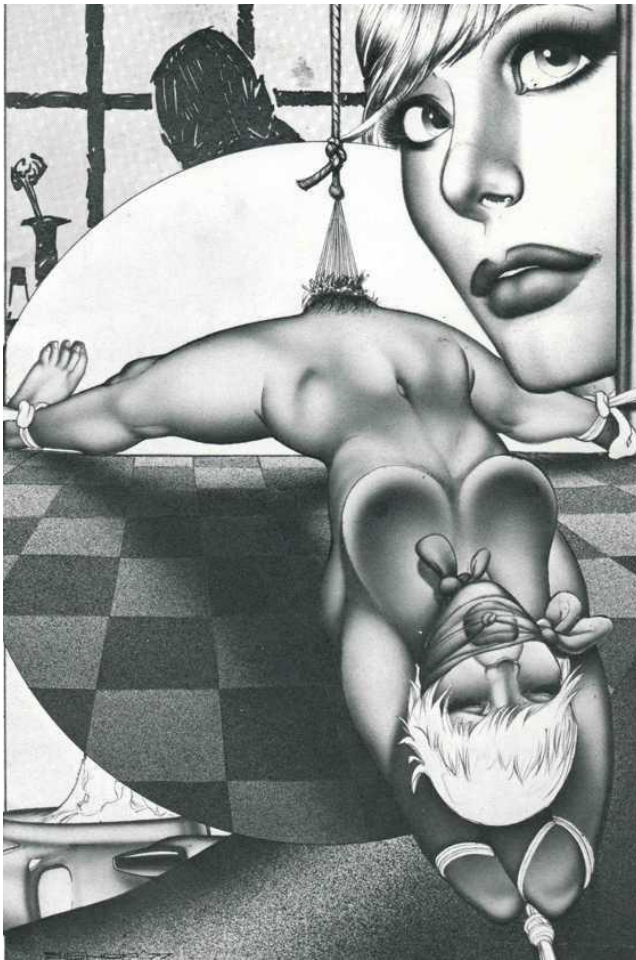
"I can't say."

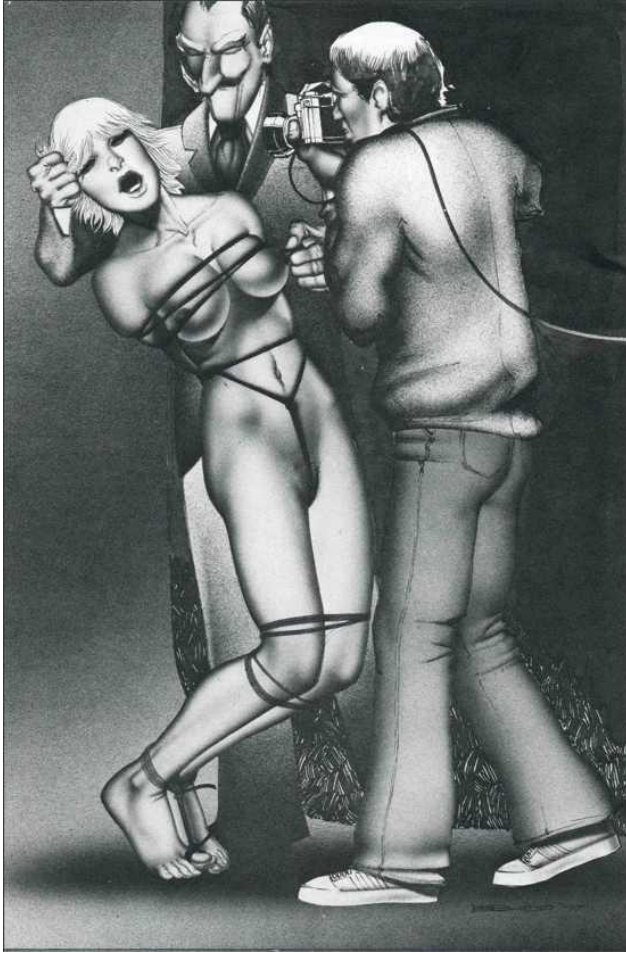
"Can't or won't?"

"Both."

They stared hard at each other for several minutes. She sensed that in this, at least, he was being candid. "All right, I'll do it." You're gonna be sorry, Hall, a very small voice told her.

"Thank you, thank you very much, Miss Hall," he sighed, seeming almost to collapse into himself. For the rumored iceman of the business world, the man seemed very nervous to Fanni. Well, the minx was his only daughter. Again, that twinge of doubt. What the hell was going on? As she was escorted outside, she reviewed the face she had seen on one of the pics.





It was Chattele all right. Not even a little doubt. Her face was right near the edge in one of the photographs, very sharp as if the camera had been deliberately focused there. And Fanni knew where Chattele was. Right down to the street number. A wee talk would be appropriate. Alicia could be, probably was, right in the city. Time to move.

Chattele wasn't her real name of course. It was merely an affectation of the term chattel, meaning personal property. Madame's personal property. The apartment wasn't hers either, it was Madame's, but Fanni didn't know that.

"Good evening, you little vermin," was Fanni's greeting.

"YOU!" was Chattele's usual urbane reply, as she attempted to slam the door. Fanni had started moving before Chattele had gotten the word out of her mouth and hit the door before it had moved more than two inches. Chattele stumbled back down the three steps leading to the portal and sat down, hard. Fanni closed the door and locked it.

“UP,” was the command as she turned. She gestured with the silenced PPK/S Walther to emphasize the command. “Into the bedroom and strip.”

“What are you going to do, fuck me with the gun?” she jibed.

“I might shoot you a few times with it, honey, and I will damn well beat the shit out of you with it if you don’t do what I tell you, but as to your suggestion, it’s simply much too nice a gun to dip in that canyon of yours.”

“Why you. . .”

The hammer came back with an audible double click. Chattele froze, eyes huge on the black .380 caliber eye aimed at her navel. “. . . on the other hand . . .” She turned and slunk into the bedroom. Her clothes were a pool of cloth about her feet moments later.

“Nylons?” Fanni queried. The other girl pointed to a near- by dresser drawer warily. Gun still trained on her query, Fanni rummaged around in the contents of the indicated drawer and withdrew a number of stockings and turning, advanced on her by now nervous prey.

“Look, what are you going to do . . . ?” Chattele started.

“We’re going to have a nice little talk. Over to the wall here. That’s right. Tummy right against it. Now bring your arms up and cross your wrists at the back of your neck. Good girl. Now back your feet away from the wall and spread ‘em. Farther, goddamnit!” It was a very awkward and uncomfortable position for the girl, supporting her weight at an ungainly slant against the wall with her chest and face. Fanni now stepped into the wide

‘V’ formed by the splayed legs. “I’m going to tie your hands now, fool, and if you try anything stupid, first you’ll fall down because of the position, and second I will then turn that hide of yours into a lampshade. Am I understood?” There was a barely audible and very tremulous word of assent.

Fanni contrived a large clove-hitch (not all that easy to do with nylons, by the way) and slipped the double loop over the crossed hands. She tightened the stricture until all the elasticity was gone and the body beneath her stiffened at the tightness, then used the remainder of the nylon to cinch the binding. Reaching through the narrow gap between

arms and neck on both sides, she wound a second stocking from the front of Chattele’s throat back around and through her cinched hands and then back around again to the front of her neck out of the way of trouble. Stepping back out of the way of potential kicks Fanni again motioned with the pistol. “Over to the bed.” Tentatively and very gingerly, because of the tight band around her throat, Chattele tested the effectiveness of her bondage, found it insurmountable, and complied. “On your stomach.” Chattele sat down, laid back, and rolled over. Fanni quickly grabbed the girl’s feet and bound them together before she could resist, then dragged her pouting bundle so that her bound legs pointed toward one of the posts at the foot of the bed. Using more

of the nylons, she bound only one of the pinioned feet to the upright, then quickly cut the main binding and with both hands forced the other foot to the remaining brass pole. The bed being wide, and the girl's feet being bound directly to the uprights, she was laid obscenely spread and open.

"God, you're splitting me up the middle," was the gasp.

"You should survive. I think." The last knot tightened, Fanni stood back to examine her catch. "Very inviting, love. Not very subtle, to be sure . . . maybe I should invite in that dog I saw out in the hall ..." The look was pure venom. Impotent venom. In the cabinet beneath the kitchen sink, Fanni found an extension cord and a mostly clean dishcloth.

One end of the electrical cord she looped about the pointed elbows and the other end about a lateral crossbar at the head of the bed.

She pulled once and got a gasp, pulled again and got a distinct moan, pulled again just to be sure and threw a knot onto the line. Chattele was now stretched taut as the proverbial bow string, her feet splayed and lashed to the foot of the bed and her elbows stretched hard toward the head of the bed. "All I need is a bow and some resin," Fanni thought aloud.

"What?" was the agonized reply.

"I see you've taken up photography," Fanni said. "Polaroid photography."

"I don't know what you're talking about!" Chattele whined. "I don't even own a camera and wouldn't know how to use one if I did." Fanni took the packet of pictures from her bag, rifled through the selection, selected one seemingly at random and held it before the girl's eyes.

"Recognize yourself, Bozo?" Chattele's eyes went wide for only a second, but it was enough. She looked away from the picture. Fanni kept the picture moving so it would always be before her gaze. "I care naught for you, honeybuns. It's the





girl in the picture, the blonde that your friends have laced up there that I want. It's the Madame, isn't it? Another one of her stunts. Why does she want the girl? Why is she ransoming her off so cheap? Speak!"

"I don't know. I don't. I swear, she told me to get into the pictures a couple of times. You know what she'd do to me. I can't, I can't! I won't!!! You've got no right to mix into this; it's none of your business! Go to hell! Let me loose, please!?"

"Truculence was ever the bane of youth," Fanni sighed. "If tact and gentle persuasions be not sufficient, more efficacious methods must perforce be employed, me thinks." She wadded the dishcloth into a ball and thrust it down a nylon until it was halfway to the toe. She then took both ends of the stocking and tied a hard knot around the wad of cloth, leaving her with a nylon-clad ball of cotton cloth with long ends from either side of the ball. "Open wide, sugar."

Chattele, seemingly exhausted and in pain, meekly submitted. The wadding was huge and it took a lot of effort to finally push it home into her mouth. Cheeks and mouth stretched to the limits of human flesh, Chattele looked as if she might have been trying to eat a baseball at one gulp. The nylon ends of the gag went around behind the hapless girl's neck and then forward again against the bloated cheeks, one end going over the gag wad and the two ends joined together at one side of the face. There would be no invective coming from those lips. Her breathing was noisy through her nose. "Do you have a cold, sweetheart?" Fanni commiserated. "Maybe I should get you some aspirin. How about a hot water bottle? Last chance. Anything to say . . . er well, you know what I mean, under the circumstances." The bound face gave a definite, but thoroughly frightened negative.

Fanni shook her head in disappointment. "Your treat, kid."

From a 35mm film can, Fanni removed a bundle of fine silk thongs. The bundle unraveled revealed about two dozen separate two-foot-long filaments. Fanni settled herself comfortably at the juncture of the splayed thighs and began her task. She didn't speak.

Chattele couldn't. With great care, Hall tied one end of a thong about a small cluster of pubic hairs and knotted it with deliberate care. Picking up another thong, she repeated the process using another small group of hairs. "I'm really glad you aren't shaved, you know," she opined.

Chattele listened and breathed through her nose. The process was lengthy because of the precision involved. At the end of the requisite time, all 24 lines had been secured to Chattele's luxuriant thatch, each in its separate area, each binding a distinct bunch of hair.

Fanni slowly and carefully gathered all the thongs together, pulling simultaneously so that they all shared the same tension, none too slack, none too taut. At this point, the thongs were tied together in one large knot. Above the knot the remaining length of the ganged threads was linked to a length of clothesline provided by the copious kitchen cabinet.

The nether end of the cord was then thrown over a beam overhead spanning the bed edge to edge. With a cherubic grin, Fanni caught the thrown end as it fell and pulled down on the end of the line. The effect was immediate. Twenty-four tiny hands firmly clenched in Chattele's bush lifted and pulled. She squirmed, sweat standing out on her face. Garbled negatives disappeared into the wadding. Her eyes were white on -the edges and huge.

"Any helpful comments?" Fanni coaxed. A pause and then a very faint shake of the head.

Stubborn. OK. Full grown. Her choice. From an adjacent bookcase Fanni selected a

number of wide flat books and returned to the bed. Throwing the pile onto the bed, she jumped beside the recumbent form and heaved the sweat-streaked buttocks bodily from the bed and

began shoveling the books beneath. When she was done, Chattele found her sex elevated a full twelve inches higher than before, held in place by the stack of books.

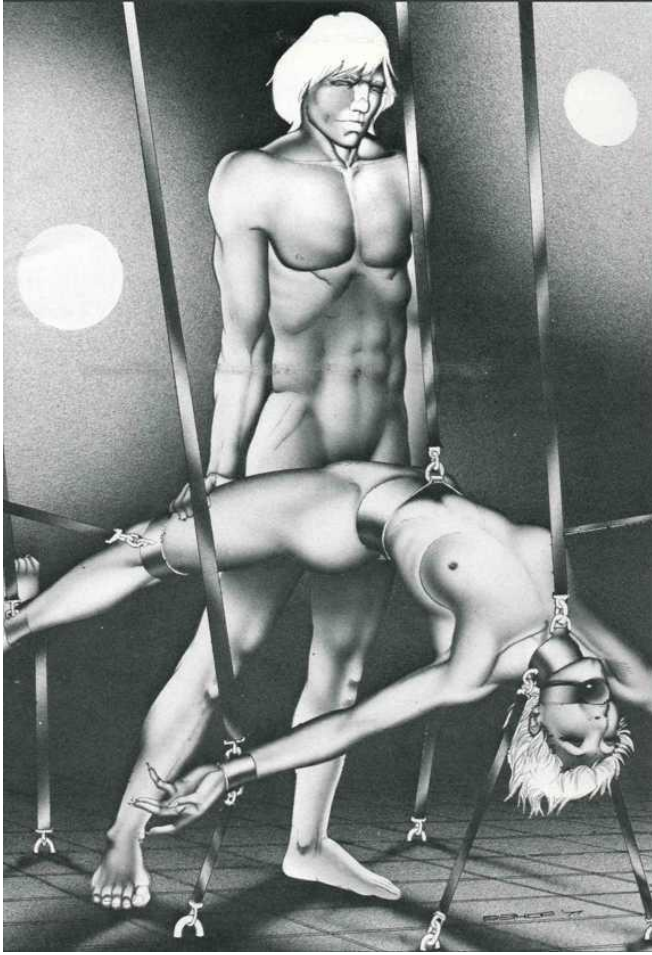
“You ain’t gonna like this, kid. Madame tried this on me once and I seriously considered having myself permanently depilated after that just to make sure it could never ever happen again.” With that, she drew the pubic hair rope taut, tied it off at the base of the bed, and removed the books, one by one. When the last book was gone, Chattele found herself supported by her crotch hairs, her bottom a clear four inches from the bed’s support. The agony was unbelievable. Surely those tiny, inconsequential hairs couldn’t support so much weight. Or hurt so much. She writhed and twisted, hair lank and damp against her forehead, the bed sopping beneath those parts of her body where the two made contact.

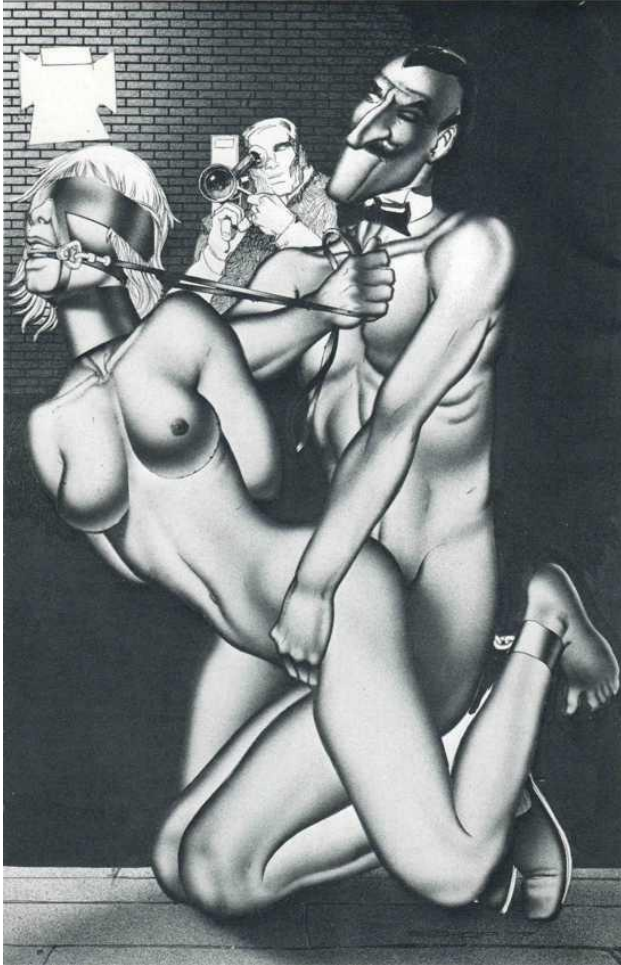
The pain was beyond a groan or a gasp. She screamed and screamed again, the frantic scream disappearing into the gag like a BB into a pool of oil, emerging, finally, as no more than a thin whining through her nose. “Told ya you wouldn’t like it. I have to run on down to the drug store. I’ll be back in an hour. Or two. Enjoy.”

Dimly, through a red haze of pain and sweat running into her eyes, she saw the other woman pick up her coat and depart! No! This was impossible! Incredible! Worse, almost than the pain was the fact that she could see every single line of her torture, pulling the hair and the flesh to which it was attached up into tiny pink hillocks. Oh God, if they would only pull out! If only she could give one good hard jerk, she was sure the hairs would part company with her, but she was so tightly tractioned that any upward movement was impossible. She could only hang, and hurt. And mewl into the monstrous huge gag. Time stood still.

“Want to talk?” She was back, what, a century, a millenia later? Sucking a coke, coat hung over one shoulder, Fanni was Chattele’s own vision of heaven and solace incarnate.

“Wanna talk, schweetheart? ” she said with a Bogie drawl. A nod. It was almost more than she could manage.





“I have the location. What? How? Well, let’s just say an ‘acquaintance’ of mine came across. No. No real problem. No, I m on my way, now. Should have this cleaned up pretty quick. Any more pictures? Yeah . . . they did WHAT! Hope the dog was all right! Well, I’m sure you’ll enjoy your revenge all the more for that. Gotta go.” Fanni hung up the

phone.

The man hung up his phone, then picked it up, again and dialed a number that had come with the latest pictures. “She’s on her way . . . what about my daughter?” There was a click on the other end of the line. The man cradled the phone and stared blankly through the smog. He was well past rage by now. A black emptiness was all he could feel.

For Alicia, feeling, en toto was what she did to a greater extent now than at any other time in her entire life. She had become a creature of the tactile, her skin an instrument for

communicating the plethora of wounds, of stripes, of bonds, and strained, exhausting, agonizing positions she had so recently weathered. The physical dimensions of the change in status had begun so long (it seemed) ago in the car. The leather pads strapped to her eyes had robbed her of her sight, and she had turned inward, examining the sensations, discomforts, . . . pleasures, for that was what they had been, her fear and initial revulsion and frantic negatives notwithstanding. She had been brutally torn from the fabric of her perceived life, the inviolate image of herself as a sovereign entity had been dissolved with the first ropes on her wrist. The inculcated and imagined sanctity of her sex had been plundered by the invasion of the strap, the orgasms all the more violent because she had absolutely no control over what was happening between her legs. She would not be the same again even if her captors led her freely to the open door. She had hated them, and feared them. Especially the woman. White on black. Pale, pale skin surrounded by a black fall of hair merging, seemingly into a dress of the same color. There was a thin brilliant red belt high about her waist. Her only color. But for the eyes. Green.

She was quite the most beautiful and terrifying spectacle Alicia had ever beheld, and was the only thing about the room to which the removed blindfold had introduced her that she could recall, afterwards. The meeting had been brief and wordless. At a curt gesture from the woman Alicia, still gagged, still bound, still wearing the strap, had been hustled from the room and to the bleak, featureless cell that had become her only point of stability in the whole incredible whirlwind of activity.

That and her bonds. They never left her. They seemed, now, almost clothing. Surely, they were the only things that covered any part of her body. In three days, nakedness had come to seem almost as ordinary as the wearing of clothes had seemed before, although Mr. Ferret's constant leering and smirking still caused the occasional blush. What might have been a natural reaction to attempt covering the crotch and breasts with the hands had very quickly been denied her. Left alone in the cell, she generally wore the same

“uniform” - the thick leather collar around her throat, the handcuffs holding her wrists behind her back, and the short strap that attached to a ring at the back of the collar, and pulled her hands high up beneath her shoulder blades. Sometimes they chained her feet for the night. Most times not. With her hands so completely denied to her, she had developed into a fine art the ability to pull the one thin blanket they allowed her up to her shoulders with her teeth. Her feet, too, had become more dexterous. One night, she had been chained to the wall, one dainty foot lifted and bound to a ring set two feet off the floor of the cell. She had spent the night balancing on one foot. That had been the first night, before she knew enough to keep her mouth shut. She had spent the night gagged, as well.

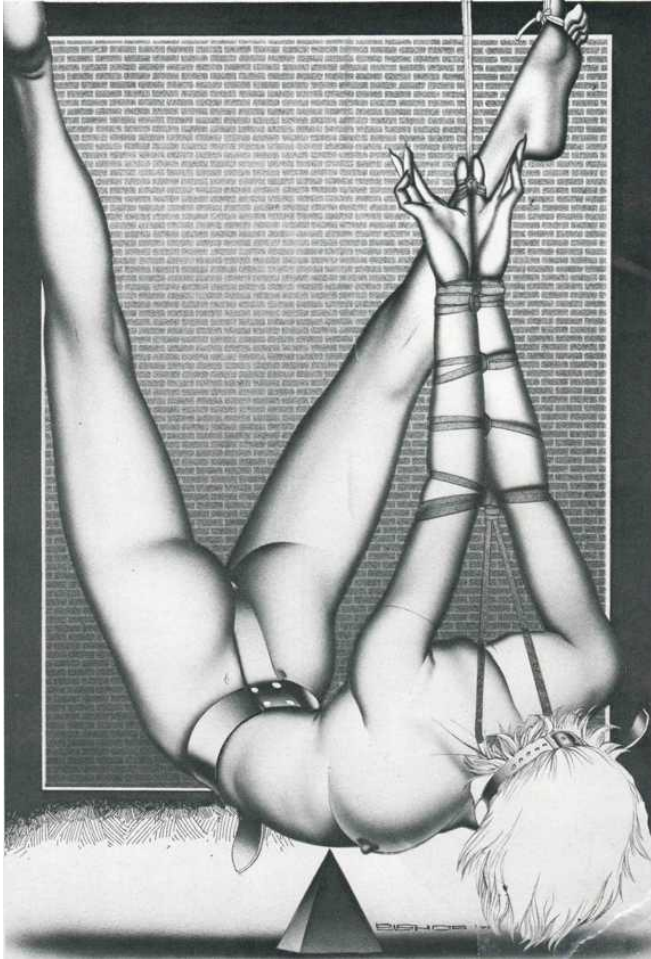
She knew what they were doing to her. It had been explained in considerable detail, and implemented with consummate skill. She saw the woman infrequently. Each time she had seemed to be distracted, evincing none of the feral lust and demonic bondage innovation that

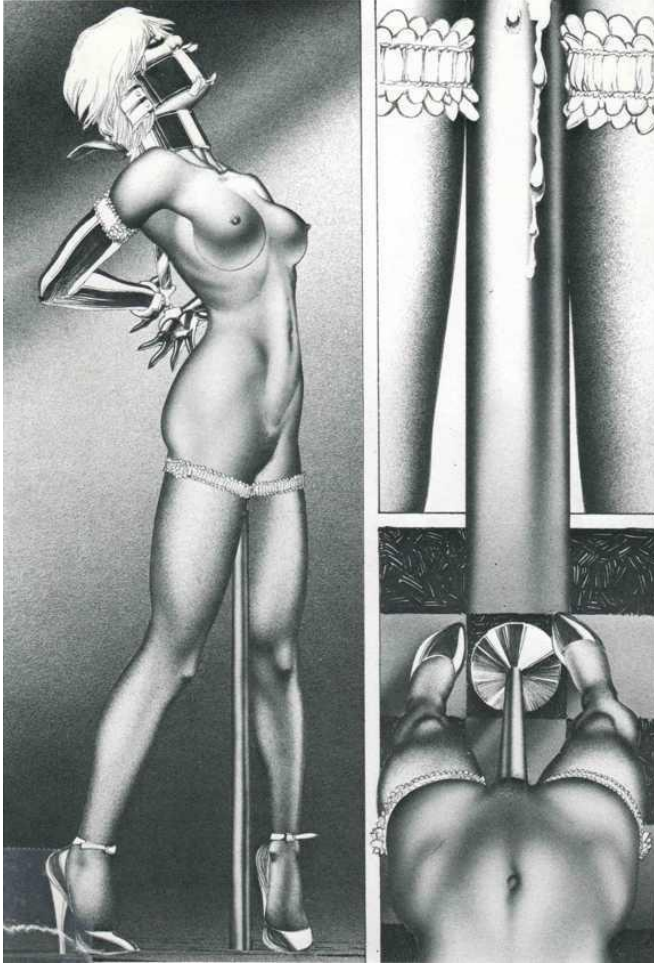
characterized Fiendly's attentions. Her interests seemed elsewhere. She seemed im-patient about something.

Fiendly was never, ever distracted. He strapped her and chained her, roped her and gagged her and blindfolded her in contortions she would never had thought she would be able to attain. And then maintain, sometimes for hours! And the cameras going off all the time. For the first day's photo session, she had been given back the leather bikini and told to don it. After having just spent her first full night bound, and naked, she jumped at the chance to cover herself decently. The flush of pleasure was to be short lived, however.

Her wrists were thonged behind her back and she was led into a very well equipped studio and marched out onto a backdrop paper.

The photographer lolled at the edge of the paper, Gorrila sat, arms crossed, by the doorway through which she had just entered, and Fiendly set to work preparing Alicia more thoroughly. First, he tied her elbows together, again, only with cord this time and she gasped at the bite. Several turns of line then crushed her arms to her back and pulled a deep valley into her stomach. At this point, the photographer began shooting, scurrying around and choosing his angles. Fiendly continued, cording her legs above and below the knees, her ankles and then, finally, her big toes, pulling, arching them back and up toward the bindings on the ankles. He stepped back then, and the photographer came in for close-up shots, especially of her face; they didn't want her father to have any doubts about who this was happening to. Her bra came off next and more rope was used to pin her arms to her upper body, the thin line digging deeply, painfully into the silken soft conical mounds of her breasts. The camera clicked away. Fiendly was getting very excited. That left only the bikini panty. His fingers curled under one strap, sliding toward the knot at the hip.





through the torrent of tears running down her face. The back of her scalp felt as if it were

afire. The tension, the strain were unendurable. But she endured. She discovered what it was like to, literally, live from second to second. She could move absolutely no part of her body, save for her eyes, and what was she going to see? The pain never left, and she never got used to it but, happily, after the first several minutes, she discovered that she could live with it. She wept bitterly, desperately. Pay, daddy, please, please pay! At one panic-stricken moment, she thought her left foot might give out and that her arms and legs and hair would have to take the full weight of her body. Gritting her teeth and panting like a dog, she concentrated, willed, prayed her

trembling, jerking leg into obedience and to suffer more torment. The calf muscle of the leg stood out like a fist. It went on.

The cameraman was busy setting up. Something was happening. Please let me down, she whimpered to herself. He looked like a decent enough sort. Maybe she could reason with him. “Please, sir,” she gasped. God, even her voice sounded tortured. There was no reply.

“Look, sir, my father is a rich man. He’s got lots of money. If you let me go, I’ll get you anything you want, as much money as you could ever hope for. I won’t say a word to anybody about this. PLEASE!!!” Tears and pleading had always worked on her father.

Maybe there was a chance, here. The man turned and gave her a sardonic stare. Speaking not a word, he turned to the equipment chest and returned to stand directly before her, a thick short strap dangling from one hand.

“E.F. was right, I guess, little lady. You should know the rules by now. Sorry, but I only work here. Open wide.”

“Oh God . . .” That was as far as she got.

Fifteen minutes, the woman came in, followed servilely by our man Ferret. His eyes lit up when he saw the gag, but he said nothing. It was the woman who spoke. “I see she’s been talking out of turn, again, Harry?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Disappointing. Considering the type and qualities of schools to which your father sent you, young woman, you seem not to have learned much in the way of common sense.”

The woman strolled around the panting bundle, occasionally poking or feeling. “It should be glaringly obvious, I would have thought, that recalcitrance on your part is not merely a waste of time but guaranteed, I’ll say it again, guaranteed to land you in a lot worse trouble than you’re going through now. If you like this little configuration, keep shooting off your mouth and you’ll really experience a touch of the bizarre. I think we’ll have her shaven, E.F. That way the rings will show better.” The woman completed the circuit and ended standing directly before Alicia’s sweating, flushed face. With a quick economy of movement she removed the sopping gag. “I have decided that our snaps of you will have a rather more pungent

“Please don’t,” she whimpered. “Please.”

“Ah, foolish child, so very foolish. You were told about the consequences of errant speech,” he chortled. With a flourish, the knots came undone, and the man held the panty mounded in his hands, a soft, supple bundle warm with her body’s heat. He gave her a lecherous wink and began wadding it up, smaller and smaller. Tiny as it appeared when

worn, the bikini bottom made a sizable bundle.

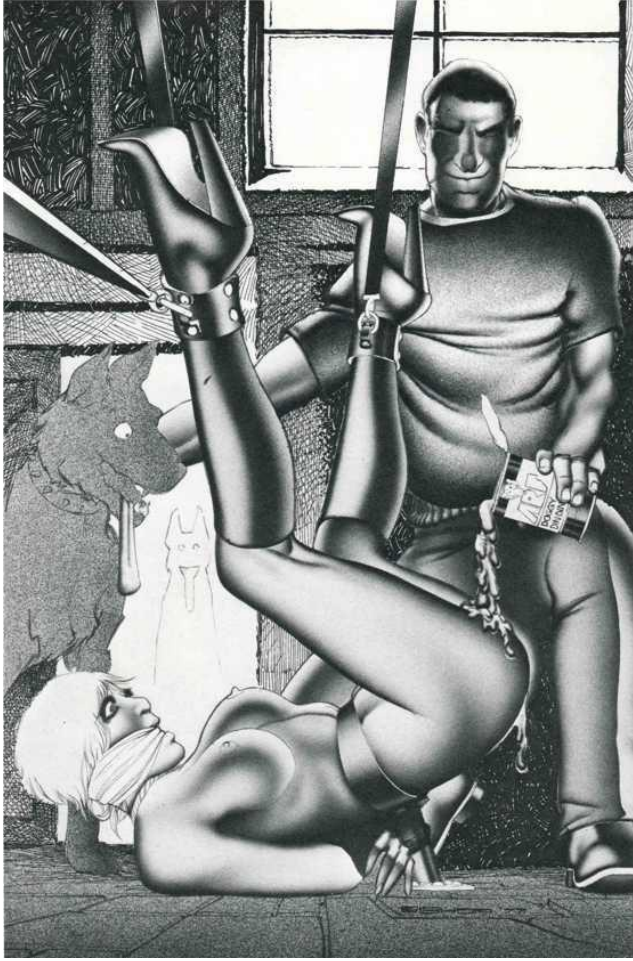
Alicia shook her head, teeth clenched. “You’re not putting that thing in my mouth, you little fuck!” Quick as a snake striking, Fiendly’s hand flashed to a nipple pinching with unbelievable strength and twisting till she thought the nub would be wrenched from her breast. Pain exploded in her chest, and reflexively, she opened her mouth for the scream.

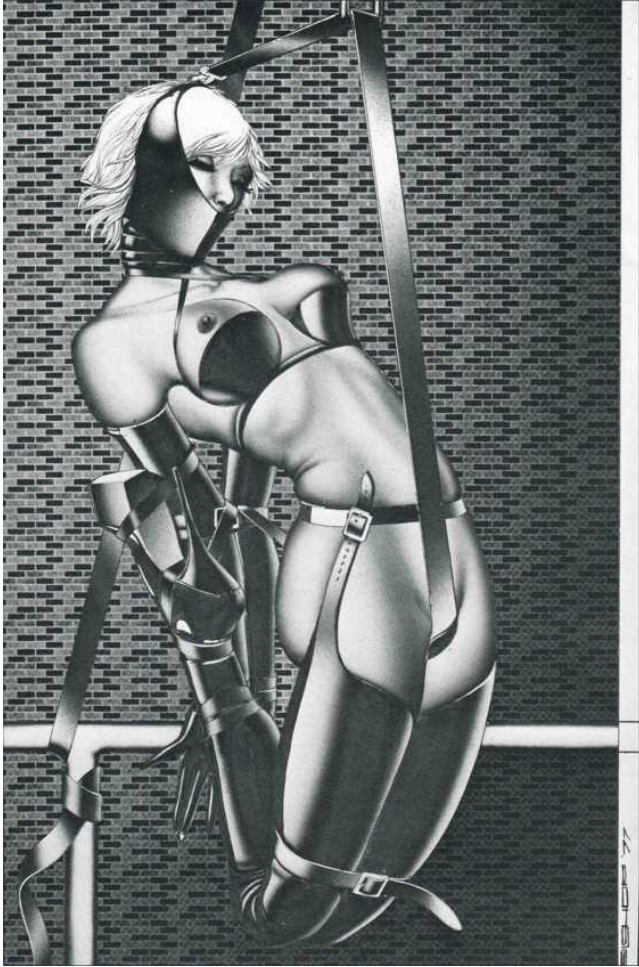
Instantly, the man had the leather packing firmly seated inside and almost as quickly secured in place. She screamed anyway, in pure shame and frustration. The little bastard had done it again! The strobe lights going off in her face were blinding, but she ignored them in her impotent fury. She twisted against his grasp and, obligingly, he let go. Her balance, precarious at best when standing perfectly still under the circumstances was not up to the task of these sudden perambulations and she fell heavily on her side. The floor beneath the backdrop paper was cement and the fall hurt. Badly. The side of her head rapped the floor lightly, and she saw swirling bright lights behind her eyes.

“But it isn’t quitting time, love,” he cooed. “What does this mean, you lying down on the job. Arise, my pet.” She shook her head, trying to rid her vision of the stars. “Comply,”

was the word as his hand grabbed a handful of hair and bodily dragged her up. The cameraman was yelling that he had to re-load the cameras. She stood, wobbling, weeping, as the last of the shots were finished. That was the first day. At least she didn’t have to wear the gag that night.

The second day saw her subjected to a number of contortions, culminating in what was probably the worst of her experiences thus far. She was made to stand on the very tippy toes of her foot, the rest of her arched and up into an elaborate bow suspended from the ceiling. Her arms were bound back and to a juncture with her left leg. This juncture hung down just far enough so that the outstretched right leg could just lend some miserly support. Everything ached in seconds, screamed in agony in minutes. “Oh my, that does look painful,” Ferret considered. “Here, I’ll help you.” He knotted another length of rope into her hair and pulled the other end up to meet the ceiling rope. When he had pulled and tugged for several seconds, Alicia found her head and neck added to the bow of her spine. “There, now, isn’t that much better?” was the solicitation. “Yes, indeed, I am always happy to help.” And then he left. Her view was the upper part of the wall directly before her, what she could see of it





effect if they are accompanied by sound effects.” Ferret handed her a cane. Alicia had no illusions about its purpose.

You can t hit me with that thing. How dare you* I’ll scream!”

“Precisely. And beg. We don’t expect anything particularly fancy, just your basic groveling and pleading.”

“Fuck you, witch!”

“I think a very large gag, tonight, Mr. Ferret, And a helmet.” Alicia’s heart sank. She’d done it again. But this was all so impossible! Knowing full well that she had already sentenced herself to a thoroughly unpleasant night, she decided it couldn’t get much worse, and persisted.

“Why do you have to hurt me like this?” she wailed. The woman and Ferret exchanged glances. “I can’t get away. Daddy will pay. You told me you aren’t asking for much money. Why do you have to keep me tied up all the time? Why? And keep putting me into these horrible conditions. Please. I’m trying to understand!”

The woman paused, then again walked to the girl’s face. “The money isn’t why you were kidnapped, little one. There is another reason which does not concern you. If our plan works, you will learn of it in time. It scarcely affects you except that you were necessary to start a chain of events. No, the reason for the torment is that it occurred to me during our first meeting that you are wasted in the straight world. There exists the latent slave-girl in all women but society’s inculcations have so attenuated that latency that for many girls, it is effectively non-existent. With the increasing degree to which women perceive themselves to be liberated, the female of the species is switching over to the predatory role traditionally held by men. It’s not that women are strong; it’s that men are becoming so weak. The women for whom the role of slave-girl lies very near the surface are thus in a quandry — their peers and their society demand that they live with a rather fundamental dichotomy; they are expected to revel in man’s weaknesses and dominate him or at the very least manipulate him — which they have quite successfully done for the last two million years, anyway, when in point of fact, the poor dears really want to be dominated by the man. It is a sad commentary on the male of the species that he has become so spineless. You, my dear, are one of those fortunate enough not only to, as a potential slave, be very close to the surface with your predilection, but to have become associated with a woman like me, who can and will bring it out where you can enjoy it.”

„ You re crazy,” Alicia started, not very convincingly.

“When my employees here, Mr. Gorrila and Mr. Ferret brought you here to my residence, your bikini bottom was sopping wet, as wet as . . she paused to inspect “ ... as you are now, in fact.”

“That’s ridiculous!” Ferret was grinning broadly. Even Gorrila had a smallish smirk.

“How many orgasms did you have in the car?” she asked. Alicia’s blush .was beet red.

“It was that damned strap running through my legs!” she replied, sounding rather desperate by now.

“Nonsense, child. To the average woman, it would have registered as nothing but pure pain. Besides which, she would have been so frightened that she would have peed in her pants and fainted. You did neither.” There was a protracted silence, broken only by Alicia’s labored breaths.

“If you want me to be a . . .” she choked on the word, “slave . . . don’t hurt me . . .”

“I’m truly sorry, youngster, but the torment is designed especially for the purpose we’ve been so pleasantly discussing: to make you a slave. It is not nearly enough for you to agree verbally; you must become a slave. It’s in there within you, locked up. You imagine that you operate still under your own volition. You imagine that you have choices, options. You have none. The bondage, the whips, the memories of freedom lost will transform you into a slave so that even when you walk with other people, unencumbered by chains and straps, mouth gloriously free of a gag to speak, you will not run and you will not scream.”

“You’re going to break me down . . . turn me into a zombie!” Alicia cried.

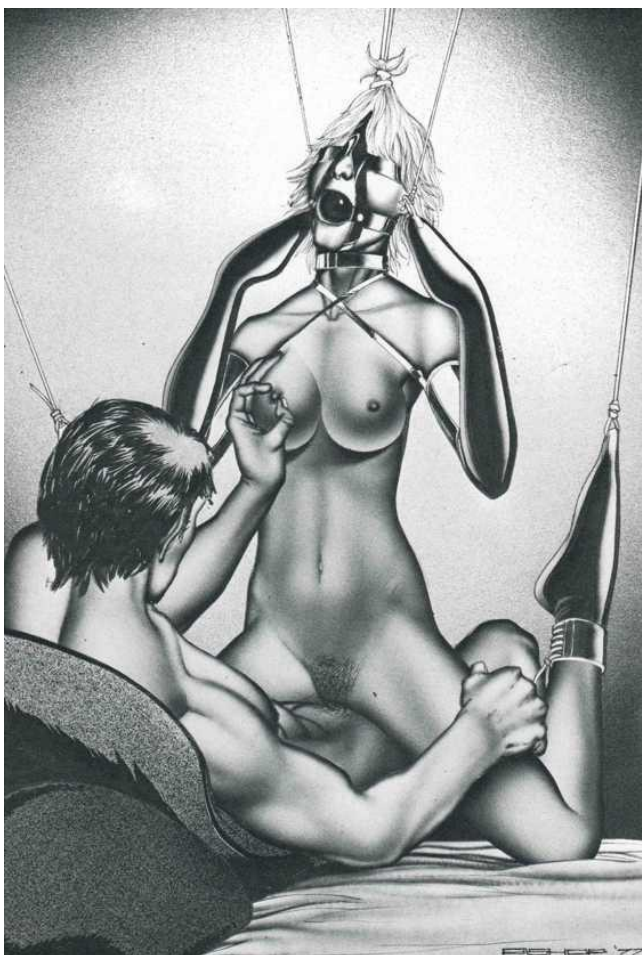
“No, my love, I’m going to introduce you to yourself.” She picked up the whip and walked back out of Alicia’s sight. Ferret produced a mike and propped it before her mouth on a small tripod. Alicia twisted her head, vainly trying to see this demented woman. The pain of the first lash exploded across the back of the outstretched right thigh.

It was in- describable. She would never have thought human flesh and nerves were capable of producing such incredible agony. She didn’t even scream. The second blow brought the scream. To say that she pleaded with eloquence is to demean the word. And then she screamed and screamed and screamed again with the next cutting slash. There were six blows in all. At the end of the caning, Alicia thought sure that the back of her leg must have been laid bare to the bone. How would she ever walk again even to be a slave!?

They let her down. The agony of her wracked body upon being released from the straited position was nearly as bad as the cane and she lay barely able to move for several minutes. The ropes were removed and her uniform put upon her. As her wrists were being drawn up beneath her shoulder blades, she could look at the, she feared, permanently maimed member. There were, instead, six purpling, ridged weals running laterally across the back of the leg. No blood. No gore. No whiteness of bone revealed by the dangling strips of maimed and mangled flesh. She goggled. It wasn’t possible, but there it was. Absurdly, she almost smiled!

Later, after she had been fed and bathed, mouth fitted around a huge wad of rubber, Ferret lacing the leather helmet





tight about her head, she reflected on the day. The woman in black and white had achieved a new dimension for her. The stripes ached viciously, agonizingly, and she knew without seeing that she was soaked, again. She felt betrayed by herself.

On day three, she lost her virginity. Several times. To several different people. And objects. The door to the cell had slammed open — she supposed it was morning — and was taken, still in helmet and uniform down halls that felt much longer than those down which she had previously traveled. Her ankles had been hobbled, and she minced along as best she could, teetering and slumping into the arms that held her up. Shortly after the helmet had been put into place the night before, she discovered the chief horror of the device, aside from the claustrophobia, the heat, and the blindness and the difficulty in breathing; there was no place for her drool to go! As disgusting as it was to have the saliva streaming down one's chin with a conventional ball gag, to wear an even larger rubber pad inside the helmet was terrible. It is difficult, to say the least, to

swallow with a gag in one's mouth. She'd had visions of drowning inside its clinging embrace. She had learned how to swallow gagged. Very quickly. Another useful lesson learned, she supposed.

There was a fumbling at the laces running up the back of the helmet and the device was removed. The sudden rush of fresh air seemed frigid after the stifling blackness of the hood. Her hair was a wet mat plastered around her head, her face was begrimed with sweat, and her chin was glistened beneath the protruding rubber wad from the saliva that, inevitably, she had not been totally able to control. Squinting her eyes against the glare, she perceived that she had been continuously filmed from the moment she had entered the room, both with a video-tape camera and with still cameras. Maybe they wanted instant replay. It was nearly as difficult extricating the gag from her mouth as it had been installing. In working her jaws, her mouth seeming somehow empty without the awful turgid presense. A. Gorrila stood before her. Arms crossed. Naked. A. Gorrila was clearly not bored, now. His erection was huge. And aimed directly at her. It was the vision in the car! Only this time, it was no vision; it was reality! He reached out for her and she recoiled, forgetting about the hobble, and went flat on her bottom, sprawling frantically away, feet shuffling piteously within the boundaries mandated by the straps at her ankles. Gorrila reached again, and again he missed by inches. If only she had her hands! She was making a superb spectacle for the cameras, which was, of course, the intent. Give daddy a real show. With a gesture from the cameraman, Gorrila suddenly lost his ponderous mean and pounced with an agility surprising for a man of such girth.

One of the huge arms pinned the thrashing legs together and lifted them clear of the floor, while the other got rid of the hobbles. He swung her body clear of the floor and dropped it. so that Alicia was lying at right angles to the camera. Then, his bulk was upon her, sweaty and huge and crushingly heavy.

She could barely breathe. During all this time, not a word had been spoken, by either of them. There didn't seem much to say. Pleading was, she knew, useless. Her eyes, brimming with tears of disgust and shame and revulsion, sought out those of the woman seated next to the sacrifice, but there was no pity in them. Gorrila grabbed her hair and cruelly twisted her head back and to the side. She gasped with the pain. His lips and tongue sought her throat, sliding down to her breasts, nibbling, licking, sucking, finally biting, gently at first, then harder. The other huge hand had slid between their bodies and was busy between the lips of her sex. She tried desperately to clamp her thighs together, but the hand merely vacated her sex temporarily and parted them like opening the pages of a book where they were kept apart by his legs. The hand returned to its ministrations.

A. Gorrila may have been no prize to gaze upon, but he was very very adept at arousing female flesh. His fingers were quickly slick and moist. She loathed herself for the weakness. Oh God, not this way! Not so ugly, and crude! She thrashed beneath him, not entirely to escape the man, more to escape herself. The buzz between her legs was continuous, now. She knew herself close to orgasm. Suddenly, she was penetrated in one long smooth stroke. She screamed as her maidenhead was breached and she spasmed.

The invader within was huge. And talented. As the cameras respectively whirred and clicked, A. Gorrila and his upstanding friend wrang from her the most wanton moans and cries she had heard anyone utter, all the more damning because they came from her lips. The zoom lenses and shotgun microphones were tight on her embroiled features, and oh the gigantic shaft appearing and disappearing into its warm, albeit temporary, home.

Daddy would have quite a show. Gorrila became bored after a bit and he and his friend withdrew, the friend looking somewhat limp and listless. No sooner had she been vacated to curl up within herself at the spectacle that she had been not merely to the cameras and the watching eyes, but to herself, when it was Ferret's turn. His eyes were like wet marbles. Her ankles were again hobbled and she was blindfolded. She lay limp and uncaring, betrayed by herself. You bitch, she thought, you rotten bitch. The supple strap cracked across her belly with an excruciating sting. She lurched, jackknifing in the middle. Another blow caught her across the thighs. She rolled and twisted, blind and frantic. The blows rained down on her body. She couldn't get away! She could discern Ferret's panting, whether from exertion or arousal, she couldn't tell. She didn't care. This incredible torrent of stinging slaps was all she cared about. Several times, when her harried gyrations took her too near the edge of the backdrop paper, the assault paused just long enough to drag



her back to the center of things but always it resumed, unabated in frequency or strength. She was weeping, incoherent sounds punctuated at odd moments by the occasional plea. And again, she felt the beginning of the buzz. What the hell was the matter with her! She really must be a slut. But a slut was one who looked for it, wasn't she? She wasn't looking for this at all. And yet she was . . . Goddamn you, she silently screamed at herself . . . again becoming aroused. Her introspection dissolved with the successive blows, as she was chased around and around. Finally, both of them nearly exhausted, Ferret told her to kneel with her face to the floor, bottom protruding and open and he took her, doggie-style. His sexual attack was over almost as soon as it began -

clearly his lust was triggered more by the whipping than the act of coitus.

She was slung from the ceiling via a harness/trapeze arrangement and rocked back and forth upon her impalement, then head bent back down toward the floor, was made to lave with her tongue and lips the instrument that had so recently been within her. All the men in attendance she then cleansed in this fashion. There were so many. Where had they come from? She was pierced both from the front and the back at the same time, her mouth silenced and filled with yet a third of the thick pylons. It was as if all the erections she had so casually caused had come home to roost. She was used and used and used again, becoming nothing but a receptacle, a thing, a slave. All day. In a seemingly endless stream of positions. The men had finally tired. She had ceased to care, looking around, almost offering herself to any late comers.

The dildo was gigantic. Back in the cell, blindfolded and gagged, she could feel its cold girth and length slide into her, her warm flesh mold, protestingly around it. When it was totally inside the straps attached to it were attached to her so tightly that she feared she might be severed. Then

the giant's vibrator was turned on. It took only seconds before she was moaning and crying into the gag, her breath coming short and hard through the nostril holes. She writhed and bucked, scrabbling her feet around the cell, even standing and stumbling blindly about, banging into the walls, slipping and falling, the orgasms piling one on the other seemingly projected into the blackness of the hood as exploding stars and colors. The straps held it a part of herself. Escape was impossible. Finally she lay exhausted, twitching. The thing was turned off. Her instant sleep was as black and featureless as the inside of the helmet.

Came the fourth day, and her eyes were restored to her. Gazing blearily around the room, she remarked, "What, no line? Alicia, your hole-away-from-home is to spared?" That had gotten her whipped. A round dozen. Her hands were away and impossibly high above her and her feet were spread wide to rings set into the floor. The worst cuts were those falling on the wounds suffered the other day. Her screams echoed back to her from the wall. The man with the whip, one she'd not yet seen before, removed the dildo to make way for him- self. Standing up and unable to twitch, he used her in much the same way he undoubtedly used his hand when no woman was available. It wasn't even recorded for her father's delecta- tions. He left her to hang. What a way to start the day, she thought ruefully, licking the salt tears that had so recently coursed down her cheeks. The manacles bit and gnawed. She endured.

With a puff of displaced air she felt most piquantly across her groin, the door opened, and the woman walked in. She was alone, and closed the door behind her. A sardonic grin marked her features as she surveyed her youthful property. "Since it seems you have become too inured to the distress of gags, as penance for your willful tongue, we'll just have to see what effect pain, et al, will have. You haven't really learned, yet, have you darling? I've been rather remiss, I suppose." She ran a crimson be-nailed hand lightly up the stretched belly. Ran her tongue around a jutting nipple and kissed it. Almost instantly, the nipple stiffened. She stood inches from her charge; Alicia submerged into the woman's scent, her warm breath bathing her face. The woman's hands continued their play, and Alicia's breath became faster.

"Please don't do that," she moaned.

"Do you find it so unpleasant?" The hands continued with no abatement. "Your body would seem to be suggesting its whole-hearted approval."

"Please . . . I'm not a lesbian. I've never done it with a woman."

"Of course you are; all women are switch-hitters to use the vernacular." The woman leaned forward the two inches that separated their faces and kissed Alicia on the lips. It was warm, sweet, incredible. Instantly, with a vehemence that surprised, Alicia returned the kiss, surging forward against the bonds ineffectually. God, if only she could move, even a little bit! "See what I told you!" The woman stood back. Alicia's mind was a turmoil of shame. They eyed each other for several minutes, Alicia's breathing returning to normal.

"You're a lesbian." A statement, rather than a question.

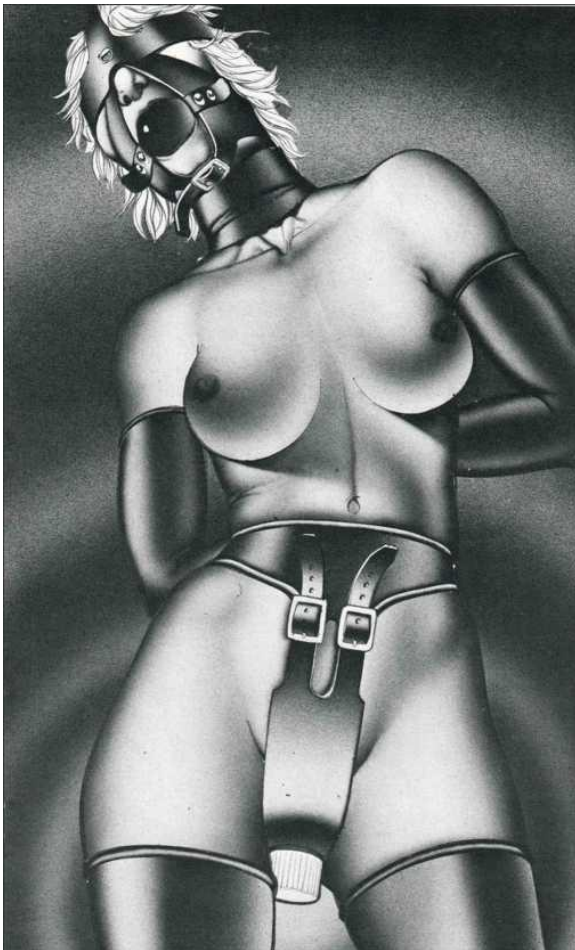
“I’ve just told you.”

“Don’t you ever . . . you know, do it with men?”

“Of course, silly,” was the laughing reply. “I enjoy both spectrums of sex, although I must admit I’m partial to women.”

“If you want me as a, a . . . lesbian slave, why did you give me to those men, yesterday, why did you let them do those things to me? And then that horrible thing that was in me all night . . .?!” Alicia cried, outrage and incomprehension written on her face.

“I don’t want you as a lesbian slave, pet, I want you as a slave. The men were to ‘break you in’ so to speak, and to illustrate the fact that your body, henceforth, is available to



any man or woman at all times, for any purposes to which they want to subject it. You are a slave — a thing. A tool to be used at your better's convenience and/or pleasure. You shake your head no, but already you know that what I say will happen, is happening. I said before that I would introduce you to yourself. It is a process well begun and fruitful developing. You still shake your head, but I can see in your eyes — and in your body,”

she touched Alicia in the one place that even then was graphically betraying her

negatives, “that it's so.”

She turned and produced a cane and stood before her girl. “George has you nicely striped in back,” she mused. “Those breasts could use some adornment,” she concluded. “I will make you scream,” she whispered and kissed the helpless lips.

At first, it was awful; worse by far than the previous experience — she could see the cane flash through the air like the strike of a snake; hear the awful thunk as the wood embedded itself into her breasts, her belly, and the fronts of her thighs. And yet it was different; the strokes were blinding slashes of fire scoring her flesh, and the pain was as bad as anything she had experienced before in her other encounter with the lash, but, peculiarly, the woman seemed to radiate a kind of love for her, that love being manifest in each bite of the cane. After each searing blow had lost its effect and she could again focus on the world, she seemed somehow drawn more and more to the woman standing, watching, examining the throes of pain, savoring the timbre of the resultant scream. She was changing with each blow bringing her closer to the woman, like a machine indexing itself toward some mechanical end. The pain seemed to be an awakening, the catalyzing.

The cane went back and back for another swing.

“I don't think so, Madame,” came the voice. The woman whirled, almost dropping the cane.

“You!” was the word, explosive, from her lips. Alicia followed her gaze, dimly, still in her private haze. The newcomer was coiled against the wall just inside the door. Her coloring was black, like the Madame's, and their differences were subtle but distinct. She wore a neck-to-ankles leather catsuit affair. In her right hand was a nasty little slab-sided automatic pistol pointed at Madame. Through the open door behind her, A. Gorilla formed an oafish pile on the floor. He didn't move. Another man's head protruded around the corner at the end of the short hall. The head was still. An awful silence pervaded the small room. Alicia groaned softly. The newcomer flicked her eyes, all hard and fast over her and it seemed that she was recognized, then her gimlet like stare returned to the Madame, poised, frozen in mid-swing.

“You really should have demanded more money, dolt. It was a dead giveaway. You had to want something else. Ten thousand dollars from a billionaire?” The voice was filled with humorous contempt. “Since it became obvious that your little minx Chattele didn't know a

damned thing, she was nothing more than a plant to get me to come here, all unwitting. I was basically the ransom, wasn't I? Very flat-tering, I'm sure." Madame's look of consternation had turned to one of barely controlled fury. The hand holding the cane had begun to twitch. The woman watching let out a hearty laugh. The pistol never wavered. She slammed the door. "Drop the cane." Alicia could almost hear the gritting teeth covered by the drawn cheeks. "I said drop it. A .380 ain't much of a round, sugar, but it'll peel off a kneecap like you wouldn't believe." The muzzle of the gun lowered to the target. The cane clattered on the floor. Alicia didn't understand what was happening. Who was this woman? Why was she pointing that ridiculous pistol at the Madame? Alicia wasn't thinking too well at that point. She was suddenly afraid for her captor. The delicate and as yet still tenuous relationship developed thus far through the cane had been caught short in mid-stride. That which beneath and augmented by the

pain had been surfacing was frozen, frustratingly close but held at arm's length regardless.

"Release the girl," was the curt invective. "Time's a wastin', honey."

"I'll have to get a key; I don't have one, here," Madame finally said. Alicia could almost hear her thinking, trying to produce some last ditch plan of action and knowing that it was useless as she thought.

"Bullshit. You've always got a key. Try the one hanging on that little chain around your neck; you and I have gone through this before, remember?" the woman retorted, the humor now quite gone from her voice. Alicia didn't like the voice. The women's eyes locked yet again, but a protracted staring match was useless and the woman with the gun seemed quite capable of carrying out her threat. Alicia was sickened at the mental image of the muffled explosion as the gun fired and bucked, and the soft plop as the kneecap, glistening white flecked with red hurtling across the room. Clearly, the woman was very dangerous. The Madame withdrew the key from between her breasts and turned to the captive. "Do her feet, first."

When the clasps fell from her ankles, Alicia thought sure she would have collapsed straight away but for the support afforded her wrists by the ceiling cuffs. With a final venomous glance over her shoulder, Madame released one wrist, which fell limply to Alicia's side, and finally the other, and Alicia did collapse, the Madame only partially able to cushion the descent to the floor.

Madame was then ordered to assume Alicia's just vacated position, and to snap closed about her own wrists the dangling manacles. Being taller than Alicia, she was able to manage, albeit with some stretching and fumbling. As the last segment of the bracelet ratcheted home, the woman finally put up the gun. Swift and sure, she joined the Madame's ankles with another pair of the handcuffs. Madame's eyes were blank, empty, defeated. Almost, there were tears at the corners of her eyes. Alicia's heart went out to her in a gush, replaced with a gathering rage of indignation at the usurper. Madame's doleful look as her mouth was pried and stretched around the rubber wad Alicia had worn the night before produced an aching pity in her erstwhile young captive. It wasn't right; it just wasn't right; just when they had just started going and she had

begun to find, for the first time in her life, an identity so true, so complete, so hitherto undreamed of, this, this utter fearless bitch comes along to ruin it. The fact that she was there specifically for her succor was forgotten. This woman and her father, and her life entirely, she suddenly realized, were of a world entirely apart from what she was, now. There, she had flitted, purposeless, useless, an ornament on her father's list of achievements, a pampered status symbol no more a woman than one of those disgusting inflatable dolls, with all the right parts. Madame had begun to open doors into a world so very different, so much better . . .

and now this.

"My name is Hall, kid, but we can make with the introductions later," the woman muttered over her shoulder. "One more little adjustment, here, and we'll be on our way."

She had linked Madame's waist to her ankles by a piece of rope running through the red leather belt and the single link between the cuffs. Now, she lifted Madame's legs with one

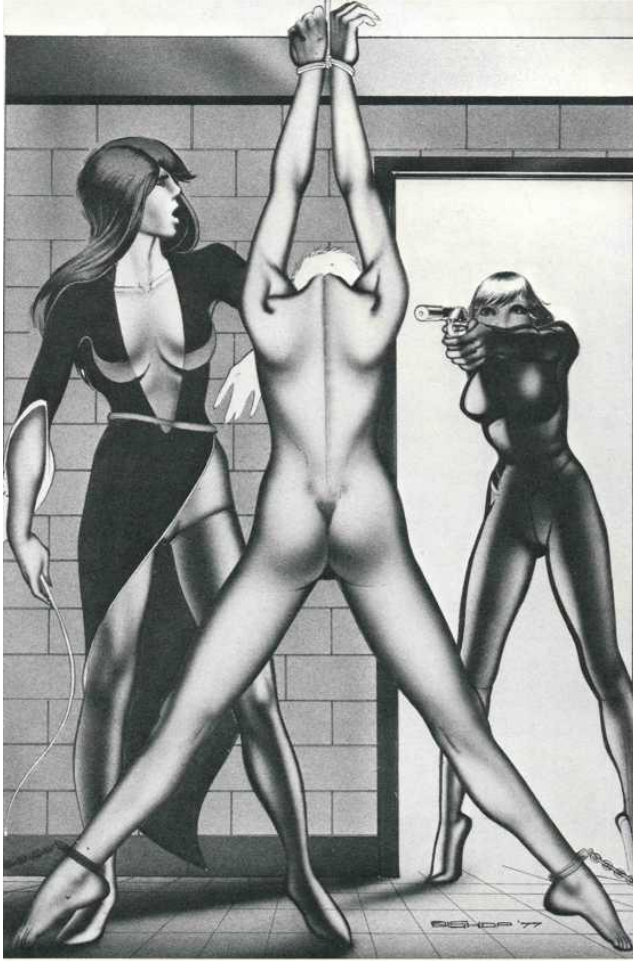
hand and arm, and pulled the loop of rope smaller and smaller with the other until, finally, Madame's legs were doubled, her heels snubbed tight beneath the bulge of her buttocks. She moaned into the gag, fingers stretched taut, claw-like at the pain of the cuffs supporting all her weight. Alicia was moving almost unconsciously. This had to stop! There had been a small stool at one side of the cell. Both hands held it high over her head, now, as the Hall woman began to turn around, her back still to the lunging girl.

The stool swung down in a short arc but the woman, somehow, had sensed the attack and with incredibly fast reflexes, had managed to throw one arm up as she spun toward Alicia.

She wasn't fast enough, though, and her arm only partially blocked the blow, the rounded edge of the weapon glancing off the side of her head. As she stumbled and fell, her look was of pure incredulity. Then her eyes glazed as she slumped to the floor, her head striking the cement with a flat bumping sound. She was still.

Alicia stood and panted, the stool still dangling from one hand. Madame's eyes were huge above the gag. Was I right, Alicia thought. The look in the bound woman's eyes changed into comprehension. Alicia dropped the stool and embraced her, kissing the tip of her nose. She would have to find the key.

Madame watched closely as the perfect young body rifled



the zippered pockets of Hall's suit. Was it possible that the child had changed so fast? It seemed unbelievable; almost too good to be true. Alicia flashed her a demure smile as she held up the chrome key and, walking around behind her, began fumbling at the knots

holding her legs in stricture. Madame bit on the gag in savage satisfaction. She glared down at Hall, supine, legs askew, an ugly bruise just below the hairline. As the knot was finally loosened and her feet touched the floor, sending another wave of red-tinged agony, Alicia supported her with sweet, soft arms. It would be fine, she thought, as the metal bands fell from her limbs. Just fine. She approached the unconscious leather-clad woman, the manacles dangling from her hands.

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THE RETURN OF FANNI HALL

by Robert Bishop

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OUR STORY THUS FAR:

Alicia (whose name later mutated into Alissa) was a shapely young lady with short blonde hair, the daughter of an immensely powerful (and just plain immense) corrupt businessman named Bertram B. Bertram. To teach his girl some respect, the scum ball hired Easa Ferret, a professional cock-tease-humbler, and sent A. Gorila, a hulking monstrosity, to kidnap the girl off a beach.

Dressed only in a leather bikini (and soon less than that), Alissa is subject to a staggering array of sexual degradations. Enter our Fanni Hall. Although she thinks she's trying to save Alissa from the white-slaving jaws of the Madame, a long-time enemy, Bertram has actually hired Hall to get

her into the Madame's clutches. It seems that the Madame is selling some guns for the nasty man, and they've cooked up this whole deal just because they like being deviously perverted.

Unfortunately for Madame, Bertram doesn't like the buyers the slaver has sold the guns to, so he kidnaps everybody back. But the old coot has underestimated Fanni, who escapes, kidnapping the now kidnapped Madame away from the businessman's bad guys. The proverbial hell breaks loose at that point. The ever-clever Fanni realizes she can't run too long from the virtual army of Bertram's minions, so she puts herself into the clutches of another Bertram employee, the nasty Dawnelle.

While trying to get out of Dawnelle's house of sensual discomfort, Fanni stumbles over (almost literally) her own gorgeous female friends: black Alisha (not to be confused with Alissa, although there is little hope of that) and oriental Suni. Seemingly just to complicate matters, Suni is in love with Ian, an MI-6 agent who is always around to save the myriad characters' various asses.

After an enormous amount of shooting, blowing up, car chases, helicopter chases, and double, triple, and quadruple crosses (not to mention an inordinate amount of binding, gagging, despoiling, and the shoving of do-dads up the wazoo), here's the score in this inning.

Madame and Gorila have Alissa bound and gagged; Fanni and Ian have Dawnelle bound and gagged; Bertram's boys have Alisha and Suni bound and gagged. Fanni, Ian, and Dawnelle are holed up in a cabin in the woods, along with several MI-6 boyos, while Madame, Gorila, Alissa, Suni, Alisha, and Bertram's men (led by the man's son, Byron) are raining all manner of devastation upon the log place. As you are plunged into this thing again, the defiant Dawnelle has just made a break for the front door. . .

FIRST INSTALLMENT

Dawnelle had almost made it to the door and might well have were it not for the hobble about her ankles. John's flying tackle, another Americanism he particularly liked, put both of them into a heap near the head of the sofa, where he adroitly snatched one of the huge leaking feather pillows and nested Dawnelle's face in it while he fished the wadded scarf out of his pocket. "Ride 'em, cowboy," he said, smiling. Dawnelle's twisting body and muffled squawks were the best fun he'd had all day.

Ian turned his direction to the long-range guns at the right end of the cabinet; he'd scanned the contents when Fanni removed the Heckler and Koch but hadn't paid much attention to the specifics other than to note the three turn-bolt guns off by themselves—Rugers, all three M77s.

The drawer beneath the guns yielded a collection of bright green RCBS reloading die boxes and three even brighter yellow plastic ammunition trays holding rounds for each of

the three calibers.

John was done with his little errand, and the recipient of his packaging effort glared back at the two of them. No love lost there. And it was such a neat job.

"Here, you're a better shot than me," Ian said, brushing past John and beginning to slide all the windows open. John stuffed three of the beefy rounds into the magazine-well, then pressed the lot down and rode the nose of 'the bolt over the assemblage and dropped a fourth round into the chamber, then locked up the gun. Four little presents from Mommy.

He smiled to himself, then walked to the window nearest the small knoll where he'd spotted the first of the visitors. Still there. About 200 meters. Probably where the gun's zeroed, he thought. I do so enjoy turkey shoots, gobble-gobble. Ian was sticking a 30-round magazine into another Ruger, a Mini 14, and 12-gauge shells into a Winchester 1200

riot gun. The man who'd been floundering in the stream had disappeared.

Ian had his eyes pressed to the small binoculars he seemed born with. "Any chance they're ours?" John whispered.

"Negative, mate. And they're not American either; Langley would've rung us up if they were sending up this bloody lot of Neanderthals." He paused to dart to another window and cautiously looked out. "Bloody hell, there's more of th—" The glass at the side of Ian's head exploded, first into motes, then chunks, and finally sharded slivers that zoomed all over the insides of the cabin. Dawnelle jerked against her ropes, whining into the gag.

"Ian! Ian! My god, man, are—"

"Get the three on the hill—now! Do it! Do it!" John instantly turned from Ian's bloodied face, small chips of glass decorating it like a mosaic. The binoculars had saved his eyes.

Small miracles and all that.

"Cluster, you asshole!" the tall man beside the sniper grated. "Now they know we're here!"

Adams and Chosen aren't even in position yet. Goddamned stupid shit!" The air had gone all electric in its still-ness after the shot: a green and grey freeze-frame.

Cluster could see Adams as an obscure blot paralyzed a few yards from the side of the house.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Bertram. I thought I had a good shot." Goddamn old man's kid coming out to supervise a simple delousing and shoving his fucking weight around. Who's the asshole here?

Nothing but a couple of broads in the house anyway. Jesus H. Christ!

"You'll shoot when I tell you... " And that's as far as young Master Bertram got with his

righteous "I'm-the-employer-and-you're-the-employee" routine, because right about then the sniper's head above his nose, complete with one eyeball, exploded into a bright red and white flying stew with a sodden plop, closely followed by the astonishingly hard bark of the .338.

Byron B. found himself squatting next to a corpse so quick that it hadn't even begun to twitch, and himself covered with clots and gobbets of hair, cloth, bone, gristle, and reddish grey brain. He still had one finger raised to wave at the man and began to put it to his mouth as his stomach clawed up for air. Nausea and stark dis-belief were fighting for equal time when the second .338 caught him just above the right ear and further fertilized the bushes behind the pair. The third man, used to this kind of discussion, had burrowed himself right down into the ground and had begun to worm his way towards the trucks the instant the sniper had been killed. Already, he could hear feet running his way.

Both men inside heard the booming jump, John with a tight smile of glee. He jerked his head back towards Ian just in time to see the blur of another man's image flit past the window behind Ian, he still wiping the blood from his face and flicking tiny pieces of glass at Dawnelle as if the whole damned thing was her fault.

His hiss and pointing finger had Ian's head and his PSP aimed at the right place when Chosen stuck his head up for a look. Ian's shot was off in plenty of time, but his aim was bad and the slug took a good bite out of the window sill rather than out of Chosen. Adams snaked his way to another window and cocked his M-10.

Suni wore her cocoon of thin cords as before. None of them had slipped an iota. The enormous rubber plug still companionably filled her mouth. When the shooting began, she jerked and twisted against the filaments like a fish in a net, and just as uselessly. A single man ran, panting, through the trees to make the two of the three men still at the truck, who'd deserted their posts as the start of pleasantries. She slumped in exhaustion and pain, listening with one side of

her head to the approaching voices and being jostled like baggage when they threw open the rear of the truck and dragged out a canvas-wrapped box.

Dawnelle lay stock-still in the center of the room. She lay on her belly, knees akimbo with her ankles bound to her thighs and her wrists, and her body bent into a tight bow. Over her gag, John had wound a piece of rope and knotted it at the base of her skull. With that he had then pulled her head back into a continuation of the curve of her spine, anchoring the rope to her

ankles. Sweat and tears streaked her face. Dawnelle's eyes were huge and white over the gag.

And God only knows what they'd done with Suni.

A distant clink from the knoll filtered through and Ian once again turned his attention to the business—the boyos were back. He could see them in the distance through the ruined front door and he leaned back against the far wall to pull out the tiny pair of binoculars with their new gritty cover.

A tow! Holy sweet mother of Jesus, he gaped. Either extract... or cauterize. He dropped the rifle and dived for the back door. Dawnelle snapped her head back to follow him, then back again to the front door. It is possible that she had some glimmering of what the distant pop from the hilltop signaled before the anti-tank missile flashed through the door and smacked into the back wall where Ian had just been, but it is doubtful if she had time to register fear before the stout little cabin opened up like a small melon with a cherry bomb inside. Timbers from the roof described graceful arcs both on the way up and on the way back down. The men on the launcher felt the explosion more as the oddly liquid bump of an earthquake than as the hard crack of the cartoons.

The thin streamer of smoke almost got lost in the background. Fanni missed it out-right at first as she ran through the trees. Then, seeing it in a break in the overhang, almost brought her up short like a late-night encounter with a clothesline. Too late! Too late! She ran on, a thin haze of tears blur-ring the periphery of her grey wet world into a tunnel. She missed seeing her watchers. And the shadow that followed.

Slamming doors and the building whine of the Gazelle slowed her more effectively than the sight of the cabin's death-streamers. Leopard-like, she oozed the remaining distance and looked out.

The cabin was a wet black crater. Some of the strewn timbers still smoked, but the rain was being industrious. With a muffled thump, the last of a number of body-bags was hoisted into an exhaust-wreathed Blazer. Its doors were slammed, and its form was thrown into the undergrowth with a quick spurt of power and a spray of mud.

The Gazelle was getting serious in its in-tents now. In a quick dart, it was out from beneath the branches that had provided such spacious protection from the elements. The pilot paused and swung the tail around, presenting the thing to her broad-side.

"Goddamned rotten bastards!" Fanni howled. "Murdering sons of bitches!" She raised herself to one knee and swung up the HK. The Gazelle floated across the lawn, both the pilot's intent on something back where the ship had been tied down. Fanni's screams of rage went unnoticed.

The copilot's head sat square atop the sight-post, and she had the trigger halfway back when the punch came. Kidney. Her scream was of a different kind now. Her body spasmed backwards, and the rifle flew off into the weeds.

An enormous hand muffled her entire face, and another huge hand and arm came up under her rib cage, lifting her bodily, dragging her back under the trees. She kicked back and down, catching a kneecap, and they both went rolling down a small embankment in a tumble.

Fanni clawed at the hand on her face and tried to pry out one of the huge fingers to twist.

Her adversary rode her like a leech, his grip tighter and tighter. After one particularly spectacular lunge down an even larger embankment, the man's embrace seemed to weaken fractionally.

Fanni was tensing herself to jam an elbow into the preferred target when the second blow came—same kidney, only harder.

It was almost like jumping, warm and dry, into freezing water, the pain was so incredible.

She stretched open her mouth wide in a near-silent hissing rictus of agony.

As if on cue, the hand stuffed a wad thick and heavy and leathery, into her mouth and kept on stuffing. She shook her head against the hand, now pinning the mass inside her mouth, scrambling under his weight like an insect. A heavy wool scarf pushed the glove father into her mouth and bound it in place with several turns around her head, the final one going over her eyes, binding her as well as gagging her.

Her wrists were yanked behind her back after the man's huge weight had shifted to the backs of her legs to pin her. Something thin and hot as wire tied her thumbs together. It was if something was trying to bite them off her hands.

The man had reversed his position atop her back and now shuffled up her arms so that his mountainous buttocks squashed Fanni's shoulders and chest into the grass. She squinted her eyes against the rug of pine needles jabbing her face as the man yanked her right knee_ out and her right ankle up. The ankle was placed behind her left knee and then her left leg was pulled up to touch her rump, trapping her right leg. He then hopped lightly off her and pulled her joined thumbs back over the point of her left boot nearly to the ankle and tied off the remnant of the thong around her thumbs under her left heel.

Completely hogtied and immobilized with less than a foot of cord. If she hadn't been in so much pain, Fanni might had admired the job.

SECOND INSTALLMENT

What a mess. When last we left Fanni, she had just been jumped by her old nemesis, Gorila, after her own MI6 ally, Ian, was brutally attacked, resulting in the deaths of his partners and their captive, the evil Dawnelle. And all this in the name of defeating corrupt businessman, white slaver, and all around sleazebucket, Bertram B. Bertram.



With a shrieking yowl, the Gazelle whipped over the brittle frieze of entwined limbs, its shadow a

barely visible scurrying blotch in the dim light. The man froze at Fanni's side till it was gone.

Satisfied, he laced her elbows together with more of the twine.

Fanni bit on the glove and arched her back as much as she could. A last, short bit of line circled her

neck in a thin bristly collar. The end of this was tied to a thick root that popped out of the ground and just as quickly jumped back in, tethering her.

One of the hands grabbed a handful of her hair and bent her head back. She thought the scarf would jam the gag clear to her stomach. A broad and thinly gleeful face peered down into hers. "We can't go on meeting like this." Gorila! "Don't go away, I'll be right back." He

gave her a little wave and bounded off into the bushes.

The cords on her thumbs and elbows cut like knives, and the slight movement, particularly with her thumbs, was bought with bright, flaying pain. But she rolled, twisting and jerking, nonetheless. She had hopes, at first, of pulling her right ankle from beneath her left knee, but the position, as simple as it looked, proved escape-proof.

The wind was up in the trees again, and so Fanni didn't hear the sneaking and slithering's until Gorila and crew were nearly at her side. She turned her muffled face toward the gathering racket as fully twenty or thirty thousand bagged buffalos annihilated any-thing that could pop, snap, crackle, or break noisily— definitely not Indian Scout material there.

"Cunt!" Ah yes, Madame, Fanni thought, nothing like that initial cheerful ice-breaker to get the conversation going. "Goddamned, muthergugging cunt!" She put her own unique signature on this last with a hearty kick to Fanni's side, thus bringing the pointy end of her right boot—at some considerable velocity, mind you— squarely into a very graphic demonstration of the simple fact that it's damned difficult to get two objects to occupy the same place at the same time. That portion of Fanni's side was covered by her coat and its attached pocket, and inside the pocket was a fully loaded 20-round Heckler & Koch magazine. Said object usually doesn't get much excited—or deformed—unless it gets run over by a tank a couple of times and was thus not much impressed by the expensive but very squashed boot. Madame was very impressed with the results of her experiment, however, and her enthusiasm for demonstrating it was commendable, fully deserving of the efforts of Panaflex camera, several hundred feet of film, and several miles of Scotch 208

tape.

When the screams and howls had died down a bit, Gorila came over and took off the gag

—his left hand was freezing—and propped Fanni up against a stump. Her ankles were together now, crossed and tied.

"Quite a mob you've got here," she opined, looking around the confines of the small clearing. Fanni, never much of a fan of reunions, saw no reason to change her mind. Alissa sat slumped on the ground, her wrists scrunched together in the grip of a broad nylon strap, its nether end sticking out like a bleached, stiff tongue. Madame hobbled around the periphery of the clearing taking giant steps with good foot and teensy, tiny steps with the damaged one.

Gorila sat near Fanni, looking at her. "Your people in the cabin killed the old man's kid," he said. The sentence just kind of hung there like that poor bastard of a coyote who kept chasing that bird

out over cliffs. Gorila seemed disinclined to say anything else. He seemed tired.

Madame lurched closer by degrees, her mutters becoming steadily more murderous as Fanni began to make out the words.

"Your people in the cabin killed the old man's kid!" she screeched.

"Gosh," Fanni said, "I hope he doesn't take offense. Endless apologies. Promise it won't happen again."

"Good God, you stupid bitch!" Madame screamed, perilously close to tears, whether from pain or rage . . .

or fear? Fanni couldn't tell. "Don't you know what this means? He'll never stop looking for us—never! That was his only son; he was supposed to take over when the old man quit!

He doesn't trust anybody else. And now you've killed him!" She turned away for a minute, pants or sobs making her shoulders heave. "Ah, Jesus Christ, we might have been able to make some kind of deal or something. But now... " She sat down in the wet grass, then turned her face back to Fanni, glaring.

"You've still got her," Fanni reminded, jerking her head towards the quacking Alissa, her face red and puffy and tear-streaked. She had seen her brother's head demonstrate the wonders of hydro-static shock. They'd never been that close, but he had still been her brother.

Fanni turned to her. "I'm sorry, muff. But what did you expect them to do, just sit there and die? You've seen what they did to the cabin; they had no intention of taking any-body alive. You must see that, don't you?"

Alissa had been staring at her. Now she turned her head to the side and the tears began again. "Don't you?"

"She doesn't mean anything to him," Madame started.

"Oh, yes, she does," Fanni interrupted. "If there's anything old Bertram B. is, it's possessive.

She's his and he's going to want her back. Particularly now that she's his only living kid," she added for emphasis. "So long as we have her, we've got a bargaining point."

"What the hell do you mean 'we,' bitch?" Madame growled, snatching for the end of Fanni's throat tether.

"We!" She got it and dragged Fanni off the stump. The knot began sliding, and Fanni suddenly discovered that she couldn't breathe. "You got us into this in the first place!

We?!" Madame howled with laughter as she dragged Fanni father through the leaves. She got a mouthful of twigs and leaves, and the loop on her throat got smaller and smaller.

Gorila suddenly jerked upright from his slouch against the tree, then collapsed onto the grass. It was as simple as that. Once a living monstrosity . . . now a dead hunk o' meat. The wind was roaring now, and all eyes were on the pair in the center of the glade, the one erect and screaming and frothing, and the other bound and pulled up onto her knees, being jerked around like a bag at the end of a rope and turning a might blue in the face.

The cord joining Madame's hand to Fanni's throat snapped like a string. Fanni, predictably, dropped like a rock and Madame nearly sat down hard, so hard had she been pulling on the line. For a moment, she stood, staring at the traitorous, parted end flapping in the wind.

A man's figure materialized in front of her. Madame screamed and jerked back. Her heel snared in a root, and she did go down this time. She rolled, frantic and terrified, onto her hands and knees and faced the apparition.

The man's face and hands were covered with blood, and his eyes were wild and white.

Her clothes were torn, seemingly scorched and in some places actually burned. He had a heavy odor of burnt wood and wet earth about him, and he limped perceptibly on his right leg. He glanced finally towards Gorila lumped in the grass and the dirty but still obviously serviceable 9mm PSP pistol he kept trained on the girls. That's why the rope broke and the hole appeared in the giant's forehead. They never even heard the shot.

He motioned Madame back towards Mara and the still sniffing Alissa, then stepped to Fanni and pulled open the loop and threw it away. He rolled her over on her side and gently slapped her face several times. "Fanni.

Fanni luv, it's me, Ian." Again.

"Ready?"

"Yeah, I guess." She was a little nervous with this, Fanni admitted to herself. It was your run-of-the-mill underground parking lot with its gloom and wet concrete and echoes that went on forever that she looked out at. It was four in the morning and the crowds were elsewhere, as expected, but it was still a public place.

The innocent would be greatly surprised by what they were about to do if they were unlucky. Bertram B.'s

people would be stoically waiting behind that forest of pilings, waiting for them to step out of the car, if they were very unlucky.

She thought back to her and Ian running through the trees to the Hughes 500 Ian had squirreled away. She turned her thoughts back to the matter at hand.

Ian pulled the car into a slot close to (but not close enough for Fanni) the door that read Elevator, stopped, and turned off the ignition. They both listened. Nothing but faint bumps from the trunk.

"I think we're all right," Ian finally concluded. "Sounds as if our luggage is getting a little bored." He grinned over at Fanni, his teeth a white slash in the dark. She tried to grin back.

They stood at the trunk of the car, and Ian stuck the key into the lock and twisted it.

Madame and Alissa were strapped into identical bundles—they were virtually immobile.

Alissa's wrists had been bound together with her palms touching one another. Over this had gone thick windings of duct tape to seal the cords, and then the windings had worked

down to cover her hands and finally her fingers. Her elbows had then been pulled together and wound with tape. A thick leather strap had then been looped around her arms and chest, then tightened until her joined elbows were hard into her back.

Another strap had been looped around her wrists, then pulled down between her legs, up the front of her belly, and anchored to a belt around her waist. Her arms and hands were totally useless. Another strap, very broad and much thicker, pulled her knees to her chin and kept them there. Ad infinitum. Her ankles, crossed and strapped, had been pulled up into her bottom and were kept there by a short cord that joined her wrists to her legs, itself running across the straps already holding her hands in position. Thus, doubled and then doubled again, Alissa was capable of little more movement than a small turn of the head or the lift of her chin. Madame was similarly endowed, and, if possible, the straps had been drawn just an extra hole or two tighter.

Each had been heavily gagged. A variation of the traditional ball gag stretched jaws and lips wide, bulging their cheeks. The variation was, simply, that the securing strap went over the ball rather than through it and stuffed the rubber was just that much farther into the wearer's mouth as a result. In addition to that, a heavy foam rubber pad had been cupped around the ball before the gag was inserted, packing the two reluctant mouths just that much more firmly. At least the foam soaked up the inevitable excess saliva, so the poor dears didn't have to contend with unsightly drooling.

Thick leather-covered blindfolds completed the binding. Soft leather-covered sponge pads fitted directly over the eyes and were then glued to the backs of a broad padded strap that covered the face from just above the lips to just under the hairline. At the center of each a roughly triangular hole allowed the tip of the wearer's nose to protrude for breath. It also quite nicely pre-vented the blindfold from being shifted up over the wearer's head.

Thus appointed, the two girls huddled next to the jack and the spare tire and a clinking canvas sack. Ian reached in and brought the sack out first.

"All right, ladies, we've got to our destination. Remember, no cocking about and we'll all get on famous.

Right? Right." He nodded his head in counterpoint to his question and his answer. Alissa and Madame didn't move a muscle.

"You first, little one," he went on, hefting Alissa around so that his legs were towards him.

He released the cord that bound her ankles to her rump, and as he did so, her ankles popped forward several inches as tightly compressed muscles and tissue were freed.

Alissa groaned deep in her throat. The neck/knee strap came next, and the accompanying groan was much more evident.

"Shut up." Ian yanked a short strap hard about the girl's knees and left her there with her lower legs draped over the sill of the trunk. Then he turned to Madame. Fanni kept swiveling her head around, looking for shadows to become something more. None had, so far.

Alissa and Madame eventually stood, trembling and awkward, trying to find their sense of balance and finding it difficult with no arms or eyes. "Off we go." Fanni was getting more and more nervous. The snail's pace mandated by the knee-hobbles the girls were wearing and the thunderous racket they were all making, compared to the almost eerie silence that damned the place, was getting to her. She prayed to whatever gods who were still awake at that hour that the door to the elevator wasn't locked.

It wasn't. They had a bad moment when they thought they heard somebody coming down the stairs, but the seeming two and a half hour wait as the elevator came down ended as the doors slid open before anyone showed up. Ian hurriedly punched the button, and Fanni heaved a profound sigh of relief when the doors slid shut on the sight of a battered fire extinguisher and the peeling paint of the door. They rode in silence but for the bound women's labored breaths.

Fanni idly watched the floor indicator light ladder its way up the translucent plastic buttons and was mildly surprised when they winked on and off until the only one burning was the one at the very top—the penthouse. Jeez, Ian must have some rich friends, she thought.

The elevator opened out directly into the interior of the suite, bypassing any awkward strolls down heavily populated corridors. Even the lateness of the hour didn't mitigate Fanni's nervousness on that score.

Ian dropped the bag in the sunken living room floor, then strode to the center of the area, knelt, lifted a flap of carpeting, and pulled up a hinged, heavy steel chrome ring which snapped open with a distinct click. Then he rummaged in the bag and brought out a length of heavy chain,

threading it through the ring so that roughly half the length of the chain protruded from either side.

He then disappeared into the rear portion of the suite, to reappear momentarily with two pairs of handcuffs, which he snapped about the ankles of the ladies. An end of the chain was then padlocked to the handcuffs, one end to one pair of cuffs. The women were now leashed to the center of the room.

"What say we unwrap our little packages, eh?" He winked at Fanni and turned to his parcel. She gave him a tight smile and turned to hers.

An hour later found Alissa avidly picking through the bones of the cold chicken Ian found in the refrigerator and Madame scowling thunderously at both. She looked away from the two huddled together in conversation, to the floor-to-ceiling plate glass window overlooking the city. She knew they were down there somewhere, but lowering clouds and pellets of rain hid any twinkling lights. She once more turned her glare to the girl, now sucking her fingers and settling her backside into the thick padding atop the circular sofa. Madame lifted her joined ankles and coldly regarded the mirrored circlets snuggling her trim legs. The tiniest of smiles caught at the corner of her mouth and she shot a quick glance back at the dynamic duo.

The pair in question were staring at a map with a good bit of intensity, and Ian was just now drawing a tiny circle on the map.

"Right about . . . there!" he finished, and threw down the pen. Fanni was shaking her head and gnawing on her lower lip. "What's the matter, luv?"

"Not good. Not good at all. I know that area: lots of money, guards, private security police, electric fences.

You have to have an appointment to even get into the neighborhood. There's a master gate with a guard.

A friend of mine use to live there; she always called the gate 'Checkpoint Charlie.' Her father had done a lot of business in Berlin." She shook her head again.

"Well, old gal, we have no choice on the matter, do we? My people definitely tracked the Gazelle to these digs here, right down to the landing on the bloody front lawn. We have to go in!" he went on, a tense fury shading his voice. Fanni thought about Suni. "We have to!"

"All right," she said, but her head still shook. She gave the tiny blue circle on the map another look and the corner of her mouth curled in resignation. "You realize, of course, that if this is where the old coot hangs out permanently, we're going to be facing a small army of bad guys." She gave Ian a sideways glance, but he was staring out the rain-smearred window, sullen, almost petulant.

She began to walk away; maybe there was some more of that chicken left. "Fanni?" She turned. Ian had stood up. "Look, luv, I was a bit overly tense just then. Sorry about that.

It's Suni and all that, you know?"

She smiled encouragingly.

"Look," he went on, "I've got some chat-ting up I have to do with my people about all this, and I may be able to spring some small surprise on the boyos if I play my cards right. We may not be as over-matched as you think. Anyways, while I'm busy doing that, you can be scouting out the premises for any chinks in the old armor, and I'll be digging up something to stick up the chink. Right?"

"Right." And she gave him a smile she didn't really feel. Right.

Fanni peered out the windshield as best she could. Even with the defroster and the wipers going full blast, it was damned hard to see anything. What she could see, however, confirmed that the circles of the very rich—particularly the old rich—don't change much or often. The familiar gate house appeared largely as it had in years past. Fanni wasn't much surprised to see the new face behind the glass. Another of those out-of-the-mold anonymous and over-muscled robots that were currently the vogue. She decided she had liked the previous old guy better. Largely inept and generally incompetent, he was at least friendly and rather likeable in a bumbling sort of way. Definitely not the android stock

she now looked at. And the android had such a big piece on his hip. Boo, hiss.

She thought she might scout the perimeter to see if there was an easier way in. Some-thing about android man's mirrored aviator-style sunglasses made little alarm bells keep tinkling down in the pitty of her stomach.

As Ian would have said, a right sodding boyo. Even though he probably wasn't. Probably.

. . . 298 . . . 299 . . . 300. Madame stopped counting. 300 seconds. Five minutes. She had started counting when they left. Five minutes should be enough, she hoped.

They were both fucking pansies when it came right down to it, she thought. Jesus Christ.

No real taste for revenge. With all its embellishments and then some. Made life worth living. Boobs.

It was always a light show behind the blindfold. Lots of little private lights that went off like strobes. And there was always a peculiar eroticism about having her mouth filled with the gag in conjunction with blind-ness. She hated it on the one hand, and it made her life worth living on the other. Odd. Disturbing. But probably one of the reasons she didn't snuff that damned Hall

when she had the chance, as had been the case in many instances over the years. Ya had to have a little sense of humor just to survive!

She had known without being told that the dynamic duo would put the blindfolds back on them before they left. Blindness had certain psychological, as well as practical advantages to someone leaving someone else bound and hopefully helpless in a room for extended periods of time. The reason was painfully simple: if you couldn't see a way out of your troubles, you were highly unlikely to go after it with any vigor. That's why Madame's little eyes had been so very busy before they left.

The phone she'd seen was near the door they had originally used to enter the place and not too far from their conversation pit. She thought the chain might be long enough.

Maybe.

The more immediate problem, though, was getting rid of the gag so that she might do something useful with her mouth when she finally got to the phone. And that meant getting free of her restraints.

The latter were indeed impressive. Both she and Alissa wore identical black leather strait jackets that fit like second ebony skins. Madame's arms had been pulled down and across her chest, and the ends of the sleeves, terminating in a holed strap on her right arm and an appropriate buckle on her left, had been drawn nearly together, so tight was the stricture.

That goddamned Hall had actually knelt on her back with one knee forcing her into the floor while she pulled for all she was worth on the strap threaded through the buckle.

Madame felt as if her arms had been changed into some kind of new, way-too-small corset.

A broad, stiff collar cinched the garment at her throat, while a broad, soft strap passed through her crotch to anchor the thing from the other end. The garment opened or closed along the length of her spine with a zipper of anchor-chain dimensions.

The only thought in the whole design was that there was no loop or fastener to hold the sleeve buckle in place at the small of the back. It would normally have made no difference anyway, so tight was the fit of the jacket and subsequent strapping of her arms.

Today, however, that minor omission was going to cost those bastards, and cost them dearly. With a little luck, and if they stayed away long enough. She continued this train of thought as she cautiously lowered herself from the sofa to the floor, inching her soft, warm rump down its side and using it for a brake. She got to the floor with nary a bump. It was carpeted anyway, so what the hell.

Then began the even more cautious, lurching advance on the coffee table sitting over their anchor-ring in the floor. Well before the blinders had gone back on, Madame's roving eye for detail had spied a small gold-colored hook protruding from one end of the table's top.

She didn't know what it had been used for in times past, and she didn't particularly care.

The only thing that mattered was that it was there; she had her own plans for it. She found the table when she ran into it. She knew the hook to be at the right end of the table relative to her position on the couch, and she now pressed her sleeved elbows against the edge of the piece and slid her upper body down its length until there was nothing left to lean on.

The next step was to turn her back to the end of the table, lean back against it, and rub until she found that damned hook. If her legs had been freer, she could have knelt with a good bit less awkwardness, but bitch Hall had been her usual reactionary self. The handcuffs at her ankles had been supplanted with cords, and her ankles had been crossed and lashed together. More of the thin line circled her knees and rendered her legs into one big, cumbersome lump. Fortunately, she didn't have to go far.

There was an air of uncertainty here. The hook had to stick out far enough to be use-able, but not be so thick that the pointed end wouldn't fit through the grommets in the strap terminating her right sleeve. She had no particular concerns about the buckle, it being of pretty generous dimensions, but she had no way of knowing about the damnable holes until she tried to get loose. A further irritant would be the fact that she would have absolutely no way to visually confirm whether or not the hook would fit into the grommets. She'd just have to fish around as best she could and hope for the best. Not encouraging, but better than nothing.

She cautiously slid her back over the narrow edge of the table, angling her butt in as much as possible, using the entire expanse of her back as a tactile sensing board to locate the hook.

She found it almost immediately, its point painful even through the leather jacketing.

Slowly and as carefully as she was able to be under the circumstances, she slid herself around on the hook, positioning it so that the open end would lie directly under the

buckle. When she felt that it was about right, she rocked her back and buckle against the hook, trying to slide the curved point under the strap looped through the buckle.

It was amazingly simple. At first, she couldn't believe that she'd actually done it, not on the first try!

Cautiously, as infinitely slow as before, she leaned out away from the table, and the hook pulled the free end of the strap through the buckle. The very end, perversely, stuck for a moment, then popped clear. So far, so good. Now came the hard part.

It would be kind of like fishing, in an odd way. Her problem was to dangle the strap over the end of the hook in such a way that one of the black brass grommets would snare the hook and thus anchor the strap so she could pull against it. The fact that not merely her hands, but her fingers as well were safely sheathed away in the sleeves left her with no effective capacity for precise manipulation. The blindfold assured that her eyes would be of similar uselessness. Not that she could have seen back there anyway.

She got to it, rising and falling on her cramping legs, each time dragging the strap one more agonizing time over or under or through that goddamned hook with repetitively dreary results. Once she thought she had it, but it only turned out to be the hook temporarily snagging on the bead running down the length of the strap's edge. Keep on!

Suddenly, after what seemed like hours—and actually was hours—the thing caught with absolutely no fanfare. And held. Madame was so exhausted by the ups and downs and arounds that she could hardly register emotion. Her legs were quivering like leaves in the wind, and she feared an immobilizing cramp. Not now!

She wanted more than anything else the simple relief of a rest, but she knew it was a luxury she quite simply could not afford under the circumstances. With a groan and a rubber-muted curse, she heaved herself away from the table and got back to work.

She inched her way out from the table until all the short slack in the strap had disappeared. She then gradually increased the pressure on the strap, turning her body at a right angle to the direction of the pull.

Finally, she gave the strap a little jerk while at the same time turning her body even more into the direction of pull. The theory was that the buckle's tongue was now out of its hole.

The theory.

Biting on the gag and panting like a dog, she concentrated on hugging herself as if she intended to squeeze herself in half. Then she slowly, slowly relaxed her arms and tried pulling them around to the front of her body. They were coming! They were coming! They were . . . stopped. The miserable bastard of a buckle-tongue was probably gouging into the leather. She pushed her arms back around the sides of her body, jerked on the strap, and tried again. This time her arms came nearly all the way around before getting hung up again. Fuck it! She rocked her shoulders forward, forcing her elbows toward each other, and gave the strap bridging her back as much slack as she could, then began sliding and twisting the thing up towards her shoulder blades. As it got higher, her torso got thicker,

and the slack rather quickly disappeared. The trick now was to somehow pull one elbow under the other.

She had done it. For a second there she'd sworn the leather wouldn't slide across itself. She lay back flat on the floor and panted into the gag; her matt-black world alive with tiny soundless popping balls of color.

Techni-color Brownian movement. She realized that it probably had some marketing merit: high performance stereo headphones with an attached blindfold. She didn't know what merit the gag would add to the package. Somehow, she just couldn't see herself as a legit businesswoman. She didn't understand the straight world. Not for a minute.

She sat up with another groan and went after the gag-strap. No use wasting time on the blindfold; she didn't walk with her eyes. She wouldn't waste time getting out of the jacket just now. The phone call was infinitely more important. She was thus unable to use her nimble little digits to coax the gag apart, but she persevered and it was eventually done.

She almost lacked the strength to pry the damned thing out of her mouth, it was so huge and she so effectively crippled by the sleeves.

She still wasn't out of it yet, she realized. She might have been off in estimating the distance to the phone, or they might have moved it after the blinders went on. That would be just like Hall, she thought. Bitch. The only goddamned broad more perverse than she was. Suddenly nervous, she fought with the blindfold and got it off.

The phone was still where it had been before. Small blessings and all, she breathed. She glanced back at the kid. Looked like the dummy was sound asleep. Good god, she thought, shaking her head. The phone may well have been where she expected it, but the chain just wasn't long enough. Period. She was nearly eight feet from the instrument, even splayed out on the carpet like an incautious roach. Shit!

But then it dawned on her that the chain, rather than being linked at the floor bolt, was merely run through it and terminated at the other end—at Alissa's ankle. Opportunity still knocked.

She reached down and grabbed a good handful of the chain and gave it a hearty yank, launching Alissa right out into the middle of the rug with a thump. Her sudden grunt of surprise at this novel alarm clock was highly gratifying to Madame, who reeled her into the ring-bolt like a fish. Only when the girl's round little butt was hard against the ring did Madame stop the pulling. What was that she'd been complaining about not enough chain, she asked herself.

She fumbled the receiver off the cradle, and it immediately went straight to the floor. The faint buzzing from the earpiece seemed somehow malevolent. Madame couldn't care less.

Fortunately, the thing was of the push-button persuasion. She would have done damn little dialing with her hands still buried inside the strait jacket sleeves. As it was, she still couldn't really manage those damned little buttons. With her hands, at any rate.

Casting one more glance at Alissa, Madame stooped to the phone, aiming care-fully with her nose, and began pecking out a number like some odd featherless chicken. She only hoped somebody was there. The phone was answered on the first ring, and the voice that came through sounded as if it had been made by a machine.

Alissa listened with growing disbelief as Madame told her father's people exactly what had happened at the cabin: how Hall had engineered the entire thing, complete to being personally responsible for Alissa's brother's death; how Madame and Alissa had been hustled away by Hall and the English-man; how the Englishman had subsequently raped the both of them with a variety of things while Hall cheered him on; what Fanni was up to now and where she was going—right into the lion's den; and that Fanni wanted to deal.

With her father. Direct. No intermediaries. There was a pause that wasn't as long as she might have expected before Madame once more began talking. It was at precisely this stage of the game when little Alissa began to do some real serious thinking about the nature of things. She had been in a somewhat petulant sort of way, content to go along for the ride, up to this point. Not that she really had any choice in the matter.

Now, with Madame's treachery, her whole world had tipped over. She knew full well what her father was and what he would do to Hall when he got his hands on her. Ian he would merely have killed, unless, as Hall had suggested earlier, her now being reduced to his only surviving heir had made her somewhat more sacrosanct than in times past. If that was the case, Ian was in for a very bad time.

Probably the most incredible irony of the whole unfolding situation was that Madame was voluntarily offering herself for a torment very little mitigated from that which Fanni would scream through. One of her father's most cherished axioms for dealing under duress was that he had never, ever compromised. The world's quick-lime pits and myriad rivers bore mute and aromatic testimony to that.

Ultimately, and more to the point, she was beginning to fear for herself. What had begun as a simple disciplinary action to teach her some manners when Madame's goons had snatched her at the beach had very quickly degenerated into a debacle of spectacular proportions. The cost of lives had been limited, but that anybody should have been killed at all was appalling. The cost in money was stupendous. People could be replaced, but money was another thing altogether, especially for good old dad. And then there was her brother, the posturing smart-ass, the stupid arrogant shit with more money than brains, who had ended up with that dubious organ smeared all over the side of a pine tree.

Money and the only male offspring had gone with the proverbial wind. All because of her.

All her fault, her father would say. Christ.

What if her loving, indulgent pater simply forgot to tell the goons that his kid was one of the people in the apartment? Wearing the blindfold and the gag, they wouldn't be able to recognize

her. One very short squeeze of an M-10 trigger and Alissa would never, ever have to worry about peer group pressure again.

On the other hand, Madame, being singularly ignorant of Alissa's father's rather bellicose business-under-stress stratagems, was feeling just fine. The only problem now was to get the hell out of there before anybody got back. She hunched around and snailed across the

rug towards the ring in the floor.

Swearing under her breath, she repositioned herself in front of the coffee table with its provident hook and positioned her back once more where it had been when the escape had begun. To say that reinstalling the

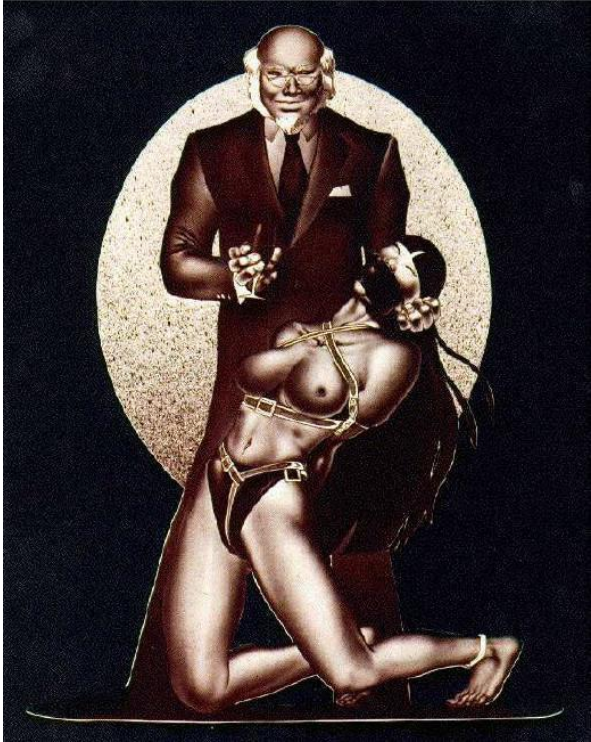
blind-fold and gag with her hands still muffed by the strait jacket was a tad difficult is to push the word euphemism damn near to the breaking point. The monumental struggle to get her arms back around her and then snub up the strap on the point of an invisible hook was to wander perilously close to that of a Homeric epic. Homer had been dust long enough now that any spinning engendered by my clankish smile would be rendered largely moot—like Hurricane Camille, I suppose.

When Ian finally got back to the place, it was to find Madame curled up on her couch and the other one sitting up in the middle of the floor like a dog begging for scraps and making one helluva racket behind her gag. Maybe she had to pee.

Fanni drove for two miles under the fading trees before she found something that looked cautiously optimistic. And a bit contrived, her alarms told her. An overturned wheel-barrow gleamed in the misting rain like an enormous turtle beside a breach in the ubiquitous wall. The wound was as fresh and clean as the rain itself. Muddied shovels were stacked against the turtle and the wall. Lots of very fresh tire tracks zippered the mud between the paving and blunt stay-the-hell-out-of-here rejection of that vertical stone fence. And all the bodies that had muddied those shovels were gone. Lunch break? She glanced at her watch. At three o'clock in the afternoon?

She parked the car up under an oak with a few tan leaves still hanging on for dear life, then walked back to the proffered hole-in-the-wall. It was all very convenient. And it stank to high heaven.

THIRD INSTALLMENT



Suni's eyes were only inches from the floor. Her feet were several feet higher and held there by broad straps that ran to eyebolts in the ceiling. A tightly buckled belt and crotch-strap anchored her hand-cuffed wrists in front of her body, while a collar/harness arrangement held her upper body just off the floor with more straps and more eyebolts.

The slightest movement she would make would have her swaying like a child's swing.

Her back, from the nape of her neck to the tips of her heels, was a livid red/blue bruise.

The strap that had inflicted the condition dangled from a small hook near the door. She was so tightly gagged that she would have been totally unable to offer up any helpful hints about Fanni's location even if she'd tried. She rather suspected that the thrashing had been more to partially assuage Bertram B. than to extract anything useful in the way of information.

Gusting wind and whacking drops of rain rustled the bare branches outside the glass of her room. Even tied and silenced as she was, she ITI knew she wouldn't be long left in such an insecure arrangement. Back to the cellar and her tiger-cage. And the chains and the gag and the blindfold. Why the hell did they need the blindfold? The place was pitch black when they slammed the door. More pique from upstairs? She sweated more sweat onto the pool beneath her and tried to keep her jaws from dislocating from the pressure of her mouth-plug.

There were five of them waiting for Fanni in her hideout, all big-ranging-to-bigger. They were standing in a loose semi-circle as the penthouse elevator doors slotted themselves back into

the frames. They were all armed but showed little inclination to shoot immediately; they probably had orders to bring the ladies in as alive as possible.

The one in the middle gestured towards Fanni with his free hand as his pistol-13 occupied hand began a slow swing towards her. None of them had apparently seen that she was similarly endowed with fireworks, what with the near-dark in the lift. Their collective ignorance disappeared when Fanni's first wad-cutter caught middle-man square at the base of the sternum and her second intercepted another man's kneecap.

In among the squeals and thrashings of the latter, Fanni managed to stir in another quick pair of shots as she punched the down button. The two remaining goons were hard about testing the bullet-proofness of a rubber plant and an aquarium as she did so.

As soon as she got the button, Fanni pan-caked herself right out on the floor of the elevator and stuck the pistol back towards the boys. The only sound she could hear in her immediate vicinity was her own jagged breathing. The recipient of her spontaneous knee surgery (the operation was very successful, judging from the sound effects at least) pretty well covered the slinking and slithering from the pair still at large. Fanni willed herself further and further into the floor and waited. When the hell were the goddamned doors going to close?

The actinic white muzzle-flash and tearing linoleum glare of an M-10 on full-auto gave her a spectacular, if dangerous target, and she ran off her last three rounds just as the doors finally decided to get off the mark. She was halfway through sticking her last magazine into the gun when they bumped together. A split second after they did, two muffled booms came from behind them and beat two dimpled, cymbal-sized dents on the inside of the doors. Shotgun. Damned good thing the doors were nice and thick.

Ian gone. No sign of Madame or the old man's kid. The Philistines arrayed in ambush.

What the hell had happened? Better yet, what the hell was she going to do now? The basement was tempting, but it was almost as obvious as the lobby. If they could afford to put five in the room, they could afford to spread them all over the place.

She got off the elevator when it got to the fifth floor, ran down a long marble hall to another bank of elevators, went up to the eighth floor, switched to another elevator in the same bank, went down another floor, and followed the arrows to the fire escape. She cautiously stuck her head out the door and looked down. Two of the boys were standing

down there, looking back up at her expectantly. She ducked her head back inside, but she was pretty sure that one of them had seen her. Shit! And they all seemed to be using little portable radios.

As she rounded a corner, she spied a tall, slender woman about her own age and build coming out of one of the rooms, struggling with a huge suitcase roped to a small collapsible dolly with bungee cords. The woman had apparently ignored or forgotten the observation that the suitcase

was substantially wider than the door, and she was wedging and turning the thing, swearing softly to herself.

Fanni grabbed her in a quick, painful wrist lock and whispered urgently in the woman's ear. After the initial spasmodic gasp of fear, the woman made no sound, but her eyes got wider and wider. She

nodded once, eyes crinkling in pain as Fanni increased the pressure of the wrist lock and they slowly stepped through the door, the woman pushing the suitcase with her free hand. The door closed and locked.

Minutes later, Fanni furtively slunk back out the door with a brand-new look. Gone were the leather jacket and jeans and boots. They were now in the small case she carried.

Instead, she wore a long black dress with a broad floppy hat and ankle-strap high heels.

Large round sunglasses hung on her nose, and an umbrella dangled from one arm. She put her bundles down while she waited for an elevator and shrugged into a tan raincoat, then picked everything up and leaned on the umbrella.

Just as she did so, three heavies came through the barely opened doors of the elevator, flicking hard glances at Fanni, and thudded down the hall past the door of Fanni's benefactor. Fanni got into the elevator amidst a covey of blue-haired matrons and heaved a grateful sigh as the doors slid shut again.

Thankfully, the elevator was going down.

The woman who had provided Fanni with her oh so convenient change of clothes heard the men galumphing down the hall too and groaned into her gag. She shook her head against the wadded-up washcloth and the thin leather dress belt that held it in place, then rubbed her banded forehead against the covers of the bed. The blindfold rode up fractionally, and she redoubled her efforts. It finally slid up over her nose and she surveyed herself in a tall narrow mirror on the closet door.

Her carefully constructed makeup job was now mostly smeared around her face. Nylons pinned her at her knees and crossed ankles. Her legs had been bent back and up to join the nylon cinching her wrists.

She could do little more than wiggle on the bed and moan. Her mother had told her there'd be days like this. Knowing good old Mom, she'd probably get a pretty good laugh if she were to see her now.

As the lady on the bed bit down on her washcloth, Fanni strode right straight across the

lobby of the hotel, head looking neither left nor right—her eyes behind the dark glasses were doing all that—in amidst the cackling of the old ladies. One of them turned to Fanni to say something and stopped with her mouth open when she got a look at her. Fanni smiled at her and pre-tended to say something.

Where were the boys?

Through the door of the lobby at last, Fanni broke from the ladies' group as they boarded their tour bus and began to walk for the corner and her car two blocks away. It was all she could do to keep from running. She couldn't believe her luck; it was too damned easy.

Memories of the hole in the fence came vividly to mind.

At last she saw the car. Two men on motorcycles slid past her, the riders eyeing her. Just be cool now, Fanni told herself. The riders turned around in the street and began edging back towards her. One pulled a small radio out of his pocket and spoke into it. The car was bare yards away, and all four tires were flat right down to the rims. She knew it'd all been too god-damned easy; they'd watched her park and then just let her walk smack into the trap.

She sprinted across a muddy stretch of lawn and darted into a ramshackle parking building. This might have some possibilities, she thought. If she could pick off one of those riders, she could use his bike herself. The problem was to separate them.

She could hear them as they shot the bikes across the lawn and began a rush on the doorway she had slipped behind. One of the bike's shadow spread out onto the concrete that formed the floor proper of the place. She couldn't hear or see any-thing of the other one. As she began to edge around the corner,

a thinking blow caught her just under the right ear. Her last vision was that of the H&K

bounding off the floor as if it were made of rubber and of the floor coming up to meet her in a darkening, slow-motion, elevator-out-of-control swoop.

The mousey little man who'd been reading the newspaper in the lobby lowered Fanni to the floor and pocketed his sap. One of the riders rolled over and got off his bike.

"Just like you said, Mr. Janes. Just like you said. She'd see the car with its tires out and us coming after her, so she'd just whip on in here to hide." The biker was impressed.

Janes stopped beside Fanni and fumbled in his pockets. "Get your friend over here, Quayles, and get ready to take her to Mr. Bertram."

"Shouldn't we radio one of the guys for a car?"

"No, your motorcycle will do quite nicely, I think. Just bring over that spare helmet and your rain poncho." The biker shook his head but walked back to the bike and opened the carry-all.

Janes fished several gleaming stainless-steel hose clamps out of his raincoat pocket and set

about restraining Fanni. He rolled her onto her belly and pulled her hands back behind her, the palms pressed together. The first of the clamps squeezed her wrists together, sinking hard into the skin. The next one joined her elbows. The biker stood by and watched. His buddy roared into the lot and slid to a halt, then joined his friend.

Janes pulled a small plastic box out of another pocket and fumbled with the latch.

Suddenly, like a jack-in-the-box, the top of the box sprang open and out popped a sphere of foam rubber a little larger than a softball. He propped Fanni up against one of his knees and diligently packed the entire incredible volume into her mouth, stopping only when absolutely nothing protruded. Holding the thing in her mouth with one hand cupped over her lower face, he pulled out another device.

This latter turned out to be a miniature mask kind of affair. A hole allowed Fanni's nose to protrude, and that part went on first. Janes then pulled and tugged the rest of the mask down over Fanni's mouth and pushed her jaws back together enough so that a cup-type affair snapped down over her chin at the bottom. When he finally tied off the two trailing ends of the mask, it was as if Fanni's face has been born with no mouth or lips. The mask was so tight that her cheeks bulged over the top of the thing's edge. The men threw another knot into the tail and stood up, motioning to the men to bring one of the bikes over.

They hefted Fanni off the floor and lifted her high enough so that the bike's sissy bar would slide between her back and her bound arms, emerging behind her head as they slid her down to the seat.

Janes secured her arms to the bars at both wrists and elbows, then again with bands the encircled her body under her breasts and around her throat. Janes motioned again, the one named Quayles plopped a full-coverage Bell Star helmet down over her head. The gag was now nicely out of sight.

Janes tied Fanni's feet to the pegs with thin black leather straps that matched her shoes.

They would still show, but only under minute scrutiny. Quayles was busy arranging the poncho down around Fanni's shoulders so none of the bindings would show. When they were all done, it was just like a lady was out for a ride on the back seat of her lover's motorcycle. The gag hidden under the helmet would keep her quiet enough, and the hose clamps would keep her from wiggling too much.

"I'll meet you at the house," Janes concluded. "Keep on the freeway as much as possible.

Harder for people to get a close look at you that way." He strolled to a waiting car and got in. Quayles and friend didn't wait for him to leave; they kicked the bikes over and roared back off the street, slowing to pass a traffic cop writing a ticket for the grounded Ford at the curb.

Fanni woke up while they were still in route to the house. She awoke to a wind howling and plucking at her, the poncho flapping frenetically in the roar, the bike's exhaust ripping along them like a banshee.

The other rider circled like a mother guarding her chicks. The bikes flashed past cars and trucks and other motorcycles. Once they slowed to edge past a prowling highway patrol black-and-white. The single driver glanced at them incuriously. Bound as tight as she was, Fanni could hardly twitch. The tremendous gag, hidden by the helmet, would reduce any amount of noise she might make to nonexistence compared to the background rumbling of the traffic. The cop switched on his lights and pounced on a VW with off-road wheels and a half dozen lights spanning the width of its windshield.

They parked in back of the mansion and dragged her off the bike, then quick-marched her down a thickly carpeted, oak-paneled corridor and into a surprisingly light, airy room.

They unscrewed the clamps and tore the clothes from her. That poor bitch in the hotel ain't gonna like that, Fanni thought.

Momentarily free of ties, she thought that she might have taken a shot at them but for the fact that her arms were totally numb. She looked at her blue hands as one of the men pulled her over bent at the waist by grabbing her hair and the other end, then performed a quick but thorough body search.

With very cold hands, as usual.

Satisfied with his search, Quayles brought out a figure-eight of very fine wire with a slip-lock at the apex of the two loops. He pulled Fanni's arms behind her again, slid the loops over her wrists, and snapped the loops tight with a jerk. Fanni winced at the fiery bite. She hoped to god he wouldn't put the damned things on her elbows.

Instead, he flipped a slip loop of the same gauge wire around her throat and jerked her over near the far wall by pulling its other end. When he had her located directly beneath a heavy ornate gas light fixture twining out from the wall, he reached up and ran the end of the wire through one of its gilt loops, then drew up the slack until Fanni was almost on her tip-toes. The wire felt like an incredibly thin line of flame biting the skin of her neck.

Selecting another length of the wire, he slipped another slip loop around her throat and, while the other man held up her left knee, he tied off the loose end. Fanni understood exactly what was happening, and when the bastard let go of her knee, she made a very conscious effort to keep the

thing exactly where he'd held it. Lower the knee and slip loop slips—around her neck! Don't stand on tippy-toes and the same thing happens. Lose your balance, and that's all she wrote.

Quayles walked around her, examining the status of his wire work, then nodded to the other man, who gave Fanni a derisive smirk. Then they both went out.

The strain began almost instantly. Holding all the weight on the ball of one foot while keeping one knee permanently in the air and trying desperately not to lose her balance, Fanni knew that with any amount of time involved this would at first be an excruciating nightmare, ultimately fatal. Maybe that was to be the old man's justice: for her to hang herself from one of his gas fixtures!

Suni dangled from a low ceiling of rock and cement. A broad steel collar was attached to two similar steel bands on her wrists by a length of heavy chain, and these, in turn, were attached to another length of chain to a ringbolt set into the ceiling directly overhead. The chain was as taut as a bowstring from the ringbolt to her collar, and she described a perfectly straight line from her wrists (fingers frantically working to relieve the strain on her neck) to her toes, providing support at only the tips of her big toes. She groaned for probably, she felt, not more than the second or third thousandth time since they strung her up years ago.

The door to the cell slammed open and she heard steps coming in. She was too exhausted by the position to raise her head. Anyway, what more could they do than they'd already done?

Amazingly, miraculously, it seemed, there was some fumbling and cursing at the ringbolt, and with a clank, the lock was sundered. She went flat to the floor amid a clatter of coiling chain and the clinking manacles. She could hardly move her arms at all. Her knights in shining armor didn't seem much impressed with the performance and immediately set about rear-ranging the bonds. They seemed in a hurry. Maybe they had somebody else to hang up there like a side of beef. Whoever it was, she wished her well.

A tether with a tiny steel jaw on one end was snapped to the rings on the permanent bracelets her wrists sported. The end of this, in turn, was drawn down so that she had to arch her back to an exaggerated bow, and attached to her ankles. The tether branched out into two shorter segments near the bottom, and when the last of the three jaws was attached, the tether line itself had the appearance of a long thin inverted Y. It straightened the whole of her upper body and formed a highly effective hobble all at the same time.

She was then shoved, floundering with the hobble, to a post, free standing in the approximate center of the floor. She was made to face it with her round breasts mounding softly out, one on each side of the post. A thin cord was run through the rings in her nipples and jerked tight around the pole, securing her to it with a bit of novelty, but no less securely than with more conventional means.

As one corded her feet to the pole, the other produced a bulky red leather hood with what appeared to be a surprisingly small rubber pear-gag attached to the inside. Suni accepted it into

her mouth with no difficulty at all. Somehow it made no sense at all, considering her captor's previous penchant for overkill and softball-sized gags.

The man adjusted the hood with great care, smoothing and pulling. Her ponytail was positioned to project through the hole provided for it, and the thing was finally zipped up from the nape of her neck to just beneath the rope of her hair. It felt as if her whole head was being gently squeezed.

The eyeholes were perfectly positioned, and she had time to blink her eyes a couple of times before a blindfold blinkered out the view of the cell.

There came some fumbling's at the front of the hood over the gag, and then the thing began to grow.

It was inflatable! She should have known! The hood kept her from opening her mouth, and the thing just got bigger and bigger, swelling against the insides of her mouth and flattening her tongue. She had lurid images of a grimy redneck levering away on a floor jack, lifting the backside of a beat-up GMC pickup, as the ball got harder and harder.

Finally, it stopped. The man on the other side of her dark little world jerked the pump hose off the teat sticking through the red leather and quickly set about releasing her from the pole. She was going to do a little traveling, she supposed.

Alisha, a very few seconds away in a very similar cell, was being made sea-worthy too.

Like Suni, she too was strung from the ceiling, but in a rather different way. The heavy length of chain looked incongruous compared to the spidery thinness of her nose ring. A large brass padlock joined the two, and enough of the chain had been allowed to depend from the ceiling hook that Alisha could by dint of standing on the very tips of her toes keep the ring from stretching her nose to elephantine lengths. Her big toes were joined by wire-thin circlets of steel.

Her wrists had been braceleted together in front of her, secured to her middle by a ring set into a broad leather belt. The bracelets were detached and the belt removed. Instinctively, she reached up with both hands to grab the chain and lift herself, removing the stress of her long-suffering nose. The cracker guard laughed and fetched two short thin chains from a pouch at his waist.

She didn't resist at all when he snatched her right hand down from its grip on the nose chain and drew up behind her back and up under her left shoulder blade. One end of one of the thin chains was snapped to the ring in the hand's bracelet. What came next was as surprising as it was unpleasant.

Still holding her hand high on her back, he brought the other end of the chain up under her left arm and ran the end of the chain through the ring in her left breast and pulled it taut. Maintaining the tension with one hand, he doubled the chain back along its own length and snapped the small

catch at the very end of the chain through one of the links, locking it. Her right arm was now rather firmly attached to one of the more sensitive portions of her anatomy.

Within seconds, the left arm was similarly tied off to her other nipple. Another volunteer tie. So long as she didn't twitch her arms or pull in any way, she was perfectly comfortable. It was even a little erotic, she hated to admit.

"Open wide for Chunky, honey," the man said, smirking and holding up a bone-white ball. – Who said we ain't integrated around her, sweetie?"

"You bastaarrummph!" was as much of a reply as she could make before the huge ball popped behind her teeth. The strap was jerked tight, her nose was finally released from its perch, her head was pushed down so that her chin was on her chest, the gag strap was retightened, and she stood, both fuming and relieved as the man attached hobbles and slid a blindfold over her head. His smile had grown from the time he'd started the job and now

threatened to split his face. Pleased at his own wit, she raged to herself. Asshole. A clear, jewel-like tear rolled down her cheek. The man saw it and gave her a laugh. She bit on the gag. The man laughed harder and snapped a leash on her nose ring and tugged her towards the door.

The memories of the last few days were still bright and sharp: that horrendous ride in those trucks out in the woods; the sound of the shooting and that tremendous explosion; the men's strangely fearful mood as they drove like maniacs back out of the woods with her dancing around like a third-class package in her web of cords; the near endless mind and body restraints and positions in which she'd worn those restraints. And always the hot staring faces. The accusatory eyes and words and motions.

It was as if some great calamity was sorely her fault. And she never did know what it was!

The first night of her captivity, she'd gone straight from the truck to a tiny little windowless room where the cords had been removed. Even with the restraints gone, she had been so stiff she could barely move her arms or legs. Annoyed, the guards poured a little water down her throat, stuck a small wafer of one of those ubiquitous and largely tasteless instant breakfast bars into her mouth for her to chew, and followed it with another swallow of water. She was still chewing and swallowing when they threw her face down on the damp floor and put her into a hogtie so strict that she would remain motionless for the rest of the night. The mask gag went back on even tighter than before. With that, the lights went out and the door slammed shut.

It had been several hours later that the doors came open again and the lights snapped on with a glare that made her squint her eyes in pain.

"So, this is the other one." It wasn't a question. Alisha craned her neck against her collar of ropes and peered over at the voice. It was a tiny, reed-thin, wizened man who looked at her. The mouth was a thin line drawn with a hard pencil. The hair was wispy white fringe that circled the

shiny little head at the level of the ears. The eyes were a very pale blue and were as cold as either of the poles.

Alisha couldn't meet his gaze. She'd met some powerful people in her day, but this little dude was power with a capital P, the kind that makes and breaks countries, builds up and destroys whole economies, shoots smart-assed presidents. This dude was not somebody to cross, especially when you're lying on the floor tied and gagged and capable of moving maybe your eyeballs.

"You have cost me very dearly, you black trash," he said. His tone of voice as flat, almost as if he were discussing wheat futures in a men's club. –Very dearly. When I think of what you scum did to my son.

. . " Alisha thought she caught a hint of carefully reined hysteria in the man's voice, but he visibly fought it back down and was in control again in seconds. What about his kid? That asshole actually had a child? The thought of the little prick in bed with a woman was almost enough to push her past her border of hysteria her-self. Probably artificial

insemination. She was getting closer to the edge and knew that one snicker, gagged though it was, would spell instant death.

The thought of tough little Alisha catching a 9mm bullet behind the ear while she lay on a filthy wet floor with her hands tied behind her back and her mouth filled with a disgusting plug was enough to bring any giggles to a screeching halt. There would be time enough (she hoped) for that later. –

"Keep them alive. I want all of them together—alive."

"But, sir, we don't even know that we'll get all of them. Wouldn't it make more sense to just get rid of these now that we've got—"

"I want all of them, and I want them alive! They attacked me together and they will die together! Do I make myself under-stood?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Bertram. Yes, sir! I thought it would just be a little easier if we—"

"You, Mr. Bundy, have a good deal to learn about revenge. It can be quite one of the most fulfilling, rewarding experiences a man can experience. Get the others!" That was Alisha's first and thus far only look at Bertram B. She had no real enthusiasm for more contact.

Subsequent to that cheery little confrontation, she had to deal with his goons and their apparently infinitely variable sexual imaginations. They had poured out of the woodwork with the cheerful glee of New York City's entire (including any undocumented workers) population of cock-roaches at the delicious aroma of Godzilla dead in Central Park for a week and a half.

She had heard the odd snatch of conversation about "the Asian cunt" and how "tight and slippery" she was, so she could only assume that Suni wasn't exactly bored either. She had the nasty suspicion that she'd just made a pun. A really bad one.

But all that was in the past. Now she was moving. Blind. Laced like a spider's fly. Moving.

Into what?

Her breathing was loud in her ears. She wondered how Fanni had made out, fearing that she'd been in the cabin when they'd shot it up with some kind of missile. The boys weren't exactly being security-conscious—maybe they figured they didn't have to be with somebody that only had another day or two to live! Cheery thought. She stumbled and got yanked by her tether. Painfully.

It seemed that every single muscle in Fanni's body was quivering like a bowstring after a release with no arrow. The muscle of her right calf had knotted itself up into a fist-shaped ball of flesh. The cramps would start almost immediately thereafter, and that would be the

end. It seemed a distinctly unglamorous way to die.

"Looks like you've had just about enough for the day, eh?" came a voice. A guard—a watcher—and she hadn't even noticed the pig come in for her concentration on keeping the wire from slipping. She heard no footsteps; he didn't seem inclined to come rushing right over to help her despite the conclusions of his observation. Come on!

"On the other hand, maybe not," the voice mused. Now she heard slow foot-steps. "Hard to tell with you, Miss Hall. I've heard that you're an excellent actress. Really quite outstanding, in fact."

He finally came into view—hove into view might have been more like it, considering his Victor Buono heft. The effect was complete right down to the carefully manicured goatee and mustache. The twinkle in the eyes was a good bit more lethal, though.

"Remember our delightful little Paula?" Fanni did. "And the boob you adorned with the blasting cap?"

He put back his head and roared with genuine glee. "Oh, I must say, that was a touch of genius.

Needless to say, both parties had nothing but the highest admiration for your thespian skills."

To Fanni's tear-streaked vision, he was nothing more than a multicolored amorphous bulb. The bulb glanced down at her trembling legs. "Still, though, I suppose it's beyond even your skills to affect such a display of muscle control disintegration. Interesting." He paused. "It would

be even more interesting to see what the final results would be when your leg fails you. Unfortunately, my master in this affair wills you alive. For now. Sad, indeed."

The bulb wormed a pudgy hand down into the folds of the robe he wore and brought out a small pair of wire cutters and poised the tiny jaws around the knee/neck wire for effect, beaming Fanni a sad smile she couldn't see. He closed the cutters and, with a musical ping, the wire parted. Both feet on the floor! The incredible luxury of it! She would have kissed the rotten son of a bitch if she could have.

"Close the eyes, please, Miss Hall." He had walked around behind her again. She did as she was told.

A rubber blindfold pushed her eyes back into their sockets. Some things just don't change.

"I have a small surprise for you, gentle lady, one which will no doubt thrill and amaze.

One has first to make some small preparations, however. Be patient." With that rather nebulous promise hanging between them, he lumbered away and, from the sounds of it, went out the door.

As for the "hot and slippery" one, Suni was well past the stage where a simple qualifying

remark on her capabilities had any significance at all. Like Alisha, she had become a toy for the boys, to be used and (not too badly) abused until Mr. God Himself decided what to do with them. Fortunately, most of them were not much into pain, contenting themselves usually with the more mundane aspects of "the spoils of war." She had first become aware of him because of his huge bulbous build. He had contented himself merely with remaining on the periphery of the goon's sexual gymnastics which were themselves of a plebian nature. Once their initial interest had waned, he began to assert himself. And his interests were far from plebian.

The sad irony of her situation with the gross Goord was that he seemed able to seek her out, to reveal her to herself in ways very intimate and erotic and private to she and Ian.

But Ian didn't know. That was the irony. The man she loved with her life had on several occasions scoffed at the freaks who were into submission/bondage. And here, with this great trembling tub of lard, she found a man who reveled in it and seemed to know instinctively that she did too. It was horrible. Infinitely more awful than mere rape, it was the misuse of her innermost self against her with no love, no caring, no tenderness, no sharing. Oh, Ian!

Many, many times, Suni had stared with open-mouthed disbelief at the strident rantings of Western

"liberated" women. Suni considered herself liberated. She was what she was and pursued those goals important to her. There were prejudices levied on her by men, but men had always been fools, and that wasn't about to change. That was one of the things that made them men.

But they had gotten weaker. Infinitely weaker. And maybe that was the real problem.

Suni—with a brilliant mind, a beautiful body, and the capacity to kill with nothing more than her hands and feet—sought ultimately in her mind at least to be naked and bound in Ian's arms, loved and held and gently taken as a slave, an object of mutually shared love.

Deeper in the fantasy would come the pain, his private mark on her body melding them together as one.

But Ian didn't know the dream, and she seriously feared she might lose him if he were to find out. He was like most men in his foolishness. The outraged screeches of treachery and betrayal to "the cause"

that would be leveled at her by the new "liberated" women added the final little touch of disgust to her view of the world. They would never understand that to be truly liberated is to be exactly what you are in your heart, not to chant slogans and cut your hair short and refer to yourself as a "person." She had always particularly loathed that little term: person.

Jesus Christ on a crutch, men were men, and women were women! What the hell was the problem with that? Too simple, she supposed. She would accept the premise only that she was any man's equal, but she was, for being a woman, fundamentally different, almost to the extent of being an entirely different species. Men didn't understand women, and women didn't understand men. That hadn't changed since they'd come out of the caves.

"Ah, there you are, my little jade goddess," Goord said with fine humor. And bringing

"presents," as he liked to refer to them. Presents, for god's sake! "I have a lovely little number for you here. Please to stand up." Sly cheer an ebullition that almost bounced off the walls.

Suni slowly stood, cautious in the too-tight bracelets on her ankles. A short chain led to the wall from the cuffs. They were her only restraint. And clothing. Goord held up his prize with a flourish. "Something to improve your modesty, little one!" A pair of black leather panties, buckled at the hips, was stretched taut between the huge pudgy hands.

He threw them to her. "Put them on, my little nymph, if you please." She bent down and hefted the garment, somewhat surprised at its weight. The reason for it instantly became obvious as she held it before her face. A long thick dildo was attached at the crotch of the panty. From its thick base a tall narrow swatch of cilia-like rubber fingerlings ran up the centerline of the inside of the leather and would, she knew, rest snugly in the cleft of her lips when the garment was donned. She gave Goord a look of total dis-gust, but she knew her nipples were betraying her.

"I've brought along some lubricant, but I think we shan't be needing any, what?" Goord was clearly enjoying himself.

"You dirty, filthy pig," Suni said in a monotone. "You rotten, motherfucking swine." As she was saying this, she was undoing the buckles. She could resist as she had done in the first days, but Goord would just send for men, and they would do the job with considerably less finesse than she would bring to the effort. And it was going to be an effort. Ankles chained together and to the wall, she would be able to offer no real resistance, she had found.

"You're going to have to release my ankles," she offered.

"Nonsense, Miss Ling. Just squat down a bit and open your legs. It'll do it every-time." She would kill him for this. Very slowly. Very carefully. A millimeter at a time.

She slid her back down the wall for support and glared at Goord, locking her eyes with his. He stared pleasantly back into her face, then at her crotch. She never took her eyes from his face as she carefully, carefully inserted the immense phallus into her vagina. The effort required grew and grew as the thing stretched the walls of the canal around its rubber diameter. She was sweating and panting from more than mere exertion when the rubber cilia entered the cleft. Goord cocked his head for an unobstructed view around her hand. Her mons had been shaved earlier, so that was the only thing hindering the spectacle. She had never felt so naked in her life as she had when the warm wet washcloth had whisked away the last of the luxuriant black hair between her legs. And now this!

"Now buckle up," Goord commanded. A flush had crept to his cheeks as well.

She pulled the garment up between the gentle mounds of her rump and buckled the back flap to the front half over her left hip. She then turned to the right hip and performed the same task. When she had pulled the tongue through the buckle to the last hole and secured it (Goord always insisted on things being tight and got very petulant and whip-happy when they weren't) she stood out from the wall and put her hands on her hips. A small defiance.

She did her small defiance very carefully too, it might be added. The thing was huge inside her. Fast moves would be unwise, she thought.

Goord obviously approved in more ways than one. "Excellent, my girl. Truly excellent.

From here, it looks just like what the girls are wearing in Nice! Except for our little secret on the inside, eh?" He chuckled. Suni knew she was close to an orgasm, and hated Goord just that much more for the pleasure that it would bring to both of them.

"Here, tie your hands," he continued, tossing her a small black braided cord. It was a lock-tie. Eight inches long, it had a small hook on one end and a lock-buckle on the other. Suni dourly threaded the hooked end through the buckle, forming a small loop. Walking back to the wall, she stuck the hook through a provident ring, held onto the loop with one hand as she turned her back to the wall, and then threaded both slim hands through the loop and walked away from the wall, tightening the loop around her wrists and locking it there at the same time.

"Turn around so I can see," Goord whispered. Suni did as she was told, wagging her fingers at the man. "Excellent. Now you may kneel." Suni knelt. As her knees approached the floor, the rings on her ankles bit with extra special enthusiasm.

Goord lumbered over behind her and yanked a restraint out of a bag. It was a rubber single-sleeve.

Goord rolled it down like a nylon until just the pouch end for her fingers and hands retained its original shape, then he pulled it over her fingers and rolled it up her arms. The rubber was so strong in its spring that it seemed to automatically squeeze her elbows together with a will of its own. Suni arched her shoulders and hissed between her teeth.

She'd never been able to get her arms together very easily. The single-sleeve made it look a lot easier than it was.

Goord rolled the thing up till it was just beneath her armpits, then smoothed the rubber and tugged it into complete, glass-smooth conformity over her arms. It looked as if it had been poured on her. Then came the straps. Suni was very close to the edge.

Goord suddenly stooped and, cupping Suni's chin in one hand, straightened her up. With the other hand, he made a grab for her crotch, pulling the crotch of the panty hard up between her legs, jamming the phallus deeper within her. She did go over the edge then, bucking and gasping and hating.

"I thought so, little dove. Not quite all the way home. I will have to assay to rectify that small error of yours." So saying, he brought the narrow strap attached to the fingertip of the single-sleeve up hard between her legs, up and over one hip, then around her back over the other hip and back to the rising part of the strap which was slewed off at an acute angle toward her opposite hip. He threaded the end of the strap under the riser and pulled it back till the thing was running vertically up her belly, effectively shortening it in the process and causing it to actually depress the panty between her lips. The dildo was as far home as it was going to go. If Suni moved her shoulders and leaned forward in the slightest, the strap was pulled in harder. She hardly dared to move!

Goord beamed his beamish beam and yanked her leash.

"Tea time."

FOURTH AND FINAL INSTALLMENT

INTRODUCTION BY GEOFFREY MERRICK

This is a momentous occasion. After eight installments and ten years, the Fanni Hall adventure which started in 1977 with „Bunzie Gets a Surprise” is ending. Looking back on the complex story is amazing There have been more than two hundred ages of text, and more than a hundred fullsize Bishop paintings, some ~ about a half dozen in color. itis alandmarkin the genre, and those who possess a full set are lucky indeed. For those who don't, we are presenting as a side bar some highlights from previous episodes.

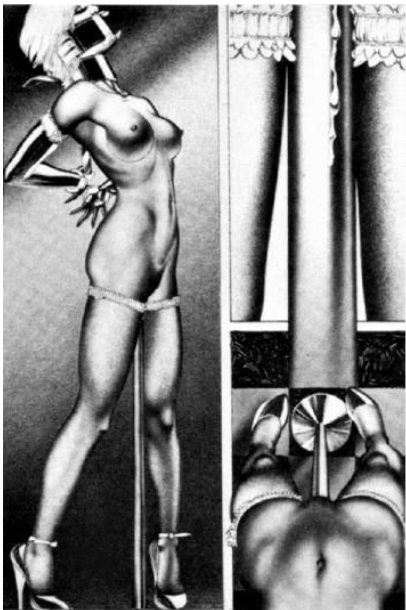
But, as the Doors once said, “This is the end, my friend.” What started with the simple premise of a staggeringly good looking girl with short, blond hair in a leather bikini getting kidnapped off a Public beach is ending with all the complex plotlines as tightly bound together as any of the heroines. And what heroines:

Alisha, the black beauty. Suni, the Asian lovely. And, of course, Fanni Hall herself ~ Bishop's ultimate fantasy woman. She's Emma Peel and Tracey Tailor all in one.

When last we left her, she was in the clutches of Bertram B, Bertram, the evil brain behind it all, being taken care of by the megalomaniacal milionaire's minion, Goord. In fact, almost everybody was in Bertram and Goord's clutches, including Fanni's old enemy, Madam, and Fanni's friends Alisha and Suni, About the only person not in Bertram's thrall was Suni's love interest, the MIG

agent lan, who has Bertram's daughter Alissa in his clutches.

Get ready folks. It's showdown time.



For Fanni, being blindfolded was inevitably an experience somewhat akin to an OBE with a tether-her skin seemed, balloon-like, to expand out and away from her body and to grow tactile whiskers. Commonly referred to as a "proximity sense," the enforced blackness of the blindfold seemed to make manifest the sense as no other purely voluntary prodding's were capable of doing. Added to proximity sense might well have been added survival sense, she thought.

She was aware of the small crowd outside the door well before her ears picked up the sounds. Two or more guard-types. With company. Unwilling company. And she knew who it was.

After the guards had done their arranging's and dangling's and gone away, one vast and bovine presence remained, walking to each of the three ladies and inspecting the proffered lace-work. It was This is a momentous occasion. After eight Goord. It had to be Goord.

The three ladies in audience concurred. Blind and gagged they were; deaf installments and ten years, the Fanni Hall they definitely were not.

Fanni's blinder went first. Alisha and Suni were instantly recognizable despite the muzzles and blinkers. Fanni was hit both with the relief that they were at least alive and (?) well and the disappointment that, like the eggs, they were all in one basket.

With relish as refined as it was lethal, Goord removed first Suni's blind-fold, then the band over Alisha's eyes. They were, the both of them, evidently, very surprised. And even more dismayed.

Goord's smirk had grown to the same proportions as the drawing on the Jammin' with Edward record album cover wherein the illustrated man's top half becomes detached from his bottom half. Fanni would have liked to play Nicky Hopkins. With a knife. Goord detached. Yum.

" 'Tis a great and distinct pity that I won't, alas, sweet gentles, be he who administers your last... rites... as it were. The Lord of the Manor has some rather specialized plans for you himself, it is rumored. I will, on the other hand, be there to observe and hopefully add to my repertoire."

With that cheery ending, he turned and left, closing and latching the door with smooth, deliberate care like one who has pried open a tin of caviar for a savoring whiff and then closed it with equal care to be gobbled later.

Fanni's eyes went back and forth between those of her two friends, eloquent in their fear and despair and not inconsequential pain. Fanni looked away, through the window, where dawn's light illuminated the lawn. Through the breach in the wall several hundred yards away, she thought she caught the flicker of a small child on a bicycle out celebrating its freedom from the rain. And here she was, laced up like a package, tired, sweating.

Scared. It might very well be the last halfway decent thing she ever saw, she thought. She wondered how long the pigs intended to let them hang around like this. Especially Alisha.

The latter had been propped up on a low stool affair with her knees resting on the surface provided. The surface, though, had been rendered into a plain of small, sharp knobs separated from one another by about an inch so that her weight, rather than finding the true surface of the stool, was suspended some fractions of an inch above it. Her legs were never quite still as she desperately tried to find some way to relieve her knees of the daggering points.

In addition to that, her feet had been pulled up to touch her buttocks by a rope that then joined her wrists behind her back and shot to the ceiling, holding her upright on the stool.

Another rope from her ankles came up between her legs in front, was threaded through a ring in the wall immediately before her, and then returned to a small attachment with her nose ring. Like her own previous position, Fanni, thought, it was instantly intolerable.

Suni wasn't quite so bad off, although Fanni found herself with no real enthusiasm for switching places. Suni's ankles had been crossed and tied, and her neck and face had been brought down into a strained union with them by a cord running over her shoulders and down to her wrists. Novelty, always one of Goord's trademarks, had been applied with a cord that ran from her ankles, under her bottom, and then up to the ceiling near Alisha's rope so tightly that her small rump had been lifted right off the floor and held there. Not comfortable. At all.

Fanni looked once more into the growing light and wondered when the goons would come. And what they would bring.

Right at that moment, however, Bertram B. was very hard and intent on listening to a small, cheap plastic tape cassette that a very agitated major-domo had delivered with somewhat less of the usual pomp and with a great deal more speed. The man had had a short listen-in to convince himself that it wasn't some cleverly camouflaged advertisement or another in the tedious string of crank calls put to tape that had characterized the electronics era. Her voice was instantly recognizable—he had been with her father long before her birth.

Bertram B. chewed on his lip as he listened to the rewind tape. The major-domo sunk back into the shadows and attempted to become invisible. It was her, all right. Alissa. The screams and pleadings were nearly incoherent, but it was her.

The goddamned Englishman in the cabin. The cabin that got nicely blown to smithereens with Dawnelle in it. Didn't anybody know what the hell they were doing any more? The English-man had gotten away somehow.

And the Englishman had demands. And then some. He knew that the Toothsome (and Troublesome) Trio were his pampered guests and he wasn't pleased about their no doubt sumptuous accommodations; he wanted them out and reasonably undamaged, or he had some highly entertaining plans for his daughter. Another squalling wail pegged the VU

meter needle. The tape ended and the old man threw the whole machine across the room.

It banged into the wall, rebounded, and landed square in the opening of the helmet atop the medieval knight's armored figure. A goon by the window had the impression that the thing was trying to eat the Sony and fought back a grin. "Out!" was the command.

"Out. All of you useless bunglers!" The old man was on his feet, pacing to his desk. The old flicker had to do some fast thinking, the goon thought. He glanced once more at the knight with its shiny new tape deck and then he did grin. Of course, Bertram B. couldn't see it with his back turned. The major-domo saw it, though, and thought to himself that the nice-looking young man couldn't have worked for Mr. Bertram very long, and quite probably didn't have much of a future with the company. Those small mirrors all over the place weren't there just for decoration.

Bertram B. sat and thought (the goon had been right about that, at least) and fumed.

Profits and losses. What to do with the damn-able brat? On the one hand, she was more trouble than she was really worth, but on the other hand, Alissa had spunk. He had hoped the phony kidnapping by Madame's people and her subsequent "rescue" a la Hall would

have knocked off at least some of the coltish perversity.

And now, here she was with a lunatic from Britain who was threatening her not merely with death, but with embellishments before the act. Her screams had been very genuine.

Damn it! He knuckled his eyes and cursed some more. She was his daughter, damn it all, and with his son . . . his son! The black fury came back then, and he hunched into the huge chair and clawed at the arms like someone suffering the joys of terminal cancer. If nothing else, if for no other reason, he would get the Englishman for that. He picked up the phone and dialed for Burnside. At least he had one man he could count on. He would throw every damned thing he had into this affair. The sonofabitch would pay!

Gourd was pleased when he heard the news. A delay! More time to play with the new toys. Perhaps not as much as he would have liked, he sniffed, but then one doesn't question providence. Especially when the morsels are so ten-der. And vulnerable. He rubbed his palms briskly together, smacked on some after shave, and strode from the room. A bright new day!

Fanni's appraisal of the turning of the clock wasn't quite so sanguine, but it was equally astute—she was still alive! The sun had been oozing into the still-wet lawn when the last of the stampedes arrived and yanked the ladies down from their respective perches and dragged them back down to the rather less genteel regions of the place.

And then Goord showed up, fat and happy. The sight of them "just hanging around" the day before had given him all kinds of ideas, and he intended to try his hand at as many of them as the Fates would allow, the Fates being manifest in the person of that skinny old anus upstairs.

They took turns in all the best traditions of participatory democracy: If one flailed away at the proffered targets of mandate or opportunity, she would in short order find herself under the self-same lash/cane/whip/prod/horse/rack, and on and on and on. It was the most fun Goord had had in his whole distended life. A pity the others didn't share his enthusiasm, although he harbored his private suspicions about the Asian. The Englander was a fool!

Wasting such an exquisite asset (especially when the lady herself would have been the chief beneficiary) struck Goord as being close to an out-and-out obscenity. He lavished extra attentions on Suni, recognizing somewhere in some very small part of his lecherous soul, as he did so, that he met few genuinely kindred souls in his perambulations, and that this one both loved it and hated him for doing it rather than the poor British boob. Sadly, he knew that he would never truly share the game with anybody but these unwilling (to put it mildly) broads headed for some lime-pit or someplace else similarly unhygienic.

Goord felt something perilously close to guilt. No, not guilt. Loneliness, maybe? Ah, fuck it, he thought, turning back to Hall, wiping a slickish leather quirt with a chamois rag.

There were better things to think about. And lots of better things to do.

The next tape came two days later. Different brand of tape, but just as cheap (and ubiquitous) as the first. The old man's people ran around like chickens with their heads cut off, but all the people working the counters of the drug store and discount houses and



stereo stores just gave them blank stares and pointed to racks containing hundreds of the same cheapo cassettes.

The fidelity of the recording (once the Sony had been pried out of the knight) was just sufficient to convince Bertram B. that he was getting a second helping of the first go-round.

Wonderful. The boys had put up an Ensolite pad on the wall with a big X marked as the bullseye if the Man should decide to treat himself to another bout of Sling the Sony.

And there was a picture. SX-70 stuff all the way: color shifted slightly to the nauseous, and image sharpness the figment of some Polaroid PR man's imagination, but once again, it was the daughter. Without a doubt. And look what that English sonofabitch was doing to his property... child!

It was some kind of warehouse, from the look of it: dirt and leached-out cardboard boxes and rats and more dirt. And Alissa. Impaled on some kind of stake sticking straight up out of a big crack in the floor that ran from frame to frame of the picture. Her legs were pulled wide and held there by ropes that ran from her ankles along a path roughly parallel to that of the crack that anchored the stake and, like the crack, dis-appeared off the edges of the frame. Her hands were around behind her back, presumably tied with more of the rope.

He couldn't tell. A tight noose of the same rope encircled her throat and disappeared upwards towards the ceiling, holding her stiffly upright, as if the stake didn't do well enough at that task! Tears coursed down her cheeks and her expression was at a considerable remove from pacific contentment. Maybe the stake had splinters. Or was cold. Or

both.

The Englishman was in the shot too. His face was away from the lens, but then again, the face wasn't what the old man was interested in. The whip in his hand was long and sinewy and curled completely around Alissa's little waist and sunk into the smooth muscles of her belly almost to the point of disappearing. The crisscrossing welts all over her torso—and between her legs—said in mute but unequivocal terms that the blow depicted wasn't the only blow delivered.

The fury descended again, as deep and full as that which had characterized his rage at the news of Miles's small cranial expansion, and he felt himself sinking into it, almost welcoming the dark as a kind of respite from full realization of what was happening to his child. The grinning goon at the wall hopped up from his slouch behind the brocaded curtain muffling an entire wall and began a solicitous (but cautious) approach.

Suddenly, Bertram B. snapped upright as if somebody had just stuck a long thin stainless-steel rod from his rectum to his brain. His hands clutched at the edges of the photograph and a look of feral glee unlike anything the goon had ever before seen crossed the old man's face. And stayed.

"You!" he fairly screamed at the goon, pointing with one scrawny digit. "Get down-stairs and see if Burnside's got here yet! And then get him the hell up here! I want Burnside here, and I mean now!"

The old man was back on the other side of the room by now, pacing back and forth before the leaded glass like a leopard in a very small cage, clutching and unclutching the photo like some revered but loathed object. The English bastard had blown it!

Came a tapping at the door.

"What is it!" "Burnside, Mr. Bertram," said the grinning goon.

The photograph was in Burnside's hands before the door was fully opened. He glanced first at his employer, hot and sweaty and flushed, and filed it away for later reference.

Boss-Man didn't customarily get this flustered unless he caught somebody stealing from the till.

He finally glanced down at the stiff little rec-tangle of paper and plastic in his hand as the old man virtually hopped around the room like a kid that really has to pee. It was Alissa, of course, in some pretty considerable distress. The man was the Brit, of course; Burnside knew of the latter's professional reputation and was more than a bit suspicious of the seeming ease with which he'd supposedly been reduced to a red mist in the boondocks.

His eyes also took in the rest of the shot.

"It's the boathouse. Anderson's. Across the river." He looked up at Bertram.

The old man's head nodded in a jerk. "Precisely! We've got the bastard. He isn't going to risk moving her much with all the punishment he's giving her. He has to stay right in that area! Get your people, Burnside—your best people. I don't want any more bungling! Use the helicopters! We'll seal off the whole damnable—"

"Negative, sir."

Bertram B. came up short as if he'd been shot. Burnside raised his hands, palms first, in apology.

"Fact is, sir, that area has still got a few people in it, although it's gone mostly to hell.

Going in like the 101st Airborne is going to raise lots of attention, and there's an Air Force base only a couple of miles away from there, and those people tend to get awful tense about casual flying around that close to the warheads. We'll have to go in with cars. I've lined up all the people we'll need. Besides, it'll be quieter that way. The dude may be fucked up, but he sure as hell isn't deaf!"

Instead of exploding, the old man slumped into a chair and rubbed his temples with fingers that had the faintest of faint tremors to them. He sighed and nodded. "You're right, of course." He yanked out a white handkerchief and swabbed his forehead. "All my frothing and screaming about bungling . . . that would have done it nicely." There was a short pause. "Do it as you see fit, Burnside. Bring me my daughter back. Alive!" Burnside acknowledged with a curt nod and went out, closing the door behind him. The Polaroid sat on the coffee table next to the old man, its contents leering up at him. Such a tiny tidbit of information way in the background and badly

out of focus, he thought, and the game ends up for the Englishman. He almost smiled to himself at the thought of the panicked surprise the bastard would have—before Burnside snuffed him out like a roach.

Of course, the stupid bastard had no way of knowing that the whole damned boatyard had been one of his first forays into the construction business, back when he'd still possessed at least a modicum of business naivete/honesty. That had been a burden he'd shrugged off in quick order! He hoped that Burnside would at least have the presence of mind to explain the fool's downfall before he pulled the trigger. He glanced out the French windows; more storms were gathering offshore like buzzards sniffing a meal.



A thoroughly grungy Pacer slipped up the top of a small rise on a little used service road a quarter of a mile from the house and stopped. Its engine was switched off with the key and it gradually wound down in a series of jerking run-ons and farts and pops. Nobody got out, but the window facing the house was rolled down and a pair of binoculars sucked in a magnified image of the front gates. The elevation was such and the rain-cleaned air so clear that the rear portal was visible to boot.

Inaudible from the distance, the front gates whirred back and the leader of the two-car one-Blazer caravan whipped out through the opening and zoomed off down the road toward the border.

A muffled voice from the ratty Pacer said, "Burnside. It's on." The window got rolled back up and the engine was prodded back into life. As the last of the caravan disappeared from view, the automatic transmission in the watcher's car leapt into drive with a clank that the brakes were only barely able to keep in check and the wreck was off, albeit with considerably less of the boyish enthusiasm shown by the mounts of the boys from the manse. Age and prerogatives and like that. And for only fifty dollars a day. The Joys of the City.

Bertram B., standing by the windows, thought he saw a car ambling along the narrow road that bordered the northern extent of his property, delineating the borders of his domain on the one side and an extensive tract of state-owned forest on the other. In fact,

the route, seldom used and even less seldom maintained, belonged to the county, but in effect it was his. He encouraged Burnside's people to affect small and unpleasant surprises for the odd hunter who parked there or for the passion-wracked teenagers who cou-pled like mink in the back seats of their cars. The word had a way of getting around: Bertram's Road can be hard on the health. The locals all knew this like they knew it was day-light when the sun was up. The car he thought he'd seen either belonged to an awful gutsy local or somebody who hadn't kept their ears to the grapevine. He couldn't see the damned thing anymore and turned back to the room and the pile of work on his desk. He wondered where Burnside was now.

"Here we are, sir." Burnside at the boatyard. The grinning goon next to him allowed the barest tinge of smugness to color his voice. At least he seemed to actually know what he was doing, unlike some of the other stooges. He even said "sir." Burnside rather reluctantly put his ruminations on the infinite perversities of people who grow up on islands into the back of his mind and attended to the business at hand. Life with the old bastard was seldom boring, he grumbled to himself. It's just that in the old days' things had been a lot simpler. Ah well, that's progress for you. Shit. The goon was still grinning. Burnside thought he might send the lad in first to see if he could alter the expression's dimensions a bit. Yes, indeed.

Fanni was currently wearing the latest vogue in bring-your-own cells, a tiny cage that just barely surrounded her doubled-up torso and her head. Her arms and wrists were actually outside the cage proper, as were her knees. Her legs had been splayed with bars running behind her knees and her ankles crossed and fastened back safe inside the porta-dungeon.

Her arms had been threaded through the bars and cuffed to a ring welded along the spine of the cage. Attachment points for a myriad of Goord's toys were scattered here and there in amongst the bars like toad stools after a hard rain, but the seemingly haphazard arrangement concealed a superb knowledge of female anatomy and a near genius for human/mechanical engineering. Fanni found two of her rather more substantial orifices...

ummmm ...engaged by snug-fitting facsimiles of appendages normally found affixed to the other version of the species.

She decided that the experience—given all else that she had so recently been through—

was more embarrassing than anything else. Goord had thought otherwise and had elected to allow her time to reconsider her opinion. This was after, needless to say, he had inserted something very large and chewy into Fanni's mouth. Goord's panoply of sayings included something that went to the effect of (Goordism #17, she thought): "A full mouth is a happy mouth." Fanni thought about it. She was still embarrassed.

Goord's happy hum bumbled by the slightly open door (Goord liked to keep an at least intermittent look-in on all his little charges) and continued down the hall toward wherever he'd stashed Suni and Alisha. Nice to see somebody happy at his work, she thought. Still,



though, she thought further, a bit of quid pro quo would be nice, but then she gave it up at the thought of the cage that would be required. It'd still be portable, she guessed, but you'd need a Ken-worth and a flatbed to move it.

As he usually did—when Bertram B. wasn't around—Goord stopped at one of the doors.

He moved his nose to within inches of the glass and turned to the object so conspicuously arrayed in the center of a single beam of light.

The woman was lithe and tanned. Her jet-black hair was gathered into one long tail and pulled taut above her like an enormous spike. Her wrists were widely splayed at acute angles from her body and supported most of her weight. Her legs, similarly, were spread wide (damn near asunder, he mentally corrected) and held by more ropes. She looked taut enough to have hummed like a string, if plucked. And oh, the weals. Oh boy oh boy oh boy.

He licked his lips with a thick pink tongue and examined the handiwork with professional eyes. Whoever was tanning this morsel sure knew what the hell he was doing. And then some. Each time he peeked, Goord was treated to another "still life," as he referred to them. The not-so-small risks he took were more than offset by the tender tableaux he'd been privy to witness in the recent past. He had high hopes for more of the same. Much more.

A small clicking way down the hall was enough to send Goord scurrying like a hedge-hog. He reached his destination door and slammed it shut behind him, leaning on it and

panting from his exertion (he'd run all of 30 feet) and panic at being nailed in the act.

Madame, quivering in her trapeze arrangement, might have laughed at the sight.

Laughter, how-ever, hadn't been much in her purview of events over the last several days.

It was that goddamned English shit, the bas-tard. No sense of humor. When he'd finally pulled the gag out of Alissa's traitorous little mouth and the little bitch had spilled the beans (ungrateful little slut!), she'd expected a rage somewhere in the neighborhood of Mt.

McKinley in height, but the swine just seemed to take it in stride, shooting her a mildly disapproving glare accompanied by a small shake of his head, and set about releasing Alissa from her restraints.

That done, he hustled to the door and pressed his ear to the wood as Alissa straggled into the clothes, he'd brought back for the both of them. Probably something out of a dime store, Madame thought. Mister Ye Olde England was casting a discernibly concerned eye at the elevator light now, his eyes flicking back and forth between the still dark lights and Alissa's floundering. He never looked at Madame once. She realized that he'd simply written her off, the pompous bastard. Goddamned glorified civil servant. Damn the blindfold, she frothed to her-self. She could at least glare at the bastard before they left!

It was only when their shoes went from the pile of the carpet to the tile of the elevator that Madame could hear that they were well and truly leaving her to her own devices, such as they were. As soon as she heard the elevator doors close, she again launched herself off the couch and squirmed towards the general area of the little table. Five minutes later, the goons found her tangled in the leg-chain and screaming her frustration into the gag.

"Where did they go?" they had asked her.

Madame just shook her head. "I don't know. You've got to believe me!

"

"There really isn't much time for this, Madame. Where did they go?"

"Goddamnit, I just told you! The Englishman came back up here after I called you people, and then Alissa told him about the call, and then I didn't hear much of anything else except that they left, together!"

"Mr. Bertram's daughter left. With the Englishman. Together."

"Yes. Yes, goddamnit!"

"After all the little numbers he did on her that you told us about... Yeah, sure, bitch!" The flicking slap snapped Madame's head back.

"Where is she!" The man's eyes were beginning to glitter like the glass beads they put in dime-store monkeys.

That was when the bitch Hall had reappeared. Oops. You said it. Oops. The elevator doors simply opened and there she was, in all her glory. With a tight sweater/skirt on and her pants down. She was violent, she was capable, but she had a terrible sense of timing, in addition to being not stupid. Bertram B.'s men took her, they took Madame, and they brought them to the bowels of Bertram's palatial manse where Goord got to polly-woddle-

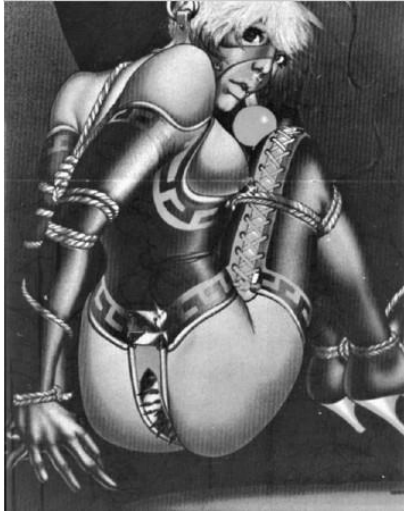
doodle all day.

Goord fiddled while Bertram B. burned. He couldn't get all the fucking irritations out of his mind. As hard as he tried to work (white heat, no distractions, total concentration, Zen business, "iai" corporation management, slicing the opponent on the draw), all his emotional frustrations nudged him. Alissa, the bitch. That beautiful, beautiful bitch. The face of a corrupt angel. It was the smooth young face of her mother's. Bertram felt his late wife's skin again. He smelled her hair. He felt her loins wrapping his: the warmth, the tingle, the thrill, the joy. The only real joy of his triumph-filled career.

Hall, the bitch. Seemingly so stupid, so hap-less, so incapable. But every time he had her under lock and key, every time they "saw" to her with tortures and punishments which would reduce any other woman (fuck that, "any other person") to a pile of lobotomized protoplasm, there she'd be again, sticking her perfect nose in, thrusting her perfect chest out, pulling the trigger on a variety of high caliber phallic symbols.

But at least these bitches were known. Who was the fucker in the car? In the shadowy, non-descript car on his road. On his road! Who'd have the balls, the ignorance, the chutzpah to drive on his fucking road during the worst day of his life? Who'd have the gall to go down his road on the one fucking day when he had no stooges, hoods, thugs, or goons to send after the vehicle? All his people were across the waves, about to put an end to the Britisher pig. No mistakes this time. They'd cover that boat-house like all-weather paint. They'd lay down a sheet of lead like a wall-to-wall carpet. The English pus-ball wouldn't so much be killed as perforated. Eradicated.

Bertram B. grinned just thinking about it. But then the grin froze. The grin in his mind's eye wasn't his. It was a face he didn't recognize at first. It was the face of a young, good-looking man. An impeccably dressed, young, good-looking man. The young man who had gotten Burnside for him. The young man who had been with the major-domo. The young man with the crescent-shaped scar beside his eye. Bertram B.'s meaty hand slammed down on the intercom. "I want the staff downstairs. I want the entire staff rounded up and brought down to the dungeons—now!"



The grinning goon slammed the thin knife into Burnside's neck.

It was so quick and so simple that Burnside, consummate professional that he was, didn't have time to react or defend himself. The grinning goon merely lifted his hand, drew the blade out of a scabbard on his neck, and plunged it into Burnside's throat from the side.

Burnside saw the movement in his peripheral vision, but thought the grinning goon was scratching his neck. But then the knife was in his neck, cutting a major artery. The blood pounded the ceiling and the door as Burnside writhed and gurgled.

But the grinning goon was already outside, in the sunset, walking toward the throng of stooges who stood ready to lay the boathouse low. They were anxious, sullen, intense, just waiting for Burnside's signal. What did they care about the boss's daughter? Their mission was to get the Englishman, and if truth be told, they figured the boss would be secretly revealed if his darling Alissa should happen to be mortally wounded—by the Englishman, of course—during the course of human events.

The grinning goon surveyed the angry mob. Tsk-tsk, he thought. A finer bunch of subhuman Neanderthals he had rarely seen. Or was that a redundant phrase? The grinning goon had to think this way, to deal with the group this superficially, in order to accomplish his subsequent goal. The grinning goon took the big square box he had hauled out of the back seat just as he slipped from the car and lifted it atop the tripod he carried in his other hand. It looked easy, but took all the goon's remarkably lithe strength to pull off with such apparent ease. It was completely necessary for him to work this casually so none of the gathered creeps would become suspicious.

As more and more of these creeps began to turn toward him, facing the car (and away from the boathouse) in the deepening orange light of sunset, they noted that the device the grinning goon was setting up looked very much like a camera. The kind of camera photographers take centerfold photos with (they had all seen them on the Playboy Channel). So, as they stood on the

dock, the water lapping nearby, the refreshing smell of salt in their lungs, no one started to scream or bolt.

The grinning goon finished, taking a last glance back at the car. Somehow the windshield had been tinted scarlet. Oh well.

He looked back to the bunch of armed hoods, who were all looking at him. They were waiting for the word, the green light, the go. The expressions on all their faces said that the grinning goon would give it to them.

"But first," said the grinning goon, "Burn-side says 'say cheese.' " He pushed down a button. The button. The modified Claymore Mine went off.

Ouch. Major ouch.

The grinning goon twisted away from the detonation and went down to the wet dirt face first. The box erupted, leaping into the air, following the goon to the ground. But it did its devastating job. Hundreds of silver balls sped out in a net formation, gaining speed and spin.

All of them were touched by it: Adams, Janes, Quayles, Mays, Davis, the others. All of Bertram and Burnside's hand-picked heathens had a ball with their names on it. It erupted internal organs, cracked skulls, and terminated perverse, corrupt, evil lives en masse.

It was the only way Tyler, the grinning goon, knew of working. No playing around for him, in the Fanni Hall style. But then again, Fanni Hall was a hero. Not he. He was just another Bertram B. Bertram with no emotional ties—no hate. What do you send to kill a monster? Why, another monster, of course.

Some stooges got away from the modified Claymore. The ones closest to the boathouse wall. They were saved from the hail of metal death by their pounded comrades, that wave of flattened criminal flesh. They did what came naturally: they ran into the boathouse—

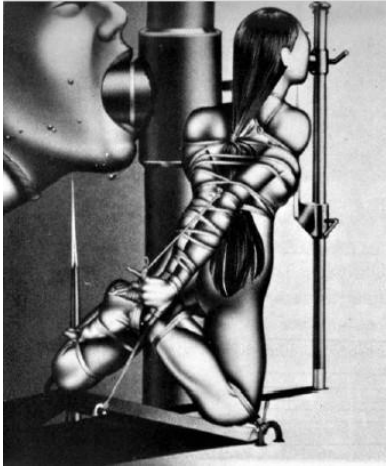
the empty boathouse.

That is, the almost empty boathouse. For, as soon as their feet started pounding the wood floorboards, Ian came erupting out. He had undone two planks and had squatted, waiting, beneath the waterline, beneath the boathouse floor, for the mine/cannon to do its work.

Now he rose, Uzi in hands, to cut low any survivors. Mr. Tyler had convinced him some time ago that prisoners were not advisable in this particular battle.

The Uzi chattered, and the remaining stooges went down, twisting, their falls cracking floorboards and raising clouds of dust, like mini-apocalypses in the sunset-shafted drama of the boathouse interior.

Soon all was quiet, save for the lap, lap, lap of the water on the blood-stained shore. Ian,



feeling ill, looked away from the slaughter. He looked down to the tiny snorkel poking out of the water between his feet. A very good-looking blond was on the other end of that snorkel.

Alissa Bertram had come full circle. She had started this incredibly labyrinthian mess as a cock-tease in a leather bikini on a public beach. She ended it as a naked sea nymph, bound to supporting pylons just below the water's surface. Ian could take no chances that her little mewls might alert the killers, so he gagged her with the entire ocean.

Her arms were spread, tied to two separate pylons. Her legs were parallel, her ankles and toes wired together and attached to a weight which held her body down and her head just below the surface. The snorkel in her mouth not only let her breathe, but kept her from blow-in bubbles as well.

It had all been the grinning goon's idea. Ian was disgusted by him, but had to admit that he knew his job very, very well.

"No time to contemplate our place in the universe," he heard. Ian looked up to see Tyler standing amid the bodies, before the swiss-cheesed front wall of the boathouse. "The army's gone, but the General still rules the Stalag."

"The General," as Tyler had called Bertram, was twisting Alisha's tit as if tuning an international band radio. Not lost on him was the similarity between her name and his daughter's. But that was not where the comparison ended—not in this case. For Bertram—

angry, upset, enraged Bertram—had decided to visit upon Alisha what had been visited upon Alissa. So, the black beauty stood—had to stand, if she didn't want the steel impaling invasion to rupture a goodly portion of her internal anatomy.

She stood tall, chest out, little beads of sweat hanging outside of every visible pore, like beads on dark rubber. The pole wasn't the only thing that made her straighten. The shoes helped—gold, strap-on high heels. Kinda like resting one's weight on a deeply sloping platform held up by a five-inch pin. Yes, the heel itself gave new meaning to the word stiletto. There was no getting around it. The thing had thin gold straps which tied around her ankles, then around her heels, and even around her toes.

Speaking of tying, her arms were otherwise occupied as well. They were twisted high up her back and held there by unbearably tight, thin cords, which then dug around and into her shoulders. Goord so wanted to attach them to Alisha's hair, but her close-cut, kinky Afro denied him that luxury. So, instead, he had to noose her neck and attach it to the ceiling to keep her chin up.

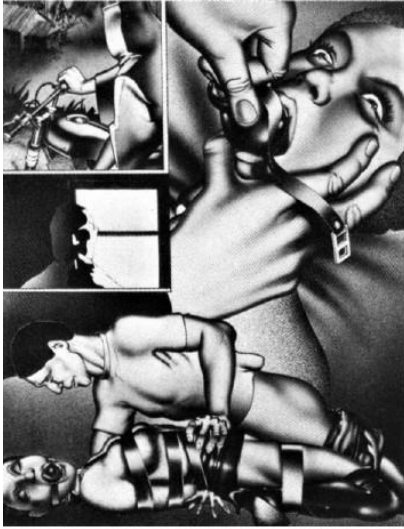
So, the rich African lovely had to stand for Bertram's molesting and the inanimate rape of the impaling pole which sunk deeply into her womanhood. Any complaints were lost in the prod-pad buckled around her head, forcing her lips to their widest aperture and filling her mouth with what felt like an entire hot-air balloon.

Goord smiled a benign smile, appreciating what the black girl was going through. It was easy for him to smile benignly. After all, his own hands were filled with porcelain-colored flesh, topped off with a cherry tab. He ground Suni's breasts in his muscular fingers (about the only part that was muscular, besides his brain) as she did the best she could to resist.

Considering what the wart had put her through, any movement at all was impressive. At least her tits were the only appendages he could get to. Almost all the other positions were filled.

Her mouth was around a big, solid rubber penis which was forced in by a tightly buckled strap. Every few seconds she would stretch her mouth off it in a terrible grimace, allowing drool to pour from the corners, where her lips met. That, in turn, soaked the sponge glued to the inside of the strap. A twin dildo remained snug in her snatch, kept there by the same strap which held the butt plug in place. That was the only covering on her hips. It attached to the belt around her tiny waist. Otherwise, she was awash in second-skin acrylic.

There was the black shirt, lacing up her back, with lacing cut-out portions on the sleeve so her smooth flesh could peek through. There was no collar to speak of, just a turtleneck which doubled as a choker. There were no pockets either, just two round holes which revealed her breasts perfectly. Her molested, kneaded breasts with the nipples acting like erect buttons. There were more laces at the cuffs, only these didn't lace up; they laced her wrists together behind her. Then there were the laces which went to the ceiling, bending her over a bit, keeping her off balance on the nasty red boots.



The boots held snugly on her thighs, the four-and-a-half-inch heels keeping her on her toes. She periodically moaned as each step vibrated the various dildos and pulled on her arm/shoulder muscles. Goord certainly didn't help matters as he expertly teased her.

Fanni watched it all through drooping eyelids. It was taking all her energy just to remain conscious in the nifty new position Goord had put her in. "Just to keep you out of trouble," he had said. Fanni was literally above it all. She was not attached to the ceiling; she hung from it. Her ankles were tied to her thighs. Her wrists were tied to her ankles, behind her.

Ropes went from the wrists and ankles to the ceiling. Her hair was pulled back and knotted to ropes holding her elbows together, so her head was up.

That only served to help her keep her mouth wide, which she needed to do because it felt as if they had stuffed the entire linen closet between her lips. The sensation was weird and definitely unfun. The only thing keeping what felt like an entire parachute in there was one thin wire, which went around her head so snugly it felt as if it had been placed there when she was a child and Fanni had grown into it.

That one lousy wire did its job, however. Somehow it defeated her every attempt to dislodge this months' worth of linen from her oral cavity. Well, at least they had the decency to dress her. Actually, decency didn't enter into it. They gave her this clinging ribbed knit mini-dress, but cut slices in it wherever it counted.

So Fanni had to just hang in there, most of her hanging out, as the staff of Bertram B. Bertram's palatial digs gathered nervously among them. It was just another meeting for them.

The master's—ahem—shall we say, extra-curricular interests, were already accepted by the hired help. In fact, Fanni felt some unwanted fingers probing where the moon don't show as the myriad and sundry servants sur-rounded her.

Bertram stopped his Alisha attention just long enough to survey the crowd with a baleful eye. "Bundy!" he roared. His voice echoed through the low-ceilinged cavern as the help shifted nervously, looking at one another.

"Mr. Bundy isn't here," said a calm voice, with not even a "sir."

"Where's the major-domo?" Bertram growled.

"The major-domo isn't here either," said the same voice. Those gathered gasped. Who would dare not show up?

"Well, where are they?" Bertram bellowed, filling the dungeon with sound. "With that Madame woman? With the other captives? Where are they?"

"They're where the lilies bloom, Mr. Ber-tram," said the voice. "They're where the buffalo roam and the skies are not cloudy all day."

"Who is that!" Bertram shouted, shaking with anger. "Who dares speak to me this way?"

"Who dares, wins," said Frakie, slowly emerging from the crowd, his 9mm automatic casually pointed directly at Bertram's chest. "I was surprised how easy it was to drive up.

How empty the place was. You must want the Englishman and the girl very badly."

"She's my daughter!" Bertram practically screamed.

"You taught her well," Frakie said sardonically. No one else moved. There was something about Frakie that said "don't move." Maybe the smell of all those people he assassinated in Southeast Asia was still with him. Maybe the servants could intrinsically tell that he killed the Cong as well as any American commander who went off the deep end. It mattered not whether this was true. What mattered is that no one moved.

No one, that is, except Goord. He had an instinctive ability to tell when the jig was up.

Keeping the bound and gagged girls between him and the gun, he skittered to the far door.

Where he was hit in the face with the butt of Ian's Uzi.

Goord went down, his stomach shaking like a bowl full of jelly, crimson cream splashing from his nose. All three female captives snapped to attention as two more visitors entered the room.

"What an entrance," said Tyler, bringing up the rear.



"What timing," said Frakie.

"As usual," replied the grinning goon with the crescent-shaped scar by his eye.

"What is this?" Bertram exploded as only a man who has spent his life-giving orders which were unquestionably followed can. "Some sort of shakedown?" Tyler shook his head sadly, holding another 9mm automatic in his hand. "No," he countered. "Some sort of conclusion. Some sort of climax. Some sort of ending." Bertram's eyes bulged. He couldn't believe it. These few men must have taken care of his army of stooges. It didn't seem possible—maybe they had diverted the thug platoon—but there was no misunderstanding their expressions or attitudes. They were not the expressions or attitudes of three men who had to get their work done and get out quick before the calvary showed up. These guys had all the time in the world.

It was over. Tyler raised his gun and fired.

The bullet went neatly through the knots holding Fanni's arms and legs and the ceiling together. She fell on a bunch of servants, who served as a lumpy safety net. They all groaned and collapsed to the floor where Fanni followed, ripping off her bondage as she went.

She grabbed the cloth on either side of the gagging wire and pulled, forcing the things out of her mouth.

"Whew," she said sarcastically, extricating herself from the butlers and maids. "Thanks." She quickly stood and kicked Bertram in the balls. Actually, she didn't so much kick as bury her calf as far up between his legs as her gam would go. Then she brought her fist

and forearm down across his face.

Bertram was not made of stone. He doubled over, his face getting red, going purple and green. Then he went down.

Tyler raised his eyebrows. "I didn't think you were that kind of girl," he said mildly.

"What kind of girl did you think I was?" she flared, racing over to extricate Alisha from her pole as Ian struggled with Suni's bondage.

"The masochistic kind," Tyler said quietly as the lithe and lovely brunette went by.

"Who are you?" Bertram said weakly from between split lips. Tyler shrugged helplessly.

"Get out of here," Frakie told the servants. He didn't have to ask Tyler what to do with them. They hadn't attacked him en masse when he appeared. They only liked Bertram for his money.

"And take everything with you," Tyler said with a smile. A roar went up from the exiting throng, just before they started taking Bertram's palace apart like Greek banshees.

"Are you all right?" Ian asked Suni as soon as he got her free.

Tyler approached, shaking his head. "Trust the MI.6," he said. "Clichés for any occasion." The ex-white slaver took the Asian's hand in his and gently gave her his gun. Then he motioned to Goord. "He's all yours."

Ian was surprised by the look on Suni's face. "Darling, no. Don't. You wouldn't."

"Leave us alone," Suni said quietly, only looking at the fat, bleeding man on the floor.

"Just a little while." She looked as if she was about to say something more, then just stared at Goord, the gun pointed at his pointy little head.

"Suni," Ian started, then felt Tyler's hand on his shoulder, turning him away, leading him out.

"You don't know the girl at all, do you?" the grinning goon said out in the hall. "Must be emotion blinding you. You don't know what they've been through, do you?"

"I know!" Ian spat intensely, holding up his fingernail-less hand (the remnant of a torture session some assignments back).

Tyler marveled at the soft fingertips for a moment, before his smile grew even wider. "Not even close," he advised. "Lucky you. You haven't a clue." Tyler shook his head. "Stay in espionage, Englishman. Where things are emotionally and psychologically simple. Where you can be tortured in body. Here the torture is to the being." He put his hand on Ian's arm before he returned to the room. "Bad news, Englishman. I know the look. If you want to keep your Oriental friend, you're going to have to keep her." Bertram B. was dead when he reentered the room. The expression on those remaining told nothing as to who did the honors. Maybe all of them. Maybe Bertram did it himself. Better

death than disgrace and all that. "Oh, now!" Tyler mock-complained. "What is little Alissa going to do with all Daddy's millions?"

"She'll think of something," Frakie said flatly.

"Who are you comedians?" Fanni said irritably. "The white slavery Abbott and Costello?"

"Interested third parties," Tyler said quickly, doing a quick survey of the room, making sure there were no loose ends. "This damn saga was becoming the best WSN

entertainment since *Gone with the Wind*. Bertram was becoming so obsessed, all his allies deserted him. The OMO was just waiting for the smoke to clear before they came in to pick up the pieces." He smiled directly at Fanni. "Couldn't have that. See you to your car?" The place was already in a shamble by the time they got outside. The servants were looting the place like veteran slum dwellers on a hot city night. Tyler managed to find some halfway decent wardrobe for the ladies before they emptied the rest of the cells. All the captives were free—except one.

"You're just going to leave Madame there, aren't you?" Tyler finally asked as he stood beside his Volvo-like car.

"What would you have me do?" Fanni asked back. "Release her? Kill her? No, better to let sleeping bitches lie. She'll get away herself. She always does."

"And maybe team up with a vengeful Alissa Bertram," Tyler mused. "I was right—you are a glutton for punishment." Fanni smiled. Without opinion. It was the first use of her mouth muscles which didn't require something shoved between them. It revitalized her, opened up her whole personality, which had been tied down for what seemed like a decade.

Tyler opened the car door. "Drop you someplace?" he inquired.

Fanni looked him over carefully. Suni was with Ian. They had a lot of talking to do, among other things. Alisha was with that Frakie character. She had a lot of recuperating to do.

Among other things. Fanni looked at Tyler's face. Among other things. Suddenly she put her arms around him and planted her lips on his. Among other things.

"Well, it's about time!" Fanni whooped when they had finished. "Who would have thought?" Her smile was completely natural by now. "Someone who knows how to kiss."

"Among other things." Fanni mused with her arms still around Tyler's neck. "You going anywhere specific?" she finally asked. "I mean, can I get home from where you're staying?"

"I can stay anywhere," Tyler said.

"Hmmm," said Fanni. "Yes. I'll tell you the truth, mister. I've had so much rubber and plastic shoved up my gym-crack, I'm beginning to forget what flesh feels like. And that would be a shame, don't you think?"

The goon just grinned. Mildly, without much irony.

"And, if the truth be known, Mr. Sardonicus," she continued, "I'm so hot after all this that I



could fry a shrimp on my barbie."

Tyler just shook his head. "You are, indeed, a glutton for punishment," he said, opening the car door for her.

"Keep that in mind," Fanni Hall said as she got in. "Home, James."

THE END

FANNI'S FIRST CASE

<https://www.deviantart.com/vonmayes736/art/FANNI-S-FIRST-CASE-Chapter-One-403993236>

It had to begin somewhere. It wasn't as if our uber-distressed heroine had suddenly appeared fully-formed, hatched from some powder blue egg, cat-suited and strapped from nose to toes, a cannonball-sized gag already denying her First Amendment right to free speech. And as Mr. Bishop implies in his chronicling of the travails of Fanni Hall, there had been prior adventures, adventures he left for later telling by someone with the time to waste and the inclination to waste it. So tell I will.

Firstly, Fanni Hall at the tender age of eighteen was nowhere near the Fanni Hall in her prime, the delightful Miss Buns that Robert Bishop introduced to the unsuspecting world. Young Fanni was no slouch, not in the least. She had trained in Judo, Kendo, Karate and her favorite, capoeira, but had yet to test her skills in actual combat. And while young Fanni had navigated the scheming corridors of American high school with nary a bruised ego, or a broken heart, had survived the betrayal and backstabbing that came with being a teenaged girl, she had not yet had the pleasure of frolicking in the high stakes real world of blood and money. But that would change soon.

It began on a chilly October night. Fanni's very first apartment was of the typical starter variety – cheap, grungy and noisy. The noise tonight was coming from apartment 2B, where the middle-aged couple seemed to be in day three of a continuous fight. Just for fun, Fanni rapped her knuckles on their door as she passed the apartment, then hustled past and down the steps before anyone opened the door. Out on the street, Fanni tucked her chin under her jacket collar and leaned into the cold breeze as she headed for the corner deli. The black van that screeched to a halt against the curb ten feet in front of her stopped Fanni in her tracks, but she kept her hands in her pockets, more curious than fearful. The side door of the van slid open and Fanni felt a surge of adrenaline at the sight of the ski mask-wearing occupants.

There were three of them and, like Fanni, they had chosen black for the evening's attire. Unfortunately the biggest of them had chosen not to wear a jock strap, and he paid for that omission the moment he got in range of Fanni's boot. He hit the ground and slithered like a headless snake, his hands trying to reposition his screeching balls. Ski mask number two made the mistake of glancing at his fallen comrade, and when he turned back to Fanni he was too late to stop the knuckles that were aimed at his Adam's apple. He staggered about, then leaned against the van, his head bobbing up and down. About ten seconds into the attack and Fanni had turned a three-on-one into a much more manageable one against one. And that one was the runt of the lot, clearly a female. "Looks like your friends have changed their minds," Fanni said with a grin. "How about you ..." The runt struck before Fanni could finish her sentence, and it caught Fanni completely off guard. Quick as a whip, the remaining thug had charged, then dove low and smashed her foot into Fanni's knee. With a howl Fanni went down. When she tried to pop back up, her knee refused to cooperate. A fist smashed into the side of her head, and Fanni saw stars. Meanwhile, Mr. Ball-busted was on his knees, in the early stages of recovery. The tide was beginning to shift back to the bad guys.

But that changed in a second. The sound of an approaching siren seemed to revive all parties, even the wounded dickheads. "Here come's your ride, boys," Fanni said.

"Fuckin' cops," croaked the thug still leaning against the van.

There was a brief moment of indecision before the obvious result -- the three ski-masked assholes worked their ways back into the van. The cop car was nearby, Fanni could tell by the sound. The van lurched once, then burned rubber as it sped off into the night. Fanni sat up, expecting the police car to go racing after the fleeing thugs. But the siren had stopped, the flashing lights throwing off blue and red in the night. Looking back in the direction of her apartment building, it dawned on Fanni why the cops weren't chasing her assailants. They weren't here to rescue her; someone had finally called the cops about the domestic disturbing a-holes in apartment 2B. Talk about some good luck.

The cops were just down the street, an easy enough walk to report the assault. But Fanni decided to remain "mission-focused" and limped on down to the deli. The police were for victims and for people who needed protecting, so count her out. The real victims had crawled back into that van and Fanni felt quite capable of defending herself. Plus, she was hungry.

The call came a week later. Whoever was talking was trying to disguise her voice, but there was something about it that seemed familiar to Fanni. Someone she knew? Maybe. The message was clear enough: "Just leave town, Franny. Don't mess with these people."

Fanni asked the obvious question. "What people?"

"Bad people. That's all you need to know. If they knew I was talking to you they would kill me. Or worse."

"How about we meet and talk about this?"

"No way. Too dangerous."

"Then tell me what they want with me. Tell me what this is about. Please."

There was a pause, then a more agitated voice. "I should never have called. Just get out of town. Get out of the state. Go!" The line went dead.

Not a sliver of information. Except for one possibly vital tidbit. Fanni was fairly certain that she recognized that voice. And it belonged to one of the very few people who still called her "Franny."

Her name was Donna Cole. One day in the fifth grade, when Frances Hall was still known as Franny, it had been Donna who had teasingly mocked her with the name Fanni. Weeks later, it

was clear that the name had caught on, and Frances Hall made the decision to embrace the name, mainly to stifle the teasing. Thus Fanni Hall was born.

Donna Cole was a bit of an enigma. She ran with the cool crowd, the cheerleaders, the jocks and the beauty pageant dummies. Her hair was so blond that it was almost white, and it seemed most of her running buddies were equally blond and equally cranium deficient. She taunted and mocked her "lesser" schoolmates with abandon. Yet, unlike her empty-headed running buddies, she also let slip signs of kindheartedness. Donna had actually made it a point to apologize to Fanni for giving her the nickname – two years after the fact! Donna was more of a follower, but the people she followed were maggots.

Her apartment might be a dump, but Fanni drove a killer Porsche 944 Turbo, courtesy of the loss of most of her savings and some rather frightful debt. But the car was a monster, and could hit 150 mph with barely a tap on the gas pedal. She parked it in a spot with good clearance to her front, just in case she needed to make a quick getaway. Then she sat. And watched. And waited. Fanni could feel the excitement tingling across her skin. She had no idea at all what she was waiting for, but she had a feeling that confronting Donna Cole might lead her somewhere. Or maybe not. Either way Fanni intended to sit outside Donna's little rented bungalow until she showed herself. The plan, if it could be called that, was for a little face-to-face talk with Miss Cole, if the girl would ever show herself. She did, finally.

Miniskirt. Expensive blouse. Six inch heels. Blonde hair teased. Makeup applied liberally over what was a naturally beautiful face. Yep, Donna Cole.

It took Fanni about three seconds to get the Porsche pulled up so it blocked Donna's car. She reached over and opened the passenger door. "Get in."

Donna turned and walked away, then turned back and leaned in the Porsche. "God damned it, Franny! Stay away from me!"

"Get in. I just want to thank you for the phone call."

"I don't know what it is you're talking about. Now just leave me alone."

"Get in, or I'll follow you everywhere you go. I have all the time in the world. All your friends will think I'm stalking you."

Donna slumped into the passenger seat. "Drive! Go!"

Fanni pulled away and was soon easing the Porsche onto the highway.

"Fuck, Franny! I try to do you a favor and I'm gonna end up dead. Thanks a lot."

"Maybe I just want to know who attacked me, and why. Or am I being too nosey? Shit, Donna, tell me what's going on."

"I'm trying to help you, fool! The only way you're safe is far away from this fuckin' town. What more can I say."

There was a pause, then Fanni asked quietly, "How long have we known each other Donna?"

There was a soft sob. "Since the swing sets at Beeker Park." Donna snorted. "You pushed Paul Baker off the swing so I could have a turn."

There was quiet in the car for a minute. "Sorry, I don't remember that. I do remember when we all saw that dog hit by a car. You were the only kid that cried."

"Whatever," Donna muttered. "Times have changed."

Fanni turned back to the matter at hand. "There was a reason you called me, Donna. You wanted to help me."

"No! I wanted you to get out of town." She shook her head. "I should have known better, huh? You never ran from a fight."

"Donna! Am I really being so unrealistic wanting to know why someone attacked me in the street? Tell me something. Anything."

"I'll tell you, but you have to promise to just get the fuck out of town then. Go somewhere and lay low for a year or so. They'll forget about you and find ..."

"Who, Donna? Who will forget about me?"

"I'm going to say one word. Then you turn around and take me back to my car. No more questions. Agreed?"

Fanni shrugged. "Okay."

Donna barely whispered it. "Shipwell."

Alexander T. Shipwell, aka All Time Shithead, a more meaningful use of his initials. Although he posed as a big-hearted philanthropist, the locals had long ago pegged him for what he really was: a petty blowhard who bullied his way through life. His source of wealth was a

mystery, though local gossip had pretty much concluded that he was mob connected. Local gossip was wrong, and too kind by a wide margin. Shipwell was much lower than the nastiest mafia hitman.

He had a large house on the outskirts of town, his vast estate surrounded by an eight foot wall. In the midnight darkness Fanni had climbed that wall easily and was making her way along the hedges that bordered the driveway. Once before Fanni had been on the estate. It was eleven years earlier on Melody Shipwell's ninth birthday party. Fanni was only seven at the time, but it seemed the entire elementary school had been invited to the party, probably so Shipwell could show off how much better he was than the other parents. An actual Ferris Wheel had been constructed in the back yard, but it was the miniature horses that Fanni recalled most vividly.

The house was an odd thing, an old Mansion surrounded by recent additions on either side. The only lights on were in the L-shaped addition off to the right side. Fanni had little fear of being seen as she crossed the driveway and smashed through the hedges. Her uniform fit the night: dark jeans tucked into knee-high black boots, a black wool turtleneck, and black hair tucked into a black wool cap.

It had been two days since her conversation with Donna Cole. Leaving town had never crossed her mind – running was for cowards and criminals. And as little as she knew about the plot against her, she did know one thing: Shipwell. The old bastard was involved somehow, at least according to Donna. And she knew where he lived, so here she was, dressed like James Bond. James Bond without a plan, that is. But she had to start somewhere.

The first window was covered by a curtain, as was the next one. The third window was likewise curtained, but this one had a crack that easily revealed the room's occupants: Melody Shipwell herself, and a local miscreant-slash-beauty queen named Valerie Morgan. They sat in chairs sipping red wine, dressed like they had just returned from a club. More likely they were about to start their night—it was only midnight. Just a couple of spoiled beauties reveling in their perfection. It was impossible to hear a peep from inside the house.

Suddenly Fanni felt foolish. Here she was, spying on old schoolmates. Shit, what would she discover peeping through the window like a common pervert? Gawd, she needed a better plan than this.

Suddenly there was a commotion in the room. Both girls stood and looked bothered. Then a third figure crossed in front of Fanni's vision. Donna Cole! What the hell? While she was so busy warning Fanni off it seemed the scheming Miss Cole was at the same time consorting with the enemy. The room emptied out quickly leaving nothing more for Fanni to see. Suddenly the yard around her was flooded with light. Bye-bye time! Her shadows seemed a mile long as Fanni raced across the yard, leaping the hedges with ease. The fence seemed higher on this side, but the rope still dangled where she had left it, so she was up and over in a flash. Her car was just ahead of her, but the sight of the hulking figure walking towards it surprised Fanni. Ski-masked thug Number One? Maybe. He hadn't seen Fanni drop from the wall, but he turned at the sound of footsteps. His eyes widened and he shot his hands in front of his crotch. Yep, thug Number One.

Without breaking stride Fanni demonstrated her best crescent kick. The solid contact of boot leather boot on human skull matched with the accompanying crunching sound informed Fanni that she needn't bother to look back and see if the thug still posed a danger. The Porsche was out of the neighborhood ten seconds later.

How many surprises are left? The call from Cora McCauley was just as unexpected as Donna Cole's had been. Cora was one of the "good ones," that rare bird who made no enemies. She was All-County in two sports, she was bright, and she was wildly popular. Luckily for the likes of Donna Cole and Valerie Morgan and Melody Shipwell, Cora had never entered a beauty pageant. Without a fingertip of makeup she would have walked away with the crown. She was five feet, nine inches of brown-haired, apple-cheeked perfection.

So what could Cora know about these Shipwell assholes? Yes, she had been in the same grade as Melody Shipwell, but as far as Fanni knew the two had never been friends. Cora was from the side of the tracks that Melody didn't know existed. But Cora wanted to meet her, apparently with information about her recent troubles. Their phone conversation had been short and vague, but at least Cora had shown the courage to use her real name and voice, and she wanted to meet face-to-face. So screw you, Donna Cole.

Whatever Cora had been doing since graduation, she had surely crossed the tracks. The high rise building was of the luxury variety, doorman and all. Said doorman instructed her to go right up. Cora's door was ajar, and music came from somewhere inside. She knew Cora was expecting her, but it seemed a bit careless of her to just leave her door open. After knocking on the open door and calling out a couple "hellos," Fanni stepped in. She followed the sound of music, figuring Cora would be near its source. "Hey Cora," she called out.

She found Cora in the living room. She wore a nice green dress, calf-length and short-sleeved. She also wore what looked like a half mile of thin white rope. She lay face-down on a nice leather couch, hogtied to within an inch of her life. A cloth of some sort was squeezing around her mouth, trapping what appeared to be a softball in her mouth. Her feet were near her elbows, that's how hard her legs had been pulled back. Her fingers were red, as was her face. It looked like she had been struggling for a while, her light brown hair darkened by perspiration. Cora noticed Fanni, then her eyes went wide and she tried to say something, a comical attempt considering how full her mouth was. She bobbed her head toward the door that Fanni had just entered through. Uh oh.

"Well, well. What have we here?" The voice was female, and Fanni was pretty sure she knew the bimbo it belonged to. She turned slowly. Yep, Valerie Morgan. And guess who she was with? No ski masks this time. Unfortunately they had traded those for the automatic pistols that were now pointed at Fanni. Crapshit!

Fanni spoke to the largest of the two men, the one with the bruise that covered half of his swollen face. "What happened to you, big guy? Get in a fight with a little girl?"

"You little cunt! I oughta beat you into ..."

"Otto! Relax." The sound of Valerie's voice shut the thug up. It seemed the little redhead was in charge.

"Well, Fanni, what brings you here? Do tell."

Fanni looked at the guns, then at Valerie. "Just a social visit, Val. A couple of girls going out to dinner. Care to join us?"

Shaking her head, Valerie asked again, "I repeat, why are you here, Hall?"

Putting her hands on her hips in a display of confident defiance that wasn't really warranted, Fanni clamped her mouth shut and stared at Valerie. This was a new one for Fanni; her instinct was dive into these three assholes and see how far her martial arts training took her, but the guns made that seem a tad foolhardy, to say the least.

"Give me five minutes with her," Otto slobbered. "She'll make nice and tell you every little thing, for sure."

"Shut up," Val said. "Give me your gun." Otto did as he was told. "Tie her up. Tight! We have to go do that other thing. We'll come back for these two when we can have a nice leisurely talk with them."

Otto smiled. "Tight. For sure."

If Fanni thought she had appreciated the severity of Cora's hogtie, she was beginning to suspect that she had underestimated it. Fuck! That brute could tie some tight ropes. Since she had worn shorts, Fanni's legs were unprotected against the pinching tightness of the ropes. Rope circled her ankles tightly, and Otto had cinched the already way-too-tight cords by yanking rope between her ankles and pulling hard. Likewise her knees were bound, circled on either side of the joint by multiple lines of fire. If her legs seemed welded together, her arms might as well have been a single limb. Her wrists were clamped together, and a rope ran from there to her bound ankles. But the worst of all her bindings was the one that had all but wrenched her arms from their shoulder sockets. It was a result of Otto having bound her elbows together until those two unfortunates were jammed in a painful embrace of bone and skin. The angry tightness of those ropes might have something to do with that purple bruise on his fat mug.

Fanni had started the day with a pair of grey socks under her work boots. The boots had been thrown to one side. The socks had been rammed into her mouth in a feat of strength and jaw stretching that Fanni barely survived. A belt was wrapped twice around her head ensuring that the socks stayed put and prevented Fanni from uttering every curse she knew. With a show of confidence in their ropework that Fanni prayed was foolhardy, Valerie and her sidekicks had waltzed from the apartment with not so much as a glance backwards.

Face down on the living room carpet, Fanni reviewed her options. She might be able to squirm her way to the front door, but she wouldn't be able to raise up to the door knob. The cord to the phone had been cut, so no need to bother with that. A quick review of the room didn't reveal anything with a sharp edge. As unlikely as it seemed, fighting herself free of the ropes was her best hope.

A quick and painful attempt at some Houdini moves and Fanni was spent. No knots within reach, no slippage in the cords, even in her increasingly slick skin. Watching Fanni struggle, Cora came to life and gave it her own shot. She slid off the couch and down onto the floor. After ten minutes the room was still, sniffing noses and heaving chests about the only sounds. Using the rest break, Fanni pondered her next move. If she could loosen just one cord, the whole dynamic would change. A free leg would get her to the door. A free hand would pull her gag out, and lord if she wouldn't scream until the entire building was at the door. But she was too well bound, as was Cora.

Then it hit her! Still wet behind the ears in all things Houdini, she had missed the most obvious of options. She needed Cora's fingers to do what her own fingers couldn't do: reach the damned knots. Three quick rolls and Fanni leaned her body against Cora's. Cora seemed to know what was up, and wiggled into position so that her own hands were near Fanni's. Looking over her shoulder, Fanni realized that Cora's hands were probably useless, if the dark red color meant anything. Who knows how long the poor girl had been bound?

So it was up to Fanni to free Cora's hands. It wasn't easy. She found the knot without much trouble, but the thin rope made it near impossible to unsnag. Small rest breaks were necessary as the minutes passed, but Fanni was frantic to see this through. She had no idea when Valerie and friends would return, but it didn't seem likely that they would leave them alone here too long.

Finally! Success! A bit of the knot slipped and an inch of rope pulled free, then more. The pace quickened, and finally Cora's hands were free. Ten minutes later and her elbow ropes came free, along with the rope attached to Cora's ankles, and her feet flopped down to the ground, finally free of the hogtie. With a muffled groan Cora used a free hand to sit herself up. Her first act was to work at the cloth around her head, trying to pull it out of her mouth with still-numb fingers. Her own mouth was still useless, or Fanni would have politely screamed at her to ignore the gag and work on getting both of them free of the fucking ropes!

The cloth finally was worked below her chin and Cora plucked at whatever was in her mouth. Turns out it wasn't a softball, just a seemingly endless collection of women's handkerchiefs. They kept spilling out, like some ridiculous clown trick.

Cora panted a few seconds, then began to work on her ankle ropes. Using her limited vocal power, Fanni got her attention. "Oh, Sorry Franny," Cora said. "I'll get your gag off." What Fanni really wanted was for her to untie her arms so they could work in tandem on freeing themselves. But Cora had pushed Fanni's head forward and was working on the belt buckle.

The picture in the living room was a wretched one, two thoroughly disheveled girls slowly working their way free of their bindings. Sweat-streaked faces were topped by tousled mops of hair. The red streak across Fanni's face was evidence of the belt's former presence. The two socks lay across the room where Cora had thrown them after pulling them from Fanni's mouth. Cora seemed to have slowed down, which frustrated the still thoroughly bound Fanni.

"Cora, work on my hands first, then we can both free ourselves."

"Okay, okay. I don't know how well my fingers work, though. But I'll try."

While she clumsily plucked at Fanni's over-tight wrist ropes, Cora felt the need to talk. "I feel foolish, Franny. I wanted to meet you to warn you that someone was out to kidnap you. Then you walk into a trap right in my apartment. What a fool I am."

"No," Fanni replied. "I don't think they were expecting me. They just caught a lucky break. But tell me, what made you call me?"

There was a short pause, as Cora continued to work at a knot. "Jeez, I can't get my fingers to work!"

"Keep trying, Cora." Fanni returned to the subject at hand. "Did you know that someone already tried to kidnap me? A week ago."

"Oh my god, no," Cora replied. "I was warned that you and I were on a list of girls who were going to be grabbed ..."

"Who warned you, Cora?"

"I probably shouldn't say," she replied quietly.

Fanni was getting impatient at Cora's lack of success in freeing her hands, but there was little she could do about it. She was also more than a little curious about what Cora knew. "Do you know who is behind all of this?"

Cora snickered. "Valerie Morgan. Who'd have thought, huh? She's a bitch but I never figured her for something like this."

"Valerie Morgan can't tie a shoelace without someone's help," Fanni said. "And Valerie Morgan is certainly not behind all of this. And I don't think you'll be shocked if I said that a certain All Time Shithead is behind it."

It took Cora a moment. "Shipwell! No way!"

"Come on, Cora, do you really think Val Morgan is the mastermind of anything?"

"I don't know, Franny. What makes you think it's Shipwell?"

"A little birdie told me. Probably the same birdie that chirped in your ear."

The knot finally came undone and Fanni let out a deep sigh of relief as her wrists separated. Her elbows were still attached, but at least there was some progress.

Fanni continued. "Who was it that warned you, Cora?"

"I ... I just don't think I should say. I made a promise not to ..."

"Oh shit Cora! We both know it was Donna Cole. And I think it's safe to say that she's a backstabbing, conniving little whore. She played us both, and here we are, tied like fucking salamis."

"Yep, that's Donna alright," Cora said. "You just can't trust her. When did she call you?"

"A couple days after those two beefheads tried to force me into a van. When did she call you?"

"About the same time. What did she say to you?"

"Get out of town, blah blah blah."

"What did she say about Shipwell?"

"Come on, Cora. Hurry up with those knots. We gotta get out of here."

Cora got to her knees and leaned over Fanni to get a better angle at her elbow bindings. "What did she say about the Shipwells," she repeated.

"Nothing. Just that they were involved. Mostly she wanted me to leave town." Fanni pondered. "It is strange that she wanted me to get out of town if she was setting me up to get kidnapped at the same."

"Donna's a strange one," Cora said. "You just can't figure her out. Did you tell the police or anyone about the Shipwells?"

"No. I wouldn't know what to tell them."

"Did you tell anyone? A friend or someone?"

cords that still bound her own legs. "Don't take it personally, Franny, this is just business and the Shipwells pay quite well." The last of the rope snapped free and Cora stood up. "They knew it was you snooping around their house the other night – you tripped a silent alarm, you know. Otto got a look at you before his skull exploded." Cora laughed. "Congratulations on that, by the way."

Cora stood next to Fanni, working her ruined pantyhose off. "Old man Shipwell was more than a little curious as to what led you there. He's a very careful old bat. Honestly, I would never have guessed it would be Donna. Oh man, her world is about to take a turn."

The green dress came off. Cora stood in bra and panties, stretching her arms above her head. "Jeez, what a day. That Otto ties pretty tight, huh?"

Dropping to her knees, the ever- conscientious Cora began rechecking all of Fanni's bindings. "We had to make it look realistic," she continued, "And Otto did a good job of it. I'm gonna have these nasty rope marks on me for a weeks, at least."

The lowest moment for Fanni had been listening to the phone call, Cora telling Valerie Morgan that Donna Cole needed "seeing to." What that "seeing to" might be was causing Fanni to blink back tears. How could she have been so easily manipulated? It was beyond a blunder, it was an egotistical bit of showing off. And it might cause Donna her life.

"Let's just get you a bit more secure, Franny." Secure meant dragging Fanni to the couch and leashing her to the leg of the couch via a rope around her throat. "Now be a good girl and stay there. Val and the boys will be back soon."

Cora had disappeared from sight and the sound of a shower running made sense. It wasn't even worth testing her bindings, Fanni knew she was thoroughly helpless.

When Cora returned she was dressed in designer jeans and a black silk blouse, expensive looking threads. It was becoming clearer to Fanni: Cora may have been from the other side of the tracks, but she didn't want to stay there forever. Good 'ol greenback dollars. Cora wouldn't be the first person changed by a large sum of money.

Footsteps from the other end of the apartment. Fanni's heart beat faster in fearful anticipation. Yep, the return of the three stooges, Val, Otto and nameless thug. But when Otto stepped out of the way a fourth figure was revealed – Melody Shipwell.

CHAPTER TWO

The guest room was barely furnished, just a bed and a side table. Cora had insisted that they strip the sheets and blankets off the bed before they tossed Fanni on it. In her warped view expensive linen held sway over a sweat-dampened Fanni Hall. Otto had the privilege of showing off his strength again, spreading Fanni's legs to the two bottom bed posts and securing them there with rope. With her arms still crushed together under her body, Fanni was more helpless than ever. Melody sat on the bed and crossed her long legs. "For a minute there we thought you were going to be trouble for us, Fanni. Kicking my boy's asses, snooping around my house, being a general trouble-making cunt. But Cora's plan seems to have gotten us back on track, huh? Plus, you were kind enough to let us know we have a turncoat in our midst, so thank you for that."

She snapped her fingers and Valerie handed her a comically large Bowie knife. Fanni had already concluded that she wasn't destined for a body bag – not yet, at least – so the knife only quickened her pulse a few beats. Not bothering with so much as an "excuse me," Melody began slitting Fanni's blouse upwards until she cut all the way through. The tip of the blade continued until it made contact with the soft underside of Fanni's chin. Melody stared hard into Fanni's eyes, daring her to stare back. Fanni passed on that no-win nonsense. A minute later and the blouse was completely removed.

"We are going to give you very specific instructions, Hall, and you need to follow them." The cold blade of the scissors scraped her thigh and Fanni's head shot up. Melody was slicing the leg of her shorts, then the waist section. A few more snips and the cut up shorts joined the ruined blouse on the floor. "You always act so tough, Fanni, but you're also a very sensible girl." Otto and the other goon had entered the room, as if they knew what was coming. A series of quick slices and Fanni's bra and panties were gone. Melody looked at Fanni's naked form for a minute, then peered up at Valerie. "Nice, huh?" Valerie shrugged. Otto worked hard to hold his saliva in. To describe Fanni Hall's body as "nice" was a vast understatement. Perfect round breasts, thin waist, long legs, firm ass, long raven tresses, flawless olive skin. And topped with a face to die for. Yeah, sure, she was "nice."

"As I was saying," Melody went on. "You need to do exactly what I tell you to do." She held up an object that brought a wide-eyed look of gloom from Fanni. It was pretty clear where it was intended to go, and the straps attached to it meant it wasn't going to slip out.

"This little thing," Melody said, "Has a bit of a sting to it."

Fanni grimaced at the dildo. It certainly wasn't a "little thing."

Without a word Melody handed the plug to Valerie, who spit all over the shiny thing. "Brace yourself, Hall. This cock is a bit bigger than you're used to, I think." Valerie sneered as she spoke. Helpless to defend against the latest indignity, Fanni lay back and let the redhead go about inserting the thing. It was no easy affair, but Valerie seemed to enjoy it. After the chrome disappeared inside Fanni, the straps were buckled tight around Fanni's waist, and a small padlock applied.

"This box," Melody tapped a wallet-sized box attached to the strap near Fanni's belly button. "Has a battery in it. And this remote ..." She waved a small control box near Fanni's face, "Allows us send a little tingle up into your coochie if we deem it necessary. Well, maybe more like a sizzle than a tingle. Should I demonstrate?"

"For sure," Otto said.

Melody and Val looked at the over-sized goon and said in unison "Shut up!"

Melody continued. "Unfortunately, if I give you a little zap now, it might take you a half hour to recuperate. So how about you just trust that me that you don't want me to push this little 'ol button."

She seemed to be waiting for an answer, so Fanni nodded.

"Excellent! Now Valerie is going to get you dressed and then off we go."

Getting dressed involved an intricate series of actions, all meant to make Fanni as pliable as a kitten. After much wrangling with Cora, she finally agreed to donate a yellow sun dress to the cause. Said dress fell to just below Fanni's knees, which ensured the thin wire binding her thighs would be unseen. Valerie demonstrated a cunning way to keep Fanni from using her arms and hands. Fanni's right hand was pulled across her chest to her left side, while her left hand went in the other direction, leaving her arms crossed under her breasts. The manner of keeping her arms that way was simple enough: A small hole had been cut into the dress on either side into which Fanni's thumbs had been thrust. A length of fishing line went from thumb to thumb across Fanni's back, and that was that. It was simple, very effective and, would bring no unwanted attention.

Valerie walked Fanni over to a couch and roughly sat her down. A pair of sneakers were laced on her feet, then Valerie went behind Fanni and pushed her head forward. "I'm going to take your gag off, bitch. But you need to understand that even though your mouth might be empty, you'll still be gagged." The duct tape came free and the sock and hankies began to spill out of Fanni's mouth. "You do understand, don't you? If you make one little chirp, that dildo up your cootie is going to light you up like the fourth of July. So keep your stupid mouth quiet!"

Melody joined the one way conversation. "You're going down the elevator and out into the street. We have a car parked straight ahead and Otto will help you get in. At this hour the street will probably be empty. But if you try to alert anyone you're putting their life in danger, not to mention setting a spark up your cunt that might very well kill you." Melody patted Fanni's head. "So be a good girl and keep quiet. This is no joke."

So it was. Down the elevator, Val on her right side, Melody her left. Right past the doorman, who politely held the door open and tipped his cap. Straight ahead to where Otto held the door of the sedan open, then gently helped settle Fanni into the front passenger seat. Val and Melody veered off and got in another car. Otto had barely gotten into the back seat when nameless thug

pulled the sedan out into the street. He drove half a block and pulled into an alley and put the car in park. Then the two beefy goons went about over-securing Fanni for the drive. The seat back was dropped leaving Fanni looking up at Otto, who was aiming something straight at her mouth. Knowing it was useless to resist, Fanni opened wide and let the egg-sized black object in. It felt like rubber. Not too bad. Until Otto pushed a small button on the thing and it seemed to explode into her cheeks and the back of her throat. Compressed air, Fanni guessed, and it had seemed to triple the size of her gag. No strap was needed to keep it in, it wasn't going to slip out.

Meanwhile the other thug was bending down and attaching a variety of pre-placed metal restraints. A thick single cuff was snapped tightly around her ankles. It had a short chain that was anchored somewhere under the seat, making it impossible for Fanni to kick out. Another large metal cuff went around her legs just below knee level, and it was also attached to the seat bottom. Otto hadn't been idle. A noose of thin twine went around Fanni's neck, then the long end was threaded between the posts of the headrest and used as a leash by Otto. One jerk on the leash and Fanni was under control.

Fanni reclined in total helplessness. Legs and arms totally useless, mouth bloated with rubber, leashed like a fucking pound mutt. And, for good measure, a metal dick raping her. And she had a nagging suspicion that things hadn't even begun for her, not really. Of course she was right.

The length of the drive had surprised Fanni. The Shipwell Estate was no more than a thirty minute drive, but hours had passed. From Fanni's position it was impossible to see anything but blackness and stars out the window. North? South? East? West? Who knows. She did learn one thing - thug number two had a name; Heck, which might have been his first name, or maybe his last.

At some point the car turned off the paved road and began a half hour trek across gravel and pot holes. The end of the journey was a foreboding mansion buried deep in the trees of who-knows-where. In the darkness Fanni only got a quick glimpse at the building, then she was forced into a door around the side of the house.

Once in the house her journey continued (fittingly) downhill. Six steps downwards, then a turn and another six steps. Somewhere underground, now. Fanni was hustled along, hampered greatly by the blistering wire tied above her knees. Her arms still crossed across her front, looking like a petulant child, Fanni was pushed closer and closer to whatever these cretins had planned for her. Those plans were still a mystery to our young protagonist, though she was clear enough of mind to realize it wasn't likely some elaborate surprise party for her.

Concrete walls, concrete floor, all very institutional. It was clear from the double-latched (and double padlocked) doors they passed that they were cells of some ilk. The one that Fanni was shoved into had all the bleak comforts of your finest gulag. It was barely long enough to lie

down on the straw bed provided, not much wider than the metal door. No windows. A plastic bucket for a toilet.

An hour later Fanni would be longing for those luxurious comforts. But she would not be partaking of them this night, the result of pig-headed foolishness on her part. Free of her bindings after excruciating hours, free of her chrome lover, the bad-tempered child lashed out. There was no chance of escape, not at all. But after so many hours of frustrating bondage, Fanni was in a fighting mood. Val was left winded on the floor outside the cell, a swift kick to the solar plexus the cause. Otto took a glancing blow to his already swollen face before he ducked away. Heck ran at her but stopped and turned at the sight of bare foot shooting towards his nuts.

"Enough!" The sound of Melody's voice didn't end the fracas, but the sight of her pistol did. I gotta get me one of those, Fanni thought. She knew it was expected of her, so she raised her hands into the air. Another good fight, another lost battle.

The message was clear: you fight us and you pay. Fanni understood the message, and she also understood that you only pay if you lose the fight. You need a win, Hall, or that healthy ego of yours is gonna shrivel up.

Sadly, she was now finding out what being a loser cost one in this house of. A good night's sleep, for sure. Having even an iota of comfort, that also. Her dignity was also on the verge of being completely washed away.

The surprise of the day was what an expert Valerie was proving to be. The lazy, mindless sack of hair and bones was an absolute savant when in possession of a couple hundred yards of made-in-the-USA grade-A Red Hawk sisal rope. The wire-thin nastiness now festooned Fanni in ways its manufacturer never imagined it would be used. The basis of her current ordeal was the dire reality of hanging by her thumbs, a wickedly harrowing way to spend an entire night. Fanni was balanced on her knees, her bare legs bound together by the ultra-thin brown cord. A couple dozen windings of the well-knotted cord also attached her ankles to her upper thighs making it impossible for Fanni to unfold her legs. Valerie had also fed her a rather unsavory gag – her own long, black hair. Two ponytails had been formed, then pulled around front and knotted into Fanni's mouth, the barrel of a pistol on her forehead the entire process to discourage any obstinacy on Fanni's part. Windings of cord reinforced the "all-natural" gag to ensure it would remain intact.

It was possible, in a fashion, for Fanni to mitigate the joint-stretching agony that traveled from her thumbs to her brains. It involved straightening her spine and tightening her ass muscles, while stretching her arms to lengths they really couldn't reach. It was a simple set of movements, not all that athletic even. But to hold it for any length of time – say thirty seconds – was intolerable to all but a superhuman, which Fanni was discovering by the minute she was not.

Removing the weight from her thumbs also had an opposite (though not equal) reaction. Those sweethearts Otto and Heck had contributed their own fiendish embellishments to Fanni's little pickle. While Valerie wove her magic on Fanni, the two hoodlums had slipped away to get a few cold brewskis. Bottles, unfortunately, rather than cans. Melody had appropriated the bottle tops, which now resided on the floor beneath Fanni, one cap to a knee. Jagged end up, if you even need to enquire.

It was a tribute to Valerie's skills that Fanni spent less than five minutes testing the tight and massive rope work. A silly waste of time and energy, she reluctantly concluded. Probably the cords tied to her thumbs would have been sufficient to anchor Fanni's arms, but her wrists and elbows were more than well-tied. Her elbows met above her, forcing Fanni's head forward and downwards. In the dim light of the cell Fanni was able to watch her sweat drip to the floor in an unending trickle.

So many parts of her body ached, and the fucking hair in her mouth was a constant, choking nuisance. Maybe not the most effective gag, but a damned terrible one! As the hours passed the two little devils under her knees seemed to be eating their way right through flesh and bone.

So was this what Melody Shipwell was all about? Kidnapping, torture? But to what ends? If a Shipwell was involved, money was the endgame. That seemed certain. But Fanni's family was scattered to the winds, and was in no shape to pay a penny of ransom, anyway. Another thought slithered into Fanni's noggin, and it came with a shiver. If it wasn't ransom, how else could Shipwell make money off of Fanni Hall?

Off of a young, gorgeous, well-endowed girl?

Uh oh.

Undoubtedly the worst night of her life. She would experience worse in the future, but even if she had the gift of premonition, no solace would be had by that sad awareness. Finally sawed free of her bindings, Fanni only hoped for a chance to crawl into that pile of straw that littered one side of her cell. Melody had other plans, though, and Melody was bully-in-chief, Fanni's brand new life coach. She gave instructions to Val and the two slobbering mutts who led Fanni from the cell and off to whatever grim events awaited her. The first of these events was a shower, if you consider a cold hosing down a shower. Next up was the choice of her attire. The centerpiece was the black leather corset, laced to a tightness that left Fanni gasping. The cups of the thing ended about where they should have started, leaving Fanni's tits fully exposed, though nicely supported. Black leather panties, a garter belt and stockings adorned her lower half, and she stood atop unbearably high black patent heels. But that was only the beginning of her outfit. A wide steel collar circled her throat, while shackles trapped her wrists and ankles in their tight grips. A long steel bar ran down her back connecting all the shackles from neck to wrists to ankles. Fanni had a vague concept of what a ball gag was, but now she knew what one tasted like. It felt enormous in her mouth, like it would crack her jaws at any sudden movement. A host

of straps circled her head to ensure both that the ball would remain in place and that Fanni would bite down on it forcefully.

Melody appeared again and Fanni was led down the long corridor, followed by the usual coterie of fiends. Said fiends had much amusement watching Fanni navigate the twin perils of six-inch heels and a ten-inch hobble chain between her feet, both new experiences for our heroine.

Otto and Heck lifted Fanni up the steps and a minute later the small procession was traversing the lawn and heading for the nearby trees. Fanni attempted to slow down to compensate for the rougher terrain, but Melody gave her a kick and sent her face first to the ground, a fall Fanni alleviated at the last second by twisting her shoulder to take some of the brunt of the landing. "I'll kick your lazy ass all the way if you slow down, Hall." Melody threatened. Otto lifted Fanni back up. "Well, go!" Melody shouted. "Lazy cow," she added under her breath. The dirt path that led into the trees was almost as treacherous as the grass, but Fanni was getting the knack of the hobbles, if not the towering heels.

Valerie had mozied on ahead and was waiting for them in a small clearing. She stood before a small pool of brownish water. And it was a sight that left a panting Fanni Hall near panic. A quite large contraption had been built in the little pond, in appearance like a small Ferris Wheel. But it was no pleasure ride, not for the girl stretched to the frame of the wheel. The wheel turned freely, but only a portion of the wheel was under water at any given time. At the moment the position of the wheel left the girl's feet high up into the air and her hands under water. Oh yeah, plus her head was submerged. Fanni looked to her left at Melody Shipwell, who wore a satisfied grin. To her right, Otto was sucking back saliva while Heck cracked his knuckles. Straight ahead, Valerie was stripping leaves from a thin branch she had picked up. What was wrong with these monsters? Let her up! For god's sake, just let her breathe!

Melody saw the look on Fanni's face and misinterpreted it. "Oh, don't worry. You won't end up like that – unless you misbehave. This wheel is for punishment."

"I got a feeling that Fanni's gonna spend some time spinning around up there," Val broke in. "She's not the obedient type, is she? Hopefully the mosquitos will be biting that day."

"Or the snapping turtles," Otto laughed. "For sure." Val and Melody both fixed him with a stare. Heck just picked his fat nose.

Valerie reached over the water and began to turn the wheel. The sight that Fanni had feared slowly rose into her vision. Donna Cole! The poor girl snorted great streams of water and snot as she was maneuvered into an upright position. Her blond hair looked brown, and was matted to her face in long strands.

"How you doing, Donna?" Val asked. "Enjoying the spa?" A ball of mind-boggling size was strapped into Donna's mouth, so the question went unanswered.

Melody stepped closer to the tepid pond, careful to keep her expensive boots dry. "The price of being a snitch, Donna. You, better than anyone, had to know what to expect. Yet you had to go and shoot off your big mouth." Melody reached back and grabbed Fanni by her arm and led her closer. "But Fanni was nice enough to let us know we had a blabbermouth in our midst, so here you find yourself. Spread like a butterfly, waiting for another turn of the wheel."

If ever anyone's eyes were literally pleading, those were Donna's at this moment. Fanni had to look away, humiliated by her role in this whole foul event.

"Have a nice dip," Melody stated sweetly. It was signal to Val, who dutifully turned the wheel and sent Donna's head downward into the soup, the girl wildly swinging her head the whole while. It amazed Fanni at how little Donna's stretched-taut body moved despite her struggles. She was absolutely cemented to the wheel it seemed.

They let Donna simmer there for a while, then let the other shoe drop. The shoe in this case was the birch switch that Valerie had stripped bare, and she "dropped" it with full force on the inside of Donna's naked thigh. Then again, and again. Not a sound escaped the unlucky victim, gagged as she was by a ball and fourteen inches of brackish water. Fear and anger, hatred and dread all boiled together in Fanni's brain. Valerie continued her onslaught.

"Enough," Melody finally commanded. "Don't want to ruin the merchandise completely, do we?"

Valerie shrugged, but Donna was slowly returned to an upright position.

Fanni looked sideways at Melody Shipwell. Merchandise?

"That's right, Fanni," Melody smiled. "You're starting to figure out your future, aren't you? But let's not get too far ahead of ourselves for now. We have other plans for you right now, but sooner or later you'll bring us a nice bundle of cash."

"I wouldn't pay \$100 for that ugly crossbreed," Valerie said. She was poking Donna's nipples with the tip of her branch.

"Meet us back at the house, Val," Melody said. "I see you wanna have some more fun with Goldilocks there. Just don't mark her up too much."

"Time to get this one fed and watered," Melody continued. She turned Fanni around and began to lead her back the way they came, followed by Otto and Heck. "Donna's blond and seventeen years old. She'll sell for a tidy little sum." Melody laughed. "Actually, she's like twenty-two, at least. Those fucking Asians want them young, but they can't really tell the difference. Man, this is quite a gig, huh?"

"I'll buy Hall if she only costs a hundred bucks," Otto interrupted. "For sure."

Melody grimaced. "I think Val was being sarcastic when she said \$100, Otto." Then added, with a grin, "For sure." Fuckin' idiots she was stuck with for hired help.

CHAPTER THREE

They clinked and tapped their way down the hall, the clinks coming from the various metal cuffs and chains that bound Fanni, the taps emanating from Melody's three inch heels and Fanni's more nose-bleeding five-inchers. Before having a collar buckled around her neck, Fanni had glanced down at herself and taken in the transformation. The jeans and tee shirts and boots that had made up the uniform of her rebellious teen years were gone, and she had a feeling they were gone for good. How could she ever go back to that frumpy nonsense, now that she has sampled the alternative? Not that she would want to live in a blood-red corset and old-fashioned stockings, or make it a habit to traipse around in black patent heels that were closer to stilts than shoes, but this ridiculous attire was ... well ... awesome! She was reminded of a picture that she had seen in one of her Uncle Jeb's magazines (that he kept hidden in a shoebox under his bed). But at the moment, Fanni resented the clothing with all her black-clouded determination. She didn't wear her new uniform willingly, and she was perfectly aware that it was meant to demean her, to reinforce the "indentured" nature of her current state.

She had no idea where Melody was leading her, and she surely hadn't volunteered to go wherever this journey led. But foot followed foot (albeit at a close distance since her ankles were hobbled by an eight-inch chain) and if Fanni slowed down, a violent jerk on the leash attached to her collar reminded her that Melody was in a hurry. There was no fight in Fanni at the moment, all martial options eliminated by the facts of her bondage. Ankles cuffed and hobbled, wrists double-cuffed, thumbs cuffed, elbows cuffed – all very thorough precautions on her captor's part. A weighty pole ran down her back and was a capable anchoring point for all the cuffs, from collar all the way down to ankle hobbles. It all seemed like silly excess to Fanni, but then again, it did what it was intended to, plus some.

So the master led the puppy along, the pup forbidden bark or bite, her jaws tightly gripping the too-big ball in her too-small mouth. The muzzle was complete with straps that weren't in the least necessary to keep the ball in, but they had been buckled to their extremes just for the fun of it.

The subterranean prison seemed infinite, the dimly-lit hallways a maze that even Melody had trouble navigating. A few times they turned around and tried a different route, but soon enough they reached their destination. The door to the room was steel, it was heavy, and it was opened with a key that Melody chose from a ring. Fanni went through the door with all the eager hope of a naughty child called to the principal's office, but a sharp tug on the leash pulled her all the way in.

Melody spread her arms towards the large space within. "What do you think, Fanni? Like it?"

Sure Fanni liked it, as much as anyone led in chains into a torture chamber would like it. She looked around at the array of evil-looking devices without lingering on any of them long enough to figure out the odious particulars.

Melody pulled Fanni farther into the room. "This is just a level one punishment cell, really not much more than a rumpus room." The leash shortened and Fanni bent forward to look straight into Melody's blue eyes. "Things will become clear soon enough, Hall. Let's just say that you're going to have a brief career as a 'crash test dummy.'"

It wasn't what she had spent her first eighteen years preparing for and under better circumstances Fanni would have declined the "offer." But Melody was determined to have her way, and thirty minutes later Fanni Hall was unhappily (and rather frightfully) finding out what Melody had meant.

The chains were gone now, replaced by a heavy leather straightjacket of unusual design. Rather than the standard white jacket, this was a gleaming black design. And instead of having her arms crossed in front, her elbows had been pulled behind her back and immobilized by a sturdy strap that held her elbows close together. Then her hands had been drawn around to her front and kept there by another strong strap that ran across her midriff connecting the sleeves of the jacket. Once the straightjacket was solidly in place, it wouldn't slip even fractionally from its tight embrace. It was zippered up the back and locked in place. A strap – a very disturbing strap – ran from the bottom front of the jacket to the back, via a short detour through Fanni's legs. Like the rest of her jacket, the infernal thing had been pulled to a tightness that seemed wildly excessive to its wearer.

As bindings went, this was both effective and uncomfortable, two traits that Fanni would find to be routine in Casa Shipwell. It was also rather minimalist; her ankles were strapped together, but that was it for her bindings. And her gag was tiny compared to some of the bowling balls that Melody had reserved for her.

"I have all the confidence in the world, Fanni. One of the reasons we chose you was because of how athletic you are." Melody was on her knees, positioning the last of the four boards that surrounded Fanni, each board six-foot square. "But I wouldn't daydream up there if I were you. Just concentrate and you'll be fine."

With her chin high in the air, Fanni was barely able to see her self-satisfied nemesis. She could see the chain that dropped from the ceiling and held the dense rubber ball, the ball that her mouth was trying to swallow.

"Okey dokey, all set," Melody declared as she stood. "If you're wondering, yes, they are quite sharp. Soooo ... keep that in mind if you begin to tire." She was referring to the inch-long spikes that littered the surface of the boards that lay on the floor around Fanni.

Tightening her grip on the ball, Fanni pondered this fiendish predicament. The consequences of falling on those spikes was gruesome at the very least, deadly at the worst. Either way it

would be a life changing experience in the nastiest sense. So she resolved NOT to let that happen. Unfortunately, the teetering little perch her toes were balanced atop had a say in her future health, and it was no ally in this struggle. In appearance it resembled a child's top, the kind you tried to keep spinning the longest. Fanni stood on the wider end, a mere six inches of slightly rounded surface. Below that the thing tapered to two inches. It wasn't in danger of toppling completely, since it was attached to a firm base that only allowed for it to shake around a bit in any direction. But considering the danger involved, it was precarious in extremis.

Melody jingled her key ring, "I better go check on poor Donna. Valerie does get carried away sometimes." She took a long last look at Fanni. "Focus, Miss Hall, focus. This is a test of strength and concentration." She gave Fanni a wink. "See you later," she said just before slamming the heavy cell door shut.

"How much later?" Fanni wondered.

The struggle was more mental than physical. Certainly the physical strain was awful, but to fixate her mind on the singular (and normally simple) task of staying upright was overwhelming. If she rose up on her toes to relieve the ache in her jaws, her legs quivered with the small shift in the dastardly little roost below her. If she reversed the process and tried to lower her heels, her pearly whites had to dig deeper into the ball to keep it snug in her grasp. Was Melody Shipwell some sort of evil genius, or were the devious little nuances of this predicament just clumsy luck? Either way, Fanni feared for what the future held. Sweat stung her eyes and strands of wet hair were glued to her face and neck, small nuisances that could normally be swiped away with a flick of the hand or a shake of the head. But not today.

The room was decorated with all the twisted accoutrements of torture that any spoiled mobster's daughter could dream of. It was a mystery to Fanni exactly how most of them operated, which somehow only made them more fearsome. But no need to dwell on them, more dire and more immediate concerns needed to be given complete attention.

The return of Melody Shitwell had become the most anticipated thing in Fanni's entire young life. Her best guess was that she had wobbled around for more than an hour and less than five. Damned impossible to tell in her miserable state. And when Melody and her little coterie of asswipes finally returned, none of them seemed in a hurry to put an end to her nightmare. Instead they circled around, like fuckin' city kids at a country zoo. Perched on her tiny island, surrounded on all sides by an ocean of sharp spikes, Fanni made a pathetic sight, which seemed to please the audience.

"Ah, good evening, Fans," Melody cooed. Evening? Fanni was gobsmacked. Had she really been teetering all day?

Valerie seemed less than impressed by Fanni's feat of survival. "Shit, that's not even a challenge, just standing there like that."

"Do you want to try it," Melody asked the redhead. "I can have Otto set you up nice and snug and see if you change your mind."

Valerie changed the subject. "Does she know why she's here yet?"

"I've hinted at it, but all in good time. She has plenty to occupy her little brain for now. Then again, maybe she already has it all figured out. Fanni can be a clever one, as I recall."

Good lord, just tell me, Fanni wanted to holler. Do you think I've guessed what madness you're about?

The spiked boards were finally removed and Otto and Heck lifted Fanni off of her perch. There was a brief comedy of Fanni not being able to ungrasp her uncooperative jaws from the ball, which four of the five people in the room found hilarious. But the farce ended soon enough, and Fanni was led off to her cell.

After another meal of inedible swill Fanni was led off to bed. Pajamas consisted of a sleek black leather tube that she was crushed into. The body-fitting "dress" had sleeves for her arms, but the sleeves trapped Fanni's arms on the inside of the tube, snug against her sides. The leather enveloped Fanni from knees to neck, a strap at her knees preventing any slippage. It was laced up her back, laced with all the grunting fury that Otto could manage. Too exhausted to test the sausage wrapper, Fanni poked a foot around in the dark cell until she found her "bed" and carefully dropped into the straw. Sleep came in an instant.

The slop that passed for breakfast left her near retching. The shower had subtracted the last of her dignity as Valerie and Otto manhandled her naked self into some semblance of clean. Wet and naked, her relationship with Otto had somehow remained platonic, though it looked like some creature was trying to bust through polyester due south of his belt buckle.

Ordered to transfer Fanni to a punishment cell, Otto eagerly complied. Cuffed and hobbled, Fanni put up no fight. But with her mouth free to talk for the first time in a while, she wasn't going to let that opportunity slip by.

"You're hurting my arm," Fanni said with a wince.

Otto loosened his grip on her arm a bit. "Shit, I ain't hardly holding it at all."

"Well, you must be stronger than you think. Do you work out a lot?" Careful Hall, not too obvious

Otto shrugged. "Some. I'm more naturally strong, I guess."

"How long you been working for Melody?"

"None of your business," he replied. "And I don't work for her, I work for her old man. I mostly babysit her, make sure she don't get herself killed and stuff."

Fanni stumbled in her hobbles, a premeditated girly act. Otto snatched her arm and kept her aloft. "Thanks," Fanni said softly.

"Just take small steps," Otto said.

Fanni giggled. "Excuse me for not knowing how to walk when chained up." She was flirting now, not her favorite pastime. Especially with an overgrown brute like Otto. But desperate circumstances called for desperate measures. She'd flirt with old Beelzebub himself for a chance to fly this coop.

"Better get used to it then," Otto said, his tone softened just an iota. "That girl Val don't like ..."

"Otto! Shut the fuck up!" Speaking of Valerie, that particular redheaded Sataness was coming up quickly from behind. "Don't let this bitch say a word to you," she added. "And you keep your stupid mouth shut, too."

Fanni gave Otto a discreet wink, two pals with a common enemy. "Beat it Otto," that enemy added.

As Otto wordlessly turned and trudged off, Valerie snagged a clump of black hair and turned Fanni to face her. "No talking to the hired help, Hall! Got it?"

With a frown, Fanni gave her smart-ass reply. "So I can't talk to you, Val? Unless your last name is Shitwell, you're hired help. Christ, you and Otto oughta form a union."

Valerie's reply was silent and rough. She half-dragged Fanni into a cell by her hair, with our hero making a crash landing on the filthy floor.

"I'm going to find the biggest fucking gag in the building, and then hammer it into your barker." Sweet girl, that Valerie Morgan.

There was no doubt that she would be silenced in the next few minutes, so Fanni made her play. "Tick tock," was all she said, hoping it sounded mysterious enough. Valerie either didn't

hear it, or ignored the words. She was busy gathering up various coils of rope. "Tick tock," Fanni repeated.

"I swear to God, I'm going to skin you, Hall," Valerie hissed. "Just keep your mouth closed."

Oh well, Fanni sighed. Looks like she's not biting.

"What the hell are you blabbing about, anyway?"

That's better. "You mean 'tick tock'?" What do you think I mean? You know old man Shipwell's reputation. He sure as shit isn't gonna leave a redheaded loose end like you around. The first time you get Melody even slightly agitated, off she'll go, whining to daddy about you. If you're lucky he'll ship you off in a cargo container to Singapore. More likely it'll be cement slippers in some deep lake."

Valerie moved quickly, dropping on top of Fanni, straddling her with her knees crushing Fanni's shoulders. "Keep talking and it'll be a shallow grave for you, Hall. And soon." She dangled the gag in front of Fanni's face. It looked to be about the size of cantaloupe. "Open wide for a nice yummy, asshole."

There were certain disadvantages when trying to drive a wedge between confederates. A big one was that you tended to piss them off in ways that came back to bite you in the ass. At the moment there was no derriere being masticated, although Fanni's bottom was certainly available to any fangs that might want a taste. But Valerie had certainly been pissed off. Besides the basketball-sized gag (yes, it's getting larger with each telling!), Valerie had strung her up in an agonizing position. No art was involved, just unadulterated anger. Using wire-thin cord, Valerie had tied Fanni's arms behind her from wrists to shoulders. A rope was dropped from a ceiling, tied into Fanni's wrists bindings, then it was pulled upwards, her hands slowly gravitating towards their destiny far above her head. The uncomfortable turned painful, the aching turned to agonizing. Still Valerie turned the handle, making her arm's painful journey a slow one. Fanni's head was soon hanging down at waist level, her toes were barely scraping the rough cell floor, and her shoulders were debating whether they should slip their sockets. Mystifyingly, drool was escaping from around the watermelon in her mouth, hanging like icicles under her chin. All-in-all, not Fanni's favorite moment in life. With absolutely no concern for Fanni's state of near-panic, Valerie proceeded to make things worse. A cuff was attached to each ankle, then her legs spread to accommodate a wide spreader bar that clipped to each cuff. Fanni tried to warn Valerie that she was killing her, but the sound came out like a cross between a grunt and a hiccup. Pathetic.

Valerie took a quick trip around Fanni, checking her handiwork from all perspectives. "How's that, Hall? Any complaints?"

Many complaints, but none slipped out of her over-gagged mouth. Waves of pain washed over Fanni. The battle of gravity versus flesh, bones, muscle and ligaments, had turned into a brutal rout. All Fanni had left was to separate her brain from her retreating body parts, to try to

will herself into some safe asylum of survival. Breathing deeply into her nose, Fanni relaxed as many muscles as she still had at her command. She inhaled slowly and evenly, trying to lower her heart rate. The sense of panic was melting away, though the pain largely stayed put.

But this was a dungeon, after all, and Fanni Hall was a prisoner, so any control she had over her fate was imaginary. In this case, almost comically so. The first lash landed like a line of electric fire. Caught by surprise, Fanni's heart made a beeline for her mouth, but that orifice was well-occupied. The swishing noise that preceded the second lash left Fanni no doubt as to what was happening – she was getting her ass whipped!

Some things can come back to bite you in the ass.

"How's she holding up?" Melody asked.

Hanging limply and semi-comatose, Fanni was ignorant of a second person having entered the cell.

"She's okay," Valerie replied flatly. Fanni would have disagreed with what "okay" was. Valerie had whipped her on and off for at least a half hour. Ass, thighs, calves. Some blows had been biting and harsh, others felt heavier and deeper, while some others seemed to have a delayed reaction. Or maybe her mind was playing tricks with her. It was all a giant blur of sweat and pain.

Like a perverse scientist, Melody inspected Fanni's dripping body, running soft fingers over lash markings. She questioned Valerie, who explained which whip made which marks. Even in her muddled state, Fanni understood they were judging the relative severity of the various whips and crops, which ones left trivial markings and which raised welts. What a proud moment for Fanni, a fine feather in her cap - donating her own flesh to Melody Shithead's rather dubious study of the effectiveness of whips and canes and other sundry floggers! White rage flashed for the briefest moment, immediately drowned out by a black cloud of despair. What possible good would anger do? No, now was a time for careful planning, for clear-mindedness, for waiting for her captors to slip up, to be ready to pounce at that first opportunity and fly this loony bin. But that was the light at the end of a tunnel that Fanni hadn't yet approached. For the time being, simple survival would have to suffice.

While making no claims to five star status, Casa Shipwell was strictly economy class all the way for its guests. Fanni lay on the straw that passed as her mattress, naked but for what passed as jewelry in this hell hole: Wrist cuffs, ankle cuffs, a neck collar, all of them joined by a heavy iron bar that passed down her back. The bar ran from collar to ankle cuffs and was too short for

Fanni to straighten up completely. It had the effect of a loose hogtie, perfectly effective for keeping her from causing any mischief, though what hijinks might be perpetrated in a furniture-less cell was a mystery. Despite the comic nature of being chained inside an inescapable cell, Fanni chose to save her laughter. This was the closest to a "comfortable" respite she had experienced in two days, and she was determined to get as much shut-eye as circumstances would allow. The cell was stocked with exactly one blanket, but said source of warmth was currently playing hard-to-get in the pitch-black cell, and Fanni was more or less (definitely more) "movement-challenged" by about twenty pounds of forged steel restraints. And her bedroom seemed to lack central heating. The straw shifted below her as she shuffled around on her side, using her hands to flail around for the missing blanket. Finally located and snugly in hand, it took another indeterminately long time to make it useful. Tired of the ridiculous chore, and loathe to lose another millisecond of precious sleep time, Fanni finally accepted semi-defeat and lay on her side, the blanket leaving her lower half uncovered. But she did have the absurd success of somehow working it completely over her head. Fuck it, it would have to do.

The break of a new day announced itself with a blast of light and the soothing snarl of Valerie Morgan. "Wake up, dipshit. Time to earn your pay."

Fanni worked her aching joints and struggled to sit up, shaking the useless blanket off. Straw stuck in her hair, and she spit a few pieces from her mouth. She squinted up at Valerie who stood framed in the doorway, hands on hips, her red hair pulled back in a severe ponytail. Black boots over black jeans, topped with a black leather jacket. If the effect was meant to intimidate, the result was a half grin from Fanni. "Fucking Johnny Cash," she muttered.

"What's that?" Valerie spat.

Fanni sighed in response, chomping at the bit to let Valerie Morgan get an earful of word shit, but her still-sore ass sent a quick message to her brain to tell her mouth to stay shut.

"Remind me to gag you tonight, Hall. You have a smart mouth and nobody here wants to hear your shit. Got it?"

Fanni peered down at the ground.

"Fucking A, Hall! I asked you a question. Do you fucking understand?"

"Yeah, I hear you." Fanni looked up and locked eyes. Valerie felt this an act of defiance.

"Don't eyeball me, Hall," she said, stepping into the room and grabbing Fanni's hair. "You need to learn your place here, and your place doesn't involve giving anyone any shit. Got it?"

Fanni didn't answer. She was staring at the wall beyond Valerie. A vicious slap to her face brought her out of her brief meditation on the cell wall.

"Answer me, Hall!"

Fanni hadn't really heard the question, so gave a simple, "Yes." She looked back up, using a flip of her hair to disguise her interest in the wall. It wasn't actually the wall that fascinated her.

It was the nail that was hammered into it.

Coffee had never smelled so good. Fanni lay on the cold tiles of the kitchen floor and breathed it in again, then looked down at the bowl of water below her chin. Next to that bowl was a plate with some mashed bananas and burnt toast pieces, mashed together for easier consumption. The image of Valerie mashing them with the toe of her boot was still fresh in Fanni's mind, so that made it a little less appetizing. But hunger was hunger and thirst was thirst, so Fanni ignored the red hairs floating in the water dish and slurped away. Sitting on chairs that seemed high above her, Melody and Valerie silently sipped coffee and picked at muffins. Whatever plans they had for Fanni must have already been worked out, since neither spoke or even bothered to acknowledge that a chained girl now had her face in a plate of mush, greedily slurping in chunks of fruit and bread. And Fanni was happy to be ignored, though she understood that her neglect was temporary. A fleeting curiosity about the fate of Donna Cole crossed her mind, but was replaced by the unexpected concentration necessary for dining like a dog. But she would see Donna soon enough.

She was in a cell nearby the one that Fanni had spent the morning in. This particular chamber was much smaller, and had a dark and ominous aura, all spider webs and dank stone walls. The centerpiece of the cell was the structure that held the unfortunate Donna Cole, a brawny wood pillory. But it was more than your run-of-the-mill pillory. Donna's wrists and head were clamped in the openings of the double stocks, but her feet were a good two feet above solid ground. Without some sort of support the unlucky occupant of this pillory would quickly strangle, if she didn't have her neck snap first. Fortunately for Donna, she had such a support. Unfortunately – very unfortunately – that perch was a simple triangle of wood that ran between her legs, held solidly upright by a steel stanchion at either end. It was simply the most painful seat you could furnish a girl, the sharp angle of the wood making itself at home where it was most assuredly unwelcome.

Donna's perfectly tanned legs dangled straight down, her ankles captured in a heavy-looking wooden stock that was unattached to anything, save for a chain that dropped loosely to the floor where it was secured. The stock kept her legs separated twelve inches and prevented her closing

her thighs around the sharp perch, an act that may or may not have made things fractionally less agonizing. Fanni hoped to never find out.

Valerie walked to a spot next to the suffering girl. "Hey baby, how's it hanging?" She ran an index finger down Donna's side, then licked her finger. "You taste like popcorn, darlin' – very salty popcorn."

A low moan escaped through the enormous red ball that was strapped into Donna's mouth. Rivers of perspiration fell from her head leaving a small puddle on the floor below. Her hands were clutched into tight fists, and Fanni could see that Donna was attempting to lift some of her weight off the infernal saddle, using her arms to lift up, her back and shoulders straining to share some of the weight. Pick your friends better, was all the pity Fanni could summon for the pathetic creature. Donna groaned again, clearly near the end of her endurance.

"Shut the fuck up!" Valerie yelled at Donna.

"Shush," Melody said. She reached up and softly tickled one of Donna's nipples, bringing it slowly to life. "Donna's doing the best she can. You should be nice to her since she'll be leaving us for good in a few weeks." Melody smiled up at the sweat-drenched girl. "We'll miss you Donna."

Fanni's chains rattled as she shifted bare feet. Despite her role in events that conspired to place Donna in her current little pickle, she had little interest in the future of Miss Cole. Call it selfishness, call it a simple lack of compassion for a girl that had picked an awful set of compadres to run with. But Melody was more than willing to explain Donna's impending destiny. "Yemen. A nice Arab businessman with a stunning villa. One phone call and we're a hundred grand richer." She stage whispered to Fanni, "Rumor is that this particular Arab fancies himself an amateur surgeon, so that may be a problem for Donna."

Fanni had tolerated enough of this nonsense. "If all he's going to do is cut her up, why buy a blonde American girl? There's plenty of local girls for that. That doesn't make sense. Fuck, Shipwell, what kind of business model is that?" Otto and Heck shifted behind her, but nobody moved to stop her so Fanni continued. "Wouldn't it make more sense to hold out for more money? To sell her to someone who actually wanted a yellow-topped California girl and would pay a premium for it?" Melody opened her mouth, but that was it. Fanni delivered the words that she knew would end the conversation. "And do you know who else is blond and "sixteen?" Look in the mirror to solve that mystery. You might just end up reaping what you sow, Mel."

It was silent in the room, even Donna seemed stunned by the outburst. Melody put her hands on Donna's hips and pushed downwards. The silence was broken by Donna's muted screams. Without taking her eyes (or hands) off of Donna, Melody gave a command to her minions. "Take Hall and clean her up. Then put her to work."

Otto spun Fanni around and off they went, leaving Donna to the tender mercies of Melody Shipwell.

The room had a laboratory-like feel, white tiled floors, walls and ceiling. A gurney was pushed against one wall, thin straps dangling from its sides. A small table sat in a corner, a variety of tools on it, shiny metal things that Fanni eyed greedily from where she sat on the cold floor. Valerie was completing the task of strapping her legs, six individual straps deemed necessary for the task, each tightened to excruciating ends. A straightjacket already restrained Fanni's torso in its thick cotton embrace. There was nothing fancy about the white straightjacket, though it did have some small details to make it more effective. Like normal straightjackets, Fanni's arms had been crossed in front and her hands pulled wide to opposite sides. Four thin straps were added to the sleeves, two tightly around her wrists, and two more just above where her fingers were located. The result was two cotton pouches for her hands, making it much harder to wiggle around in the sleeves. A heavier strap crammed her arms together where they met below her breasts, making her enforced self-hug that much more uncomfortable. Not decked out in fetish gear today, just flesh and hair, Fanni was more than a little put out by the strap that ran from the bottom of the jacket near her belly button, all the way to where it was buckled behind her. That strap took an all-to-short and all-too-intimate excursion between her legs. It wasn't intended simply to annoy Fanni, it also anchored the lower portion of the straightjacket.

So Fanni sat on the floor, only Valerie left from the coterie of thugs that had escorted her to this new cell. "This is our cheapest straightjacket," Val said. "It costs us about twenty dollars to produce in quantity, and we'll sell it for a couple hundred." She flipped Fanni onto her stomach, atop her pinned arms, and began inspecting the laces that stitched the jacket together in the back. "But we haven't had a chance to test them yet. So consider yourself a quality control intern, Hall. Unpaid intern, of course."

Satisfied that the straightjacket was properly fitted, Valerie rolled Fanni back over and sat her up. The leather plug that had been jack-crammed into her mouth entirely stifled Fanni's complaints, complaints about how tightly the gag strap had been pulled and how much hair the buckle had ripped loose.

"This is simple enough, even you can understand it, Hall. All you have to do is escape from these rather basic restraints. Shit, mental patients do it all the time and they're only a little smarter than you." Valerie stood. "I even left some goodies on the table over there, scissors, pliers, whatever you need. And as incentive, if you get yourself free you'll get a nice meal tonight and get to sleep on a mattress with no restraints. If you don't get free, it's straight to bed with no supper, and you'll be hogtied to boot. So don't just lie around like a lazy cow." Valerie looked around the room, then continued. "I'm gonna give you six hours, dummy. That should be plenty of time." With her hand on the cell door, Valerie added one final and very important incentive. "Oh, the first hour is free. After that the heat gradually increases in here until it's like a

toaster oven." Fanni's eyes followed Val's finger to the recessed red lights in the ceiling. "So don't fucking nap in here. I seriously recommend you make a serious effort, fool."

It seemed unlikely that Valerie was bluffing, her being a semi-sane sadist and all, so Fanni went to work the minute the door was bolted shut behind the nasty redhead. It didn't take much to get to her feet, and from there Fanni had a nice view of the room and all it had to offer. Which wasn't much. There was a pair of scissors on the metal table, along with some wire cutters, pliers, and a small utility knife. But they may as well have been feathers for all the good they were to a handless Fanni. But she did have her feet. Fanni sat back down and shimmied over to the table. Force, rather than grace, was the word of the day. The metal table toppled over with one swift kick, and Fanni started sorting out the tools with the toes of her right foot. The knife seemed the most likely little collaborator in this scenario and after some clumsy tactile foolishness, the blade handle rested snugly between two toes. Oddly, it was at that moment of success that the hopelessness of her situation came into clear focus. Without a way to use it, said knife may as well have been a feather. Fanni had already spotted the cameras in each corner and cringed at the thought that her miserable plight was probably a great source of amusement for whoever was at the other end of those lenses. Fuckers!

Life inside a straightjacket was as frustrating as it was restricting. So accustomed to having her arms and hands and fingers at beck and call, the loss of their use was maddening – her brain just kept sending signals to reach for those scissors, or to unbuckle her leg straps. But Fanni was no quitter. Back up to her feet she went. Act Two of this farce had Fanni playing at Houdini, testing her arms and shoulders in the jacket, looking for any source of slack. She had heard that Houdini sometimes slipped his straightjacket by dislocating a shoulder, but even if she was inclined to that crazy act, Fanni's own shoulders couldn't budge in any direction. The straps that Valerie had applied around her wrists seemed all the more cunning now, since without them there might have been a chance to adjust her arms in the sleeves. Soldiering on, Fanni lost track of time. But she needn't worry about that; the low hum of the red bulbs above her alerted her that her "free" hour had elapsed. Shit.

At first the heat wasn't too bad, only a few bulbs had turned on. But every time she looked up it seemed more bulbs had come to life. Resolving to not panic, Fanni took a closer look at the room, working her eyes from floor to ceiling along each wall. Nothing seemed to offer hope. She hopped to the gurney and looked it over. Nothing. It had dozens of straps, all securely anchored to the sides. And above the gurney hung another in Melody Shipwell's collectors series of comically gigantic ballgags, ready to be strapped into the mouth of whatever unfortunate was deemed worthy of the gurney's charms. Strands of wet hair hung in Fanni's eyes as she surveyed the room once again. They had had their fun offering the knives and other tools to Fanni, but they did it knowing full well how useless they were to her. The room had been made "child-proof," Fanni being the boisterous child in this scenario. She thought about trying to lie down on the thinly padded gurney and waiting for the inevitable, and all the punishment that would accompany it. But fuck, the room was getting hot! Fanni lowered her head and shook her hair around like a wet mutt, sweat flying in all direction. She put her head back up and tried to shake

as much hair out of her face as she could get to cooperate. She found herself staring up at the huge ballgag again. But this time she saw something else.

The gag and its straps dangled from a small hook, like one you might hang your coat on. It seemed to offer opportunities unlike those of the other tools that had tantalized Fanni earlier. The main one being that it was solidly attached to the wall. The fact that it was at forehead level didn't seem a problem, not if she could climb atop the gurney. That proved hardly a challenge. Step one was to get rid of that tangle of straps and ball that hung from the hook, which proved to be a five minute prelude to the main event, accomplished with the aid of whichever toes could grab it. Next, Fanni slowly stood up on the gurney, intending to back up against the hook. All it took was a small loss of balance for Fanni to discover what a fickle ally the gurney was in this task. Leaning against the wall to catch her balance, the gurney wheels took it as a signal to have some fun. The ensuing fall might have been fatal for Fanni, but in the end she was able to fall back on the gurney as it rolled into the middle of the room. Alright, I need a better platform, Fanni realized. And there it was, lying on its side where Fanni had kicked it. Dropping back down to the floor, Fanni realized that even those formerly-frigid tiles were getting warm, and wet to boot. A glance at the ceiling lights would have answered some questions about the heat in the room, but Fanni passed over peeking at that scary sight.

Using her feet Fanni pushed the table against the wall, and using her feet (and a commendable act of dexterity) she set it on its legs again. Not wasting a second, Fanni sat on the table, then raised her legs up until her knees were against her chest. With her feet solidly on the table, and using the wall to assist her balance, Fanni stood up. And there it was, right against the small of her back. But now what? There was a buckle just above the hook, the one that held the accursed crotch strap fast. But could she loosen it? And would loosening it accomplish any real benefit?

The next three hours were hellish. At some point the fight to free herself became less about Valerie's threats of punishment and more a personal test of perseverance, of stamina, and of skill. The crotch strap buckle turned out to be the most difficult. To get to it she had to stand on tip toes atop the increasingly slick metal surface of the table. But it did come free, eventually. The buckle that joined the straps of the two sleeves behind her came off in a few lucky minutes of work. The lacing at the back of the jacket took some time, but it, too, succumbed in the end. Close to exhaustion, eyes half blinded by perspiration, stringy hair hanging in her face, Fanni watched the buckle that joined her elbows finally fall away. The jacket hung to her now, her hands still strapped in the sleeves. To say the room was hot was demeaning to the word "hot." The lights hummed their angry buzz non-stop. But the heat was a partner now. The cloth material was sopping wet and as slick as saliva. First one slippery wrist was yanked free, then the other. So much for the jacket. With no idea how much time had elapsed Fanni worked with a fury to remove the leg straps, a relatively easy task with the use of actual fingers. The gag plopped free with a small river following it. And like that, Fanni Hall was free.

She lay on the gurney, only now realizing how thirsty she was. She looked at one of the cameras and waved, not gloatingly, just to remind whoever was behind it to come and get her out of this oven. Or at least to turn off the heat. No one came. Not for quite a while.

It was Melody who finally appeared. She smiled as she entered, then her eyes widened abruptly and she quickly backed out of the room, slamming the door behind her. Fanni sat up on the gurney. What the fuck? It hit her like a comet -- nobody was monitoring those cameras! They never considered it even minutely possible that she would escape. Which is why Melody Shipwell, queen-asshole herself, sauntered in all by her lonesome, no backup goons, no pistols, nada. The idea had certainly crossed Fanni's mind to pick up a knife and initiate a melee of some severe violence, but without the element of surprise, that was a lost cause. But now she understood the reality; they hadn't been watching her at all. No one expected her to escape, they had simply trussed her up and thrown her in here to roast like some turkey. Just another prank, Melody having fun at Fanni's expense. And the worst was the missed opportunity. Shit, she wouldn't have even needed a knife to go get past Melody Fucking Shipwell.

No crying over spilt milk. Fanni lay back on the gurney, a deep sigh lost in the hum of the bright red lights.

You won't be overly-astonished to learn that - besides being sadistic kidnappers - Fanni's captors were also lying, sore-losing hairbags. That straightjacket had been conquered fair and square. Instead of thanking her for revealing the jacket's flaws, Melody was livid. Maybe she had already printed her 1978 Dungeon World Catalog For Sadistic Assholes and would have to amend the "Slave-tested 100% Escape-Proof Heavy Duty Straightjacket" blurb. Tough break for the bad guys, but Fanni had actually expected that hot meal and a night on a mattress. Then again, she was currently residing in a dungeon, so the lack of honor among scoundrels was not all that shocking. Live and learn.

She had been pushed into her cell, two slices of whole wheat bread tossed onto the dirty floor behind her. A delicious two course feast for Fanni Hall - if she could find those measly morsels in the pitch black cell. In the moments before the light had been turned off Fanni had taken a long look at the nail she had seen earlier, still hammered solidly into the concrete, still frustratingly out of reach. Fanni took a mental snapshot in the few seconds she had before the room became black. The nail was maybe four feet to the right of the door, and just above nose level. It was out of reach of Fanni's hands, which were tucked snugly into the pouch that held them behind her back. It was becoming clear that Fanni was having the honor of trying out a different set of restraints every night. Tonight's model seemed unimpressive when compared to her previous fetters. It wasn't anywhere near "comfortable" but it was an improvement. Rather than having her shoulders disjointed, her arms formed a nice square, fingers wrapped around opposite elbows. The leather pouch and its built-in straps held her forearms together, and further straps circled her breasts and went up and over her shoulders preventing anything in the way of slippage. Without leg straps, and with no gag to chew on, Fanni Hall was as near to freedom as she had been in days. "Freedom" being a relative term, since she was locked in a cell and had no use of her arms.

Sliding along the wall, Fanni stopped when she felt the nail rub against the back of her head. She lightly bounced her noggin against it a few times. It was solidly hammered in. Standing on her tip toes, Fanni measured how close she could get her shoulders to the nail. Not close enough to snag a strap. "Shit," she muttered as she knelt down to the floor. She dropped to her belly, and went searching for that fine feast that lay somewhere on the floor. It took her ten minutes to find a slice, which she tooth-grabbed by a corner and shook around, hoping to get some of the grit off it. A single thought occupied her mind as she chewed her dinner: the little stub of rusty nail that didn't stick out even an inch from the wall.

For two hours Fanni had stood in the same spot, arms spread high over her head, legs pulled equally wide and cuffed to rings in the floor. She had been dressed, in a manner. The centerpiece was the dark blue corset and matching skirt, gorgeous and expensive-looking, and not at all diminished by the figure modeling it. Surprisingly, the corset hid most of Fanni's cleavage. Not surprisingly, little snap-on "trap doors" covered the nipples, making those delightful nubs easily accessible to curious eyes or fingers. A pair of sheer stockings covered Fanni's legs, gartered to the bottom of the corset. Black patent high heels, very high heels, made Fanni dread even a short walk in those monsters. Just standing still in them was chore enough.

Compared to the other cells that she had occupied, this one was well lit, bright even. Of course with a hood over her head Fanni was unaware of this. The leather hood was beyond tight, zipped, laced and strapped on. The comically huge leather plug in her mouth was being vised so firmly by her jaws that Fanni was sure it was going to burst open and spill whatever was stuffed in it. The hood also had a small ring at the crown, and a chain dropped from the ceiling and attached to it, keeping Fanni's head high. That chain, and the two holding her arms aloft, held Fanni stretched high, those mountain-high shoes struggling to meet the floor below.

Her stomach rumbled. Those two measly bread slices last night had done little more than waken her stomach. But she ignored any thoughts of hunger. Or thirst, or pain, or humiliation, or anything except that butt end of a rusty nail that she slept nearby every night. It had to have a use. Could she use it to free herself, then poke it in Otto's eye or Valerie's jugular? Was she capable of an act that gruesome? Putting the cart back behind the horse, Fanni ruminated on what would be a simple matter under more normal circumstances – getting her greedy little paws on that nail.

Half-deafened in her leather head-squisher, Fanni was barely aware of the voices in the cell. The usual suspects had honored Fanni with their unwanted presence. Melody ordered Fanni's hood removed, said task done with no shortage of vigor by Otto. Wet hair spilled from the leather, and Fanni screwed her eyes shut at the combined assault of bright light and Otto's ugly mug. The sopping hood dangled below Fanni's chin, still attached to the gag, which had no way to exit its little gopher hole without some help. The ever-assholey Valerie Morgan pushed Otto out of the way and provided that assistance. She yanked and twisted the plug, one palm planted on Fanni's forehead for support. As eager as Fanni was for the gag to come out, her jaws seemed to have lost their ability to open on their own. Valerie quickly stood back, avoiding the little river

of drool that emptied onto the floor as the gag finally plopped free. "Pig," Valerie muttered at the sight. Fanni drew in long breathes and shook wet hair out of her face.

Melody stepped closer, then walked behind Fanni. "God dammit, Val! I told you not to mark her up too bad."

Valerie snickered. "I barely tickled her with that whip. She'll get a good whipping soon enough, though, unless she ..."

"Fuckin' A, Valerie! Just do what I tell you!"

Caught by surprise, Valerie spun on her heel and walked from the room. Melody let out a small snicker at this act of defiance. "I guess she thinks we're equals," she said. "Let her pay the bills around here, then we can be equals. Fuck, I give her cash every week."

Old man Shipwell paid the bills, of course, not his spoiled daughter. But Fanni ignored that and focused on another subject. "You might want to pay her more, Melody. She sounds pretty unhappy with what you give her now."

"She told you that?"

"She told me a lot more than that," Fanni said, warming to the subject."

Melody settled herself in front of Fanni. "What else," she asked with a concerned look.

Think quick, Hall. What will drive a wedge between these two bitches? "She talked a lot about opening her own business, and doing it right. I don't think she's going to open a flower shop, so you may have some competition soon."

"Anything else?"

Fanni hesitated. Don't get carried away and make it sound like bullshit, she thought. "That's it," she said.

"Alright, Fanni, very good." Melody spoke while she was unsnapping the little nipple covers on Fanni's corset. "Trying to turn us against each other, tsk tsk. But do you think we're a bunch of seven year olds? Valerie might prove to be disloyal, time will tell. But she is much too disciplined to complain to you about anything. And leave poor Otto alone. He might drool around you, but he's as loyal as a lapdog. So you can cut out your silly little games. I'm starting to get embarrassed for you."

"You have it all figured Mel, you're so smart. But you've been making mistakes all over town. First Donna - who knows how many people she called beside me. And Valerie's not as disciplined as you think, or else she wouldn't have whipped me. And Cora is out there, a big fat loose end waiting to figure out that her future lies in one of your dungeons."

Melody shrugged. "I'm not too worried about Cora. She's fallen head-over-heels for all those hundred dollar bills we give her. But you're probably right - she'll fetch us a nice little basket of cash someday." She tilted her head at Fanni. "Don't get jealous, Hall, but when we were choosing a model, Cora was our first choice, not you. We needed someone strong enough to survive a little ... rough handling. And attractive enough to keep the clients interested. But it turns out innocent little Cora might be useful to us, at least for a while. So that left an opening for you, Fanni. And here you are."

Melody smiled up at Fanni and showed her a thin chain she had taken from her pocket. A clip was at each end, and Melody kindly opened and closed one of them in front of Fanni's eyes. Very nasty teeth lined the jaws of the little critter. Melody winked, then continued. "And, I do know how many people Donna called beside you. Zero. We asked her many times, and the absolute conclusion is that she called no one else. Believe me, she would have told us if she did." Fanni blinked at the soft touch of a finger rubbing the tip of her left nipple. Melody continued.

"AAAAARRRGGGG," Fanni yelped. One of those fucking wolverine jaws was biting her nipple. Melody ignored her went to work waking up her right nipple. "And I never told Valerie not to whip you. I told her not to mark you up too much. I guess I should have been clearer."

The second clip went on with less fuss, Fanni determined to grit it out in silence. She couldn't hold back the single involuntary tear that leaked down her cheek.

"And, yes, there is a reason we need you in reasonably presentable condition," Melody continued, her fingers toying with the chain that ran from nipple to nipple. "We have some clients coming here to look over all the over-priced products we've designed, and little old you is going to be the featured model."

Fanni mulled this over, searching her mind for some advantage from this information. "Sorry Mel, but I'm a union employee. Unless you give me three square meals a day, I'm going on strike."

"You amuse me, Fanni," Melody said, not a hint of amusement in her voice. "Maybe I'll give you a little more food – if you behave. But we have less than two weeks to get you ready, so we can't have you giving us any trouble. No more shit from you Fanni, or I'll let Valerie loose with her favorite whip. Understand?"

"I don't understand any of this, Mel. But I guess you're the boss."

"Finally you say something sensible, Fanni. Was that so hard? Now let's get you ready for the day."

CHAPTER FOUR

She walked for miles. The treadmill was absolutely relentless in its demand that she keep a steady pace. The rate of speed was not too demanding, but if she fell behind even a half step, the

reminder was immediate and nasty. The chain that connected the nipple clips was attached to a short leash that tied off to the front of the treadmill, a simple and very efficient means of keeping Fanni moving steadfastly forward. She had been informed that the purpose of the exercise was to allow her to become proficient with the mega-high heels. Why they needed to hobble her ankles with a fourteen inch chain was a mystery, as was the need for an enormous ball to be strapped into her mouth – how those embellishments might aid in this lesson would remain a secret. But she had plenty of time to ruminate on those questions during her endless journey to nowhere, the scenery nothing but the grey wall four feet in front of her. It was clear to Fanni that her future was in the hand of maniacs, and whatever nefarious plans they had for her were being revealed in drips and drabs. There was no reason for Melody to lie to Fanni about her upcoming modeling debut, and that held promising opportunities. These "clients" Melody had spoken of were certain to be felons of the lowest repute, but the more assholes the merrier at this point. Melody Shipwell and her gang had proven themselves to be disciplined and thorough, so, sure, let's get some new players in the game. One wrong move, Shipwell, and I'll bring you down, and your old man, too.

The days progressed in a blur of pain and humiliation. Fanni had been marched from one fiendish contraption to the next, each one a clever creation from the questionably-sane mind of Valerie Morgan. She had been hung, twisted, crushed and stretched. Every manner of restraint had been "tested" on her: chains, cuffs, ropes, straps, tape, and more rope. Valerie seemed intent on proving that any size of gag would fit into Fanni's mouth, however too large it might be. Every outfit she wore was meant to degrade her, while at the same time enhance her natural beauty and show off her near-perfect figure. Fanni only registered the degradation, swearing to burn every last piece of rubber, leather, silk and latex that she had been shoe-horned into.

Today's outfit was of the minimalist variety. The bright red bikini bottom was about the size of a nickel. The boots were also red, knee-high and tight-fitting. They were the objects of today's training, another forced lesson in high heel training. 'Clown stilts' seemed an apt description to the boot's occupant. She had only walked a short distance in them, every step a stumbling comedy of balance versus gravity. That short walk had ended at her current location, where all that was expected of Fanni was to stand still for some indeterminate period of time. Her captors had rather insisted that she remain standing, and reinforced their insistence in a fiendishly clever way. Like two condemned convicts, her breasts had been noosed and awaited their strangulation in surprisingly stoic fashion. Unlike most doomed prisoners, their fate was still in question. And since the breasts in question were attached to her body, Fanni was very much interested in their well-being. So she remained standing, teetering in the infernal boots, her body quaking with every tiny trembling of a toe. The tit ropes were tied off somewhere above her, and they were tight enough that Fanni didn't bother considering that they might slip off her damp breasts. Why bother wasting precious concentration on things outside of her control? Besides, her attention was needed elsewhere, namely the mini see-saw below her feet. Wasn't it bad enough that a minor loss of balance would result in a squeeze in her tits that defied description? Apparently not, since Valerie had decided to add the bit of devilry below her. It was a simple little see-saw, three feet in length and just four inches above the floor. All that was required of Fanni was to

keep her balance and not make that little four inch drop to the floor. The results of that fall would be miles beyond calamitous. So she stood, leg and derriere muscles straining, her brain focused properly on the task at hand. The hinge of the see-saw was well greased, making even the slightest shift in weight a struggle. For the first time in days her legs were unfettered. Little did that matter: With her legs spread to either side of the teetering see-saw, those limbs were as thoroughly helpless as if they were in steel chains. Fanni's arms were in steel manacles. Two pairs circled her wrists and held her arms behind her back. Those two sets of handcuffs were undoubtedly sufficient to render Fanni helpless, but two additional pairs circled her arms, one on either side of her elbows.

Under better circumstances Fanni might have recited her rather extensive lexis of curse words, letting them bounce off the walls of the small cell in a symphony of pain and rage. As it was, she gurgled out an occasional attempt at one of her cruder words, most of the sound lost behind the penis-shaped bauble that filled her mouth, held in place by a web of straps that circled her head. The image of Otto snuck into her brain, and Fanni was thankful that no fleshier penis had found its way into her throat. Stifle shiver here.

Whatever her level of pain and exhaustion, Fanni was coming to realize that her body was surprisingly capable of surviving even the most teeth-gnashing tests of endurance. The impossible became possible with the right motivation.

This farce had been going on for days – or was it weeks? It was as much a black comedy as it was a slasher movie. The absurdity of two barely-out-of-high school fools like Melody Shipwell and Valerie Morgan setting up shop as sellers of bondage equipment and human flesh was well beyond preposterous. But the day was fast approaching when some scumbag buyers would converge on this house and actually patronize the retail side of this loony bin. The thought "this I have to see" entered Fanni's mind, before she remembered that she was certain to see every last crazy minute of it.

Home sweet home. The un-feathery bed of straw awaited Fanni as darkness fell again on Dungeon Shipwell. Somewhere on the grimy floor of her cell lay two slices of bread, invisible in the darkness. And for a special treat, a steak bone had been tossed in, with barely enough meat remaining on the bone to attract an ant. The daily theatrics began; Fanni rolled onto her stomach to go nosing around for her supper. "Nosed" was a literal term, as that mini appendage poked around for what passed as a meal around here. Her arms were useless, laced into a leather sheath behind her back. The steak bone was a treat, albeit a treat eaten like a mutt. The bread was seasoned with floor dirt, like usual.

A half hour later Fanni was awoken by a blast of light, signaling the return of her foes. She sat up and blinked at the sight before her. Otto and Heck carried a black form that it took a minute to recognize. Melody stepped into the room and explained the sight. "Donna needs some company,

the poor dear. I figured you might like someone to talk to, Fanni, so here she is." Melody slurred, then leaned against the door frame. Too much wine with dinner, Fanni guessed.

"Of course you'll have to shout for Donna to hear you," Melody shouted. "She's got plugs in her ears and fat pads over them. She's kinda deaf. And she won't be able to add to the conversation. Vlalerly ..." She laughed at her slur. "... I mean Val-er-ie. She pushed a whole bunch of her dirty..." She whispered then "...knickers...down into her mouth." More mirthful guffawing from Melody verified her un-sober state.

Fanni glanced over to the mummy that represented the current state of Donna Cole. Most noticeable was how incredibly tight everything was around her. The shiny black sheath she was in seemed to be a size four on a size eight body. It had been zipped and laced to incredible tightness, then needless straps had been tightened around her already-compressed body. Donna's head was as imprisoned as her body, a black hood of identical material leaving the pathetic creature deaf, dumb and blind. Typical Valerie Morgan overkill, Fanni sighed.

"So you two girls catch up on your goship," Melody went on. "But don't stay up past your bedtimes, you have an early start tomorrow." She laughed again. "Have a nice shlumber party kids."

Heck and Otto departed while Melody swayed in the doorway, trying to think up more witty insults, but her alcohol-marinated brain gave up and she backed out of the cell. The door shut and the locks slammed home, leaving the cell in total darkness again.

Fanni recognized it for what it was, just a big joke by a drunken imbecile. Very funny, leaving Donna with her for "company." Donna may as well have been a corpse. Too morbid, Fanni winced. Not a corpse, maybe a log. Although a log would be more useful. At least with a log she could

Fuck! Was this the break she'd been waiting for?

The same thought repeated in her mind: don't get your hopes up, it might be a dead end. The more she considered it, the more unlikely it seemed. But she might never see another opportunity

Like she'd done a thousand times before, Fanni used her nose to locate the corner of the cell. Two steps to her left and she knew she was directly in front of the unseen nail, still out of practical reach to Fanni. Enter Donna Cole. Carefully measuring the distance involved, Fanni pressed a bare foot against Donna's rump and rolled her halfway over, then gave another push to complete the rotation. It proved surprisingly easy to roll Donna along, the poor girl's body slightly rounded by the severity of her bondage. Fanni pushed until Donna was flush against the wall, face-down Fanni guessed. After re-measuring her position, Fanni stepped onto the step stool that was Donna's rump. Sorry Donna, but you'll thank me later – maybe! The poor girl had to be completely confused, a small problem when compared to the severity of her bondage.

Fanni carefully turned around and backed against the wall. It took just a few seconds to locate the nail, and her heart skipped when she felt it rub against the bare flesh of her shoulder.

But now what? The nail had just a small lip on its head, barely enough to snag anything. But it would have to do. The arm sheath she wore was anchored by two straps that ran over her shoulders, then crossed above her breasts, then were buckled behind her back. It was all quite inescapable as long as all the parts were doing their jobs. What was needed was to compromise just one little part of the sheath. The straps over her shoulders were the most easily accessible, so that's where Fanni started. It took some artful maneuvering, but finally the nail caught on the strap on her right shoulder. Then immediately slipped off. She tried again and again with the same outcome. The nail just wasn't catching. More time was invested with the same depressing results. A brief change of tactics had Fanni attempting to hook the buckle at the top of the arm sheath, but that was a non-starter. She was panting now, softly muttering curses. Her shoulder was scraped raw, but that was a small consideration in the bigger scheme of things, so she went back to work on that strap. It happened on maybe the millionth attempt: the strap snagged and held! Caught slightly by surprise, Fanni steadied herself, careful to maintain pressure between nail and strap. Slowly, steadily she pulled the strap toward the edge of her shoulder. It made it halfway, then did what it had to do and held fast. Uuurrghhhh! There was simply no way the strap would go any farther, denied by the design of the damned thing! But Fanni's body was also a well-designed thing, and she decided to test its limits. First she rose up on her toes, lifted her left shoulder and twisted her body until the strap on that side rode closer to her neck, freeing maybe a half inch of space on the other side. A half inch wasn't going to do it, so Fanni wrenched her shoulders back as far as they would go, pressing her thrust out chest against the wall. With another pull she felt the strap ride closer to the edge of her shoulder, but now quite enough. Frustration began to build. Her perch atop Donna was becoming more precarious as her own sweat made things slippery below her. Some slight squirming below her was the only evidence that Donna was even alive. But Fanni continued working.

The miracle happened in a flash. Fanni wasn't even aware of it at first, she was busy trying to break her fall as she tumbled to the floor. One minute she had been pulling the strap with a grunt, the next she was landing on the floor with a yelp. But the right side strap was free, loosely hanging by her arm. She climbed back onto Donna. It was child's play to loosen the other strap. The sheath took longer to free, but with the help of well-lubricated arms, it too was pulled free.

It was impossible to know how much time had passed, though Fanni knew she had been at work for hours. Without wasting a second, Fanni went to work trying to free the nail from the wall. It wasn't much, but it represented the only weapon at her disposal. Only thing was, it refused to budge from its solid lodgment in the wall. Using only two bare hands, there was little for Fanni could do to change its mind. Any visions of slicing Valerie Morgan's jugular vanished. Too bad.

Sitting on the floor for a rest, Fanni thought back on all the previous mornings. Sometimes one person came for her, but usually there were at least two. The usual combination was Otto and Valerie, but sometimes Heck joined them. Count Melody out – she would be sleeping off a nasty hangover.

Fanni rested her chin on her knees and pictured all those early morning awakenings. Otto or Heck usually unlocked the door, then held it open for Valerie, who had the honor of being the first to insult Fanni most days. She couldn't underestimate Valerie, but Otto and Heck would be much more difficult to best in a fair fight. Fanni was well aware that she had so easily bested them in the past because of the element of surprise. If she could take out one of the behemoths quickly, Valerie would take a beating, and Fanni had no intention of making it a "good clean fight." No, Valerie would go down in a rage-fueled flurry of every martial trick Fanni knew.

She paced the cell, stretching her limbs and steeling her resolve. This was, most likely, a matter of life and death. There wasn't going to be a second chance. This was it. Everything in the cell acted as motivation for Fanni: Donna Cole trussed up like a sausage, the complete darkness imposed on her each night, the pile of straw that served as a bed, the steak bone tossed onto the floor like she was a good little doggy. She stopped her pacing. The steak bone ...

After so many uneventful mornings, Valerie could be excused for not stepping outside the usual routine. It cost Heck his life. The door had swung open and the beefy thug leaned into the room, one hand still on the door handle. A second later his throat split in two, a thin crayon mark of red the only evidence of a fatal wound. Valerie's mouth opened in surprise, but she quickly regained composure and reached behind her back for the pistol in her waistband. Using her slight size advantage, and a mountain of rage, Fanni made a frontal assault, tackling Valerie to the ground before her hand could reach the cold steel of the pistol. The redhead lay on her back, stunned by the suddenness of the attack, stunned at the sight of her naked former-prisoner atop her. "Keep your mouth shut and your claws out to the side, asshole, or you'll end up like your henchman." The command was backed up by the point of something digging into the soft area above her sweater's collar. The sight of Heck slowly sliding down the wall as his hands gave up trying to hold in all the blood was all the convincing Valerie needed as to the gravity of the threat. Fanni reached under Valerie and pulled the gun free. Only then did she rise to her feet. "Easy, Red," Fanni said as Valerie rose up on her elbows. Valerie's natural look of smug superiority had been replaced by a deer-in-the-headlights glaze, and for once she was at a loss for insulting words. She did notice the steak bone that Fanni still held. It had proven itself a near-perfect weapon. The T-bone had a fairly sharp point on one end, and it got sharper after a few hours of being honed against the brick wall of the cell.

"Get on your knees and crawl into the cell," Fanni commanded. While the redhead complied, Fanni looked over the gun. She released the safety. "The safety is off Val, in case you're wondering." No need for Valerie to wonder if she knew how to handle a gun. "Now, slowly get up and stand against the back wall. Face the wall and do not turn around."

The normally-smug Valerie Morgan appeared ready to drop tears. She meekly did as she was ordered, absolutely stupefied by the turn of events. Fanni was the source of her immediate problems, but her future with Melody Shipwell was also a question mark. That girl was always on the edge of a tantrum, and she could erupt like a volcano at the smallest inconvenience. And

this was no inconvenience; Heck was dead, and Fanni Hall was halfway out the door. Fucking cops might be knocking the doors down within the hour.

"Strip down, Val. Everything. And do it quick. Keep your eyes pointed at the wall while you do it." Fanni watched Valerie carefully, occasionally peeking out the door to check for any visitors.

Boots, socks, jeans, and sweater came off, leaving the pale redhead in bra and panties.

"Finish," Fanni said calmly. "Everything off."

"Now lie face down," Fanni said when Valerie was naked. Down went Valerie onto the cold and filthy floor of the cell. "Put your hands, uh ... behind your head." This was new to Fanni, and a lot of guesswork was involved.

Fanni bent down and went through the jean pockets. The metal handcuffs were in the back pocket. A front pocket held two sets of keys. "Put 'em on," Fanni said after tossing the cuffs over to Valerie. "Behind your back."

The remainder of the clothes was inventoried, and Fanni went to work. She sat Valerie up and stuffed her panties well into her mouth. Valerie twitched her nose, but remained otherwise compliant. The two knee-high socks were tied together at the toes, the resulting knot pushed in with the panties and the two ends knotted behind Valerie's head. Not perfect, Fanni knew, but it would have to suffice.

Valerie's tight jeans fit Fanni in the way any two-sizes-too-small pair of pants would. The black sweater was not as bad, tight but with some give. The boots were a no-go, just too small to even attempt.

The cell they were in was fairly secluded, but Fanni had no intention of leaving Valerie to bounce around the room. She used the bra to bind her ankles, then stood her up. The black form that represented Donna Cole was rolled away from the wall, and Valerie hopped over to stand under the nail. Not needing the belt, Fanni whipped it free of the loops of her jeans. The belt was looped around Val's neck. The loop was tightened and the free end lifted up to the nail. It took some effort, but one of the belt holes was worked over the nail head, leaving the stunned redhead noosed to the wall. She strained on her toes to keep the belt from tightening around her neck.

"Listen up, Val," Fanni spit the name out, trying to display her most badass self. "I don't know if you'll be able to slither free, or if one of your asshole buddies will come and find you. But whatever happens, Donna is off limits to you. When the cops get here she better be in one healthy piece." Fanni drove the barrel of the gun into Valerie's forehead for emphasis. "Understand?" The sad truth was that Fanni had never considered trying to free Donna. It would just take too much time to unravel that package. And Fanni had places to be: namely, anywhere but here. And knowing the shitheads who put Donna in that state, there was probably more

nonsense under the surface, a few miles of duct tape or rope. Sorry Donna, but it was time to split this scene.

Keys in her pocket, pistol in her right hand, Fanni crept down the long passageway, passing the various cells she had been tortured in, plus many other locked doors that hid who-knows-what. The door at the far end of the corridor was the door to freedom, or at least the first step in that direction. It led to stairs that went up to the house. The fifth key she tried opened the door, and Fanni barefooted up the steps. Her plan was a work in progress. If she confronted Otto, a bullet or two would hopefully end that threat. It would be easy to then take Melody Shipwell, who probably was still deep in slumber, visions of dollar signs dancing in her wine-laced skull. But if there was no opposition, she intended to grab a car and get as far away as she could.

The door above opened into a pantry room off the kitchen. The house was quiet. The sight of two vehicles parked outside ended any questions about what to do. One keychain held just two keys, one certainly a car key. And good luck was on her side – the key started the Land Rover, a preferable ride to the Corvette that likely belonged to Melody. Once the engine turned over, Fanni ended any hint of stealth and roared into reverse. Almost as she expected, Otto burst from the house. Fanni leveled the pistol his way and squeezed off two shots, which were high by the length of a skyscraper. Need to get used to this thing, Fanni thought as she let another shot fly at Otto, who was diving behind a planter on the front porch. That shot missed as badly, but this time Fanni blamed the fact that she was moving pretty fast as she shot. The Land Rover kicked up pebbles as it headed toward the tree line. Fanni had no idea where she was, but the only way out was down the narrow lane that split the trees. The whirr of bullets passing her ears alerted Fanni to Otto's entry into the shooting contest, and the big lug seemed to have some game in that regard. Another half inch to the right and Fanni would be missing an ear. A second later she entered the woods and the trees became an impenetrable defense against anything Otto could send her way. Tough luck, big guy.

Luck being a fickle friend, events changed in a flash. The narrow lane was the only way out, but it was also the only way in. And bearing down on her rapidly was a big black Buick, with two SUVs following closely. Fanni took her foot off the gas pedal, slowing the Land Rover just enough for her to leap off before the inevitable head-on. She was ten feet into the trees before the massive crunching of metal and glass. Whoever was in those cars were most assuredly not friends, she knew. The pistol was still in her hand, but she knew she'd have to shoot a little straighter if it was to make a difference. Aim lower, she told herself.

The sound of shouting seemed far behind her, which heartened Fanni. Unless they had an Olympics sprinter among them, Fanni's head start was going to be the difference in any pursuit, bare feet be damned! She almost slammed into the chain-link fence. Shit! It was high, and topped with barb wire. She turned right and ran parallel to the fence, heading in the same direction as the road out of here. Not smart, she realized. Any pursuers would be expecting just that move. She turned and sprinted in the opposite direction, watching for any seams in the fence as she ran. A shot rang out. Then another small burst, automatic rifle fire this time. Bark chipped from trees in front of her and small branches fell from trees. Apparently bullets could outrun Fanni's long legs. She ducked behind a tree and peeked back. First one, then a second figure came into sight, both

wearing black suits. One held a rifle, the other a pistol. Both were jogging, heads swaying from side to side as they searched for their quarry. The rifleman was the nearest, and his path was going to lead him right past Fanni. She waited, listening to his heavy footsteps crunch the undergrowth. In an instant Fanni stepped from behind the tree and leveled three shots at the figure. At least one of them scored, and he fell without a sound. The second goon had swung around and let go a single shot. Fanni ducked back behind the tree. She really wanted to get a hand on that rifle, but it was ten feet away, and she still had someone trying to kill her out there. She carefully slid down the side of the tree and lay face down. She picked up a downed branch and slowly poked it out from the side of the tree. A shot knocked it from her hands. Holy shit, she never thought that would work! Of course all it really did was inform her of how good a shot her adversary was.

Well this was quite the little pickle. Trapped behind a tree, every passing minute an enemy to her survival. There may have been more goons in those cars, or maybe she was one-on-one with this particular sharpshooter. But staying put was not a real option. She began belly-crawling backwards, keeping the pistol ready for action. The tree still offered cover as long as she crawled back in a straight line. Another shot rang out, then two more as Fanni realized the goon was on the move, looking to get an angle on her. Fanni let off a flurry of her own shots at the black blur, absolutely positive that she had missed badly. I gotta get better at this, she thought. Another shot took splinters off a tree in front of her, and Fanni realized someone was shooting from behind her. Not fair! She spun onto her back and looked for a target in that direction. Otto! He was in the open, and he made a sizeable target. Fanni aimed carefully at his chest. Bye-bye Otto, she whispered. She pulled the trigger. Click. Again. Click.

Aw, fuck, out of ammo.

Rotten foul luck. A clean escape spoiled by traffic congestion on a secluded dirt lane. And to run out of bullets when the outcome was still in doubt? Can a girl catch a break?

The walk back to the house was done in silence. Fanni simply had nothing to say – what could she say? Otto and the black-suited brute seemed to be in shock, not certain about how the recent events were going to affect them. The body count was two: the thug shot in the woods and the driver of the Buick, who hadn't survived a Land Rover to the face. Another man had been pulled from the car and hustled into a SUV that sped off in reverse. And they hadn't learned Heck's fate yet, dead in a pool of his own blood. So that was three. Valerie was a possibility, too, if she'd had trouble standing tall for the last hour.

But whatever damage Fanni had inflicted, she had been defeated and was prisoner again, being roughly jostled along the lane by Otto, who used a fistful of her hair for control. Her hands were cuffed behind her back, the metal painfully squeezing her wrists. Melody Shipwell was standing on the front porch, wearing a robe and slippers. She blinked at the ragged threesome approaching, clearly confused by the ruckus that had interrupted her slumber.

"What the hell, Otto? What's going on?"

"Uh ..." The erudite goon was at a loss for words, as usual. It was the black-suited brute who spoke. "Miss Shipwell, I'm afraid your father has been seriously injured. He was in a car accident and ..."

"A car accident? Where?"

Otto and the brute nodded back at the woods.

"Well is he okay?"

Otto looked down. The other goon shrugged. "He's hurt badly, but he was conscious. Probably some broken bones."

Melody's eyes narrowed. She took a step toward Fanni. "How the fuck did she get loose?" No one answered. "Where is Valerie?" she said softly, to no one in particular. There was silence. Then she repeated the question, this time practically spitting it into Fanni's face. "Where is Valerie, you fucking bitch?"

Valerie was found in due course. So was Heck. Melody seemed more upset by the sight of Heck's blood than by the fact of his demise. Otto was more affected, shocked even, sensing his own future if he took this Hall girl too lightly. No, he wouldn't make that mistake again. Otto quickly freed Valerie, her ordeal having turned her face a brighter shade of red than her hair. She quickly and wordlessly fled the vicinity of her humiliation.

Melody was surprisingly calm or, more likely, shell-shocked. "Hang on to this alley cat until Valerie returns, Otto. I'm going to go to the hospital." Melody slowly turned her face to Fanni's, her teeth gritted in anger. "You better pray he's okay, Hall, or you'll pay with every inch of flesh on your mongrel body. I'll take you apart piece by piece, and I'll do it over years."

But Melody was a Shipwell, and as she walked away her thoughts turned from Fanni Hall's future to her own -- what her inheritance might look like, that is. Not that she wanted daddy dearest to join Heck down in the eternal fires, but a girl needed to know where she stood in this male-dominated world and a mountain of cash was a wonderful gender-equalizer. She stopped and turned back to Otto. She pointed at Heck's lifeless body and the puddle of crimson that framed him. "And Otto, make all that go away ..."

"For sure," Otto said softly. Heck hadn't really been a close friend, but it seemed he didn't deserve to be referred to as "that."

The degree of fear that Valerie Morgan conveyed on a routine basis could be bone-chilling. But with her mind a bellicose stew of rage, hatred and a good degree of embarrassment, Valerie Morgan all but oozed terror. She was dressed in black leather pants and a black tank top, her red hair drawn back in a ponytail. She was all business, serious and severe. "You're in for a few rough days, Hall. Don't bother complaining about it, you won't get sympathy from anyone around here. Right Otto?"

"For sure."

Fanni wouldn't have been foolish enough to answer back, but that option had been taken from her anyway. In the spirit of sharing, Valerie had gathered up the socks and panties that had recently filled her own mouth and stuffed the slimy mass into Fanni's own. Most of them at least; the toe of one sock hung under Fanni's chin, the only portion of the huge mass that Valerie had been unable to ram in. The belt had gone from being wrapped around Val's neck to being tightly wrapped around Fanni's mouth, and not a thread of fabric was likely to escape its angry grip.

But the gag was just a satisfying side show for Valerie. The main event was how she had bound Fanni. The cord she used was thin, purposely chosen to inflict pain. Rather than using long strands of the rope, Valerie applied it in smaller doses, two or three strands around, cinched to grunting, bone-sawing tightness. And like a mad seamstress, Valerie wove a new set of strictures every few inches the length of Fanni's arms, then up her long legs. She wore leather gloves or surely her palms and fingers would be bloody from the effort of tying the knots into tiny fists of steel, no possibility of slack finding its way into this package. At the end of the long ordeal, both Fanni and Valerie were dripping sweat.

"Stand up, bitch!" Valerie commanded. It seemed an impossible demand, but Fanni was well aware that her very life was on the line. She needed to avoid the tiniest provocation, because it was damn sure that Valerie Morgan was looking for the slightest excuse to bury a blade in her heart. Fanni shook some wet strands of black spaghetti out of her face and pulled her knees to her chest, then flung herself upward. Only to fall right back on her ass. Two attempts later she was able to stand. Her next challenge was to hop over to where Valerie pointed, a spot in the middle of the cell. Fanni had already spotted the pulley hanging from the ceiling, and it was no surprise when it came into play. The rope that dangled from the pulley was tied around Fanni's wrists, and gradually her hands were winched upwards behind her. As her arms became parallel to the floor, Fanni began to bend forward, a victim of the limits of the human body. But she ruefully discovered that the human body could discover new limits when politely asked - Fanni's arms soon were near ninety degrees to the floor beneath her! Valerie's socks and panties did a masterful job of stifling any complaints, of which there were many. Using the toe of her boot, Valerie pushed a wedge-shaped piece of rough wood over to Fanni's feet. "Up you go, Fans," Valerie sang. Otto used his over-muscled arms to lift Fanni up while Valerie positioned the wood under Fanni's toes. There was a brief moment of relief on Fanni's shoulders as she was lifted, but the pulley was quickly adjusted four inches upward to accommodate the four-inch high wedge of wood that now sat beneath the balls of Fanni's bare feet. Being a three-sided affair, the wood had no choice but to offer a pointed edge as a pedestal for our increasingly-wretched heroine.

Valerie cupped a hand under Fanni's chin and lifted her sagging head. "Let's see you escape THAT!" This was a good moment for Valerie Morgan, the humiliated villain now back in command. It was obligatory for her to do some gloating, and Fanni expected nothing less.

Locking eyes, Valerie smiled, the thin grin of the satisfied predator. "I wouldn't get too comfortable, Hall. I'm going to keep you plenty busy." She dropped Fanni's head and did a slow victory lap around her dangling prisoner. "My orders are not to kill you, or to fuck you up too much, but that leaves a lot of room for me to have some fun with you. And I can be very, very creative. "

Fanni was catching snatches of Valerie's one-way conversation between the flashes of black and blue that shot through her pain-addled brain. If you imagined the sound of Valerie's voice the worst torture that Fanni was undergoing, you would be seriously underestimating the physical pain that wracked her body. Not to imply that Fanni wouldn't have minded Valerie shutting the fuck up!

But Valerie was nowhere near done with her smirking diatribe. "Yes, Hall, we kind of need you. It's too late for us to go out and find another model to demonstrate all our fun little contraptions. Yep, you're going to be the star of the show, Fanni Hall."

Fanni hadn't forgotten about the upcoming "tradeshow" that she was scheduled to headline. But, given recent events, she wasn't sure that she would survive that long. What she was unaware of was the amount of daddy's cash that Melody Shipwell had invested in her felonious future. There was no turning back for the girl. People with suitcases full of cash would be arriving in a few days, and Melody needed to make some sizeable transactions. Else daddy would shut down the entire hair-brained (his opinion) operation.

"Well, I'll let you settle in there, Fanni. I'll be back tonight to let your sorry carcass down."

Fanni lifted her head to look at Valerie. Was she kidding? She couldn't leave her here that long! Not a trace of a smile was on that freckled demon's face. Letting her head drop, Fanni steeled herself for the ordeal ahead.

Still barely controlling a hot rage, Valerie Morgan wasn't ready to abandon the sight of her suffering victim. She also wasn't quite ready to consider Fanni's punishment complete. "Hmnn," she said, lifting Fanni's chin up with a single finger. "Seems like a loose end to me. And I have no intention of leaving anything loose, Hall."

Thus, the final gratuitous act of cruelty. A narrow collar was fastened around Fanni's neck. The collar itself innocently soaked up sweat, and was the closest thing to clothing that Fanni wore. The collar had one purpose – to hold the little red "devil's fork" that pointed at the soft flesh under Fanni's chin. The three-tined fork was long enough to force Fanni to raise her head high, but not sharp enough to draw blood without some pressure applied. "Enjoy the view," were Valerie's last words. The cell door slammed, jolting Fanni who had to quickly catch her balance on the wooden wedge.

Maintaining her position was utterly, profoundly, absolutely, totally impossible. That she hadn't immediately collapsed into total surrender - ripping her shoulders from sockets, rupturing her jaw on the sharp points below - was a wonder. But here she was -- a full one minute later -- and still she held out. Wonder of wonders! How she had survived was beyond powers of imagination. But could she hold out another sixty seconds? Another hour? The rest of the day, as threatened? Looking at the ceiling through sweat-stung eyes, she realized her fate was in her own hands. And she had no intention of letting mosquito-brained cretins like Melody Shipwell and Valerie Morgan have the satisfaction of snuffing out her young life. Fanni let out a roar of anger and determination. It escaped her gag like a soft rustle of toilet paper.

With Fanni's downfall came Donna Cole's ascension. No longer low slave on the totem pole, Donna was back in Melody Shipwell's line of fire, and that was no enviable place for a respectable girl to find herself. At least she was out of the damp and dark cellars that she had supposed would be her final resting place. But Melody's sun-drenched bedroom was no improvement over the wretched cell she had recently vacated. At least that dank prison was tranquil. Not so here. The incessant prattle cranked out by Melody had slipped from mildly bothersome to full-blown ear torture.

"Oh, you wait and see what I do to that fucking Fanni Hall if Daddy dies," Melody said, the cherry lilt in her voice betraying her lack of genuine concern for Daddy Shipwell. She was sitting on the edge of her bed, pulling boots on. "I'll skin that bitch alive, an inch at a time. A little half-breed cunt like that, putting such an important man in the hospital. Heaven forbid he doesn't make it, I wouldn't know what to do. I suppose I'd have to take over the business, which would be so much work. Gawd!" She stood up and put a hand on Donna's shoulder. Donna didn't pull away, or move at all. She couldn't, tied as she was to the post at the bottom of Melody's four-poster bed. "I'm so disappointed in you, Donna." Melody pinched a nipple to emphasize her point. "You had a bright future with us. Instead you let a cow like Fanni turn you into a traitor. And right before things were going to get very profitable for us."

It was the third time that Donna had heard the same speech. Being bound to the post the entire night was bad enough, but to have to endure Melody's always self-absorbed drivel was enough to make Donna wish for the dark quietude of the torture chambers.

"But don't worry, Donna, you're still a valuable employee. Well, not an employee, really. More like property. After I sell you to that nice Arab man, I'm going to buy that Ferrari that we looked at. Remember? I'll think of you every time I drive it."

Moving to the bathroom, Melody continued the one-sided conversation as she applied makeup. "I'm going to visit daddy in the hospital. Be a dove and just relax right there until I get back." Donna had no choice in the matter; she was bound the length of her body, then strapped to the bed post itself. She would stay right there until someone with a free pair of hands and a chainsaw decided otherwise. Someone whose hands weren't mashed into little mittens that

crushed fingers into miniature fists. Someone whose body wasn't near-mummified in well-cinched multitudes of hemp cord.

Donna made another attempt to blink the single tress of hair away from where it had fallen in her eye, but the wispy blond nuisance was having none of it. And Melody was still driveling on. "Who knows, Cole, the next time you see me I may be an orphan. But a very wealthy orphan." She gave Donna a kiss on her tiny nose, then practically skipped out of the room humming an unknown tune. Her concern for daddy dearest seemed to have put a little wind beneath her wings. Donna took another stab at the stray lock of hair, shaking her head against the tape around her mouth, tape that also trapped her head to the bed post. The amount of movement was too minor to work the hair away, but just enough to prompt another string of hair to succumb to gravity and fall onto the tip of her nose. The resulting howl of frustration was easily muted by the week's-worth of grubby panties that had been buried in Donna's mouth for just such a purpose.

Teeth-grinding agony had been replaced by mind-dulling boredom. Since their initial retaliation, her vicious foes had switched to a mostly hands-off policy. It was two days of solitude in her cell-sweet-cell of existence. Chained from neck to ankles, yes, but fed three squares and washed like a horse once a day, she was as close to pampered as circumstances allowed. And Fanni even had some entertainment – the satisfying spectacle of how jittery her captors were when they approached their thoroughly restrained prisoner. Valerie and Otto were like children petting a pitbull, ready to retreat at the first sign of trouble. Melody didn't trouble herself with such nonsense, she simply kept her distance and clutched her silly little .22.

There was something ominous in the new routine, a sense of calm before whatever shitstorm was forming. And being fattened like some pre-feast suckling pig did little to lessen the foreboding. Her meals weren't gourmet, or even flavorful, just chicken and rice, chicken and rice, chicken and rice. No spoon or fork was deemed necessary, not while Fanni had her fingers to work with. And the chicken was boneless; there would be no repeat of the Herk cockup, unless Fanni could fashion a weapon from the pile of rice dumped on her cell floor, or the bland boneless chicken breast that topped it.

After days spent in the darkness of her cell, Fanni wasn't ready for the sunlight when it came. She squished her eyes closed and watched the fireworks show on the back of her eyelids. The pull on the leash was persistent, so Fanni stumbled forward in the stilts that these jackasses called boots. They didn't go far, just down a short path that led to a flat cement slab. The slab was a few car lengths long and had a metal post on each end. Between the posts was strung a taut wire that Fanni's leash was attached to. Braving the supernova, Fanni cracked her eyes open and took a quick glance around. Melody Shipwell still held that ridiculous pistol at her side. Valerie looked slightly retarded wearing her basic black leather outfit. Good ol' predictable Otto had his usual hard-on hardly-hidden in his too-tight trousers. But of the four, Fanni had no doubt that her own appearance was the oddest. Besides the knee-high black boots that raised her heels seven inches above ground level, her upper body had been zipped into a black rubber tube that covered

every bit of flesh from knees to shoulders. Her arms were behind her, trapped in the individual sleeves built into the inside of the thing. It was tight – breath-stealing tight. And there was no slippage possible; a strap at the hem, was holding Fanni's knees mashed together and preventing any shifting on that end. On the other end, two straps ran over Fanni's otherwise bare shoulders like a pair of suspenders and held the "dress" up. The unwanted image of her shoulders and head being squeezed out of a toothpaste tube entered Fanni's mind more than once.

But their intentions went beyond a little friendly lampooning. It was exercise time for the mutt and, like a good little puppy, Fanni found her leash attached to the wire that ran above her head, an easy task for a pet already collared and leashed like she was. And like a dog with a history of aggressive behavior, she was also well-muzzled. The broad panel over her mouth was held in place by straps beneath her chin and around her head, and was sufficient to prevent any biting. But it also stopped any bothersome barking, courtesy of the fat leather knot that filled Fanni's mouth to the full extent of the definition "full."

"Walk," was the full set of instructions that Valerie gave, so Fanni walked. Being the wise and experienced hand at this, Fanni understood that her only alternative to walking was to stand still, and that act would have negative consequences of the severe variety. At the end of the run she stopped, unable to go further. "Turn around, fuckbrain! Keep walking." Valerie did have a way about her, a real people person. But give her credit, she made her point without wasting verbiage. Fanni made the turn, no easy task with her thighs locked together. Then on she went, straight ahead until it was time to turn and begin a new lap. Then another and another. At some point she noticed Melody taking her skinny ass back up to the house, and Otto sitting in the wet grass. She also noticed that Valerie had come into possession of a bullwhip, which dangled from her right hand. Now she understood what would happen if she decided not to tolerate this nonsense. Without thinking, she picked up the pace a little. They walked her for an hour, with one short break. The next day it was a ninety minute walk, the following day two hours. The results were as expected – Fanni was now an expert at the useless art of walking in high heels.

But a far more menacing development awaited Fanni, leaving her dazed at the sudden change. They had come for her in the morning, and minutes later she found herself strung up in the center of a large room. Her limbs were spread wide to the four corners of a large square frame. She was naked, and unable to protest that fact due to the enormous black ball strapped into her mouth. A shallow metal container ten feet in front of her held a pile of red hot coals, along with some nasty-looking fireplace pokers whose tips were turning an angry red color. An array of whips were settled innocently on a table next to the grill, their potential greater than their exploits – for the time being! Fanni gave it her best fuck-it-all defiance, but the creepiness of the sight was starting to work at her little noodle. The whips held no mystery, their potential limited only by Fanni's flesh, but she shuddered at the unimaginable ways a hot poker could be applied.

Her arms and legs were spread wide, wrists and ankles cuffed and tied off to the four winches that stretched her to the corners of the frame. She wondered which of her joints would pop free of sockets first, and what it would sound like. Smart money was on the shoulders. No sense imagining what that would feel like. Keeping her head upright was beginning to be a chore, but letting it droop only aimed her eyes at the instruments of torture displayed below. Remaining

conscious became increasingly doubtful, and Fanni wasn't sure if she cared to fight the blackness. She was no quitter, but fainting like a schoolgirl might just be the smartest move.

The door was behind Fanni, and it opened just before she passed out. The sudden intrusion revived her in a way that didn't make sense; suddenly she felt a rush of adrenaline, ready for a battle she was helpless fight. It was the normal gaggle of villains, this time adding a thoroughly restrained and quieted Donna Cole to their ranks. Valerie led the way, her overconfidence back to normal, her recent embarrassment at Fanni's hands a minor footnote in her own mind. Otto followed, then came their leader, who had the loop end of a leash around one hooked finger. The other end of the leash attached to a chain which was stretched in a line between Donna's nipples, the chain itself anchored by way of two rather toothy little clamps. Melody needn't look back at her charge to see if she was keeping pace – the slightest little tug of her finger ensured that she was.

"How's it hanging, Fanni?" Melody started with, an obvious (if not witty) taunt.

"She looks like she's ready to snap apart." Valerie was feeling more talkative than usual, her normal form of communication a snarl or growl.

Otto's eyes ping-ponged from Fanni's bare tits to Donna's bare tits. "Enjoying the sight?" Melody asked him. "For sure," he replied, sucking in some slobber.

Fanni realized that a similar scene had played out some days earlier – or was it weeks? But the roles had been reversed then, with Fanni the restrained spectator and Donna the main act. The white corset that crushed Donna's torso looked almost cartoonish – the human form couldn't really be manipulated into such a state, could it? Purple trim announced the beginning and end of the corset, where breasts and hips seemed to burst out to their normal proportions. With a little jerk of her finger, Melody guided Donna to a spot against the wall. "Up you go Donna. Tippy toes," Melody sang. Donna had no choice in the matter, as Melody had reached up and clipped the leash to a hook high up on the wall. Actually rising up on tip-toes was a questionable feat, her heels already lifted six inches in the tight shoes. But the encouragement was strong enough, and Fanni observed the tiniest of space between stiletto heels and concrete floor. It would only be a question of time before leg muscles gave out, but for the time being Donna had clearly chosen to keep her nipples intact.

Melody walked away from Donna and picked up a thin cane from the table. "Let's figure out where to start, okay Fanni? Ass or tits? Belly or thighs?"

"Straight up to her snatch," Valerie said with a cold smile.

Melody giggled. "Or should we start with a hot poker up the ass? Yes, that's where we'll start. Do you want the honors, Otto?"

Fanni saw the slight mouth flinch on the pea-brained brute, who stood frozen. The room was silent for a short eternity. "You moron," Valerie hissed. She gave Otto a shove and picked up the

poker herself. "Fuuuuuck!" she yelled, dropping the hot poker to the floor. She shook her wounded hand wildly. "Fuck shit!" she added, dancing in pain.

"Use the mitts," Melody said calmly. Valerie ignored her and took her pain out on Otto, who withstood a flurry of one-handed slaps with little more than a sideways glance at his attacker. "Enough," Melody said. "Just relax, Val. Go put some ice on it." Valerie headed for the exit, steam exiting her ears, the smell of burnt palm flesh left in her wake.

Fanni would have enjoyed the ridiculous ineptitude of her captors much more if she hadn't been stretched to her breaking point. Melody's voice put any light thoughts to rest. "Don't worry, hon, she'll be right back and we can get back to business." Melody let those words sink in, then added. "Or maybe we can come to an agreement." Thirty seconds of silence followed. Christ, is she waiting for me to answer, Fanni wondered. Finally, Melody continued. "Our guests will begin arriving tonight, and over the next five days you're going to be busy modeling a variety of wonderful outfits and some very clever restraints. You do have the body for it, Hall, but don't let that go to your head. You're not the star here, my creations are. Got it?"

Fanni eyed Melody, but couldn't be bothered to waste energy with even a half nod.

"All this," Melody continued, sweeping her hand at the whips and pokers, "Is what lies in store for you if you decide to act ... mischievously. You'll do exactly what we say to do, nothing more, nothing less. You won't try to communicate with the guests, or even make eye contact with them. We'll be watching you closely the entire time. Do you need a little sample of what happens if you disobey us?"

This time Fanni was bothered to waste a little energy, so she shook her head from side to side.

"Good girl," Melody cooed.

Valerie stormed back into the room at that moment, her right hand bandaged. She grabbed one of the thick mitts, but Melody interrupted the redhead's eagerness. "Not today, Val. Fanni's given me her word that she'll behave while our guests are here."

"Fuck!" Valerie replied.

CHAPTER FIVE

They began arriving in the early afternoon, a regular parade of jackassed misfits. Black seemed to be their preferred color, which they wore on every manner of fantastically odd clothing. The first to pass by was a cowboy-looking cretin, who politely tipped his Stetson as he slowly walked past Fanni. The little line of drool that slid down his chin betrayed his pervish nature. Next came a greasy Chinaman with a laughable comb-over. Then a yuppie couple who walked a poodle in front of them. The poodle sniffed her leg while Mrs. Yuppie tickled one of Fanni's nipples. The husband, out of deference to his wife's presence, acted more or less uninterested. Dracula himself walked by, a grey-skinned vulture wearing a black cape and a

gallon of Crisco in his hair. He stopped in front of Fanni and muttered some gibberish before skulking away. On they came, a motley horde of dipshits with an abundance of cash and a scarcity of scruples. Not exactly the jet set, this lot. They all made a show of leering at Fanni, though a few merely winked, an equally lecherous act under the circumstances. The lone exception was the last guest to arrive, fashionably late by a few hours. She was the youngest looking of all the guests, a tall, thin beauty, dressed in an expensive gown. Her long black hair glistened, the strands so fine that Fanni imagined silkworms busily at work manufacturing them. Unlike the others, she strolled past Fanni with nary a sideways glance, a surprisingly unnerving moment for some reason. It was the ultimate power display, ignoring the unfortunate insect that had managed to get itself stuck to a post. Defying a firm knuckle-rapping (or its real life equivalent), Fanni ignored Melody Shipwell's warnings and turned her head to watch the girl saunter toward the house. A glimpse of Melody walking out onto the porch and Fanni snapped her head back to the correct position, a good little slave looking straight ahead as "requested."

I might remind my readers (if any remain) that a life of slavery is not all puppies and kittens, flowers and rainbows. Before you commit to a career of chattel-ery, take a moment to reflect on something as mundane as a blade of grass. Now multiply that by a thousand, and you'll have an idea of the mind-flattening tedium that comes with the territory. After some hours of standing upright with nothing to ponder but the ocean of grass and trees in her line of sight, Fanni was more than a wee bit bored. The old grey matter was verging on rigor mortis. But there was nothing for it but to endure. For how long? Another minute? Another hour? Another day? What did it matter, things simply moved along at whatever pace Melody Shipwell chose. And if she wasn't out here in the fresh air, a rather less-ventilated room awaited her down in the cellars.

Two hours later Fanni found herself the center of attention. Melody had led a pack of guests out from the house, and they surrounded Fanni like hyenas around a young antelope. "She looks like Gwendoline, tied to the post like that," a female voice said. There was a muttering of agreement. Whoever this idiot Gwendoline was, Fanni sincerely hoped that she hadn't been bound to a post as tightly as she was. Fanni's ankles had been bound with thirty feet of brown hemp, as had her knees. Her wrists and elbows were behind the metal post, tied to the considerable extent of Otto's strength. More rope circled her body and the post, grinding her spine hard up against the post. And of course her knees and ankles were likewise attached to the pole. Both hands had been stuffed into tight little pouches that left ten wiggly fingers useless to cause mischief.

But it wasn't Fanni being showcased, it was the merchandise she wore. The black corset was a beauty, and very well-made. And very tight! It seemed the thing was bypassing flesh and bone and squeezing her lungs directly. "This is just one of the many corsets we have available," Melody said, and we have a variety of colors in each model." Melody situated herself next to Fanni and went on. "As a matter of fact, everything you see here is for sale, corset, shoes, ballgag, everything."

"How about them panties she's wearing?" It was the Dracula-looking creep speaking. "How much?"

"Uh, well, you can buy those at any fine lingerie shop," Melody responded, surprised by the question.

"No! I mean them panties she has on right now. How much?"

Melody winced. "We can discuss a price later, sir."

"Is this girl American," a male voice asked. "Or Mexican?"

Melody ignored the question. She tapped Fanni's cheek with a finger. "This gag has a unique design. Besides the fat red ball you see, there are two smaller balls attached, one in each cheek. It takes a little more effort to insert the gag, but it is worth the effort if you prefer a well-stuffed mouth."

The gag was held in by a multitude of straps that circled Fanni's head in every direction. Despite the crushing embrace of the straps, her cheeks puffed out freakishly.

"Very clever," someone said. "How much for it?"

"You all have a catalog with prices waiting in your rooms," Melody responded.

"How much for the girl?" That question got Fanni's attention. And surprise, it was the tall girl asking, the one who had made such a show of ignoring her earlier. She must have caught a little peek after all.

"Not for sale," Melody snapped. "She's just modeling. Besides, she would be nothing but trouble ..."

Another voice broke in. "Don't say everything's for sale unless you mean everything."

"I think she means," the tall girl said, "that she hasn't set a price yet." She locked eyes with Melody. "I hope you don't expect to start a bidding war on this pathetic thing. God knows how fat she is without that corset, or what her teeth are like behind that toy gag." This brought some laughs from the spectators. "And I assure you that she wouldn't cause me a lick of trouble. Not after a few hours of training." She took a step forward and made eye contact with Fanni. "Don't eyeball me, worm!" Fanni shot her eyes downward. "See," the girl said, finally smiling. "She's trainable." Fanni knew she lost that round.

Melody stepped between them. "Regardless, she is not being sold. That's all there is on that subject. We have plenty of things to sell, though."

"What's the girl's name?" someone asked. "She looks Oriental."

Desperate to change the subject, Melody began to answer. "Her name is Fan..." A sharp nudge from Valerie halted her. Melody's voice sharpened. "Her name is unimportant."

And it was in that moment that the shutters flew open, the light finally flooding into Fanni's befuddled noggin. They didn't want anyone knowing her name for a simple reason, the same reason they would never put her up for sale. It was the bodies, Herk and the others. Dead at the hands of one Frances Hall, but in the eyes of the law it was Melody Shipwell and gang who would answer for them. And it was inconceivable that a loose end like Frances Hall would be set out into the world, even if it was some bordello in Thailand. No, her destiny was the same as a common bag of fertilizer. The realization sharpened Fanni's mind to a needle-fine point of clarity. She needed a plan, and she needed one fast.

As the crowd moved back toward the house, Valerie stayed behind to check Fanni's bindings, carefully inspecting each set of ropes. It was ludicrous to Fanni that her ropes need checking at all. A quick glance should be enough. Even if she undid all the knots, it would take all night to untangle herself from the miles of rope.

"So far so good, Hall. But I know you're just waiting for the chance to fuck up." Valerie hissed. Her face broke into a cold smile. "Personally, I hope you do. Melody will let me loose and I'll take you apart, an inch at a time. You have my word on that."

The words formed in Fanni's mind, words so foul and personal that she was willing to risk Valerie's retaliation by shouting them at the redheaded asshole. As it was, she couldn't even remove her teeth from their firm grip on the ball, and her tongue seemed to have gone missing, lost somewhere in the back of her over-stuffed mouth. So she "chose" to remain silent.

Valerie took Fanni's head in both hands and straightened it. "Look straight ahead, nowhere else. I'll be watching from a window." And she was gone. In a juvenile (and wildly pathetic) act of defiance, Fanni turned her head slightly and mentally stuck her tongue out at Valerie's back. But the reality of her current situation was better demonstrated by the fact that she quickly returned her head to the mandated position.

Under ordinary circumstances Fanni would be far less inclined to cause Donna Cole this much grief. Yeah, the girl had her flaws, but they were "sisters of the cell" after all, which seemed to call for at least some iota of comraderie. But her sisterliness was slowly ebbing, retreating as steadily as her stamina and concentration. Melody had play-acted some great kindness, allowing them to sit through their latest ordeal. But the bench they had been set on was not built for comfort. They faced each other, their bare tushies planted on either end of the bench. The problems began right there, for rather than a plush cushion for their behinds, a seat of coarse sandpaper had been provided. Their legs were spread a few feet wide, their feet tied to one another sole-to-sole. The centerpiece of the little game they concentrated on was a rigid tube that ran mouth to mouth. The tube was clear, and housed a small metal ball that had free rein to travel its length. The object, though, was to keep that marble-sized ball dead center in the tube, in a two-inch area that was free of the metals strips that otherwise lined the tube. While Fanni might be considered inexpert at this contest, Donna Cole could be called massively inept. And the penalty for bad play was harsh. The first jolt had actually been the worst, a steady sizzle in their

nipples that seemed to go on forever. It was Fanni who finally righted the ship and worked the ball back to its home base in the center of the infernal tube, doing this while Donna's head bobbed and shook. Both girls realized the mega-serious cost of failure, and how wildly difficult it was to re-center the ball while being shocked in their tits.

They had been set up like this an hour earlier, a small diversion for the guests before they were served dinner. By now they were probably dining on whatever roadkill that ilk preferred. There had been much merriment among the throng of cackling morons as Melody explained how the game was to be played. She also explained some of the embellishments deemed necessary to make it more competitive. Fanni listened in escalating gloom. The worst (at the moment) of those embellishments sat politely between her thighs, so close that it scraped pubic hairs. It was upright, maybe six inches high, and was best described as a wooden cactus. It would have been unwise to move at all on her sandpaper perch, but with that sharp reminder between her legs, Fanni made sure not to slide forward even a fraction. With her legs spread in such an unladylike manner, the damned thing posed a very real threat. There was also the matter of the gag. Besides being an anchoring point for the copper rod, the inflatable rubber blob in her mouth had a trick of its own. Simply put, if a tugging pressure was applied on the rod, the gag attempted to grow to a size that defied the dimensions of her mouth – picture an expanding bowling ball! And since the rod was a solid piece, if Fanni pulled, Donna experienced the same jaw-jacking result. So why would either of them choose that little nastiness? It had something – everything! – to do with the sit-up position they maintained, as if they were halfway to that elusive sit-up that would never quite happen. Fanni glared at Donna, who was nowhere near holding up her end of that bargain, though to give her credit her abs were visibly quivering with some serious effort.

The cell they currently occupied was warm, plus another ten degrees. The sweat that burned her eyes made this exercise all the more demanding for Fanni. She watched the ball roll toward Donna again. Quickly - and very carefully – Fanni ducked her chin a bit to compensate for another of Donna's spasms. And then the rubber ballooned in her mouth again as Donna leaned backwards to ease the strain on her stomach. If it wasn't for the straps that surrounded her head, it seemed certain to Fanni that her head would burst. But those straps did a wonderful job of ensuring that the outer dimensions of her noggin would remain the same even as the inner dimensions widened. A look at Donna told the story, her cheeks puffed out like a blowfish about to do whatever a blowfish does. Intuitive as she was, Fanni knew her own appearance mirrored Donnas.

The heat in the room, combined with the wee exertions demanded of her, had left Fanni little more than a wet rag. Perspiration, or whatever better described the rivers that ran down her body, was staining the floor below her. The sandpaper took on a new quality below wet flesh, more like crushed glass. Even the tiniest of movements took a toll down in Derriere Town. The bottoms of Fanni's wet feet squished against Donna's own dripping feet. Both girls had their wrists high up their backs, between shoulder blades, tied with too much rope to waste any time or energy struggling with. Two ropes dropped from the ceiling and snagged their feet, holding their legs slightly up, and enforcing that "half sit-up." At first glance it might seem the rope allowed some small slack to find relief in. But that slack simply made it more difficult to maintain a steady perch on the bench. Her brain commanded her ass to stay put, but Fanni's body

was in full rebellion – it was every muscle and tendon for itself. Little more than a minor fidget was all it took to remind Fanni that there was a prickly threat a hairs-width (literally!) from her girlie bits. Time crept by, if it was passing at all. And the whole time that merry little marble mocked them. It seemed life-like as it juked and jaked back and forth, impishly teasing the two silly girls trying to thwart its righteous attempts to zap them. The ball would roll slowly in one direction, then suddenly reverse itself and make a bee-line back the way it came. The wires that dangled from Donna's nipples were heaving, a sign that her body was giving out – again. Fanni braced herself, waiting for the inevitable shocks. Her own legs were cramping, and her stomach muscles were trying to come up with new words for agony.

Upstairs in the large dining room, Melody held court, a young princess surrounded by a legion of lepers (in her mind). The food had been catered; Melody didn't know how to cook, nor did Valerie, and Daddy's servants hadn't been employed due to the nature of the event. None among them was concerned about Fanni or Donna. They understood the amazing limits of the human body. They also knew how to dispose of a body if things went south. A middle aged bleached blonde tried to dominate conversation early on, but after a few insults from the yuppie couple she shut up and went into a pout. The cowboy wannabe bragged and bragged, and was oblivious to any attempts to shut him up. Old Dracula made things awkward, muttering nonsense whenever there was a break in conversation. The Chinaman never said a word. As the wine bottles emptied the bullshit got bullshittier, everyone trying to outdo the others with how cleverly cruel they could be. Except that tall mystery, the model-looking specimen who seemed far too cool for this crowd. Truth was, she was too cool. Younger than the rest (save Melody and Valerie), her air of indifference to all things and people was not simply posture - she really didn't give a shit about most things. Which didn't mean she lacked any interests. Her pursuits were specific, and once past the posh exterior she flaunted, had the same stink as her less-refined dinner-mates. She liked girls. She liked them at her mercy, willing or (preferably) unwilling to do the things demanded of them. It was a simple thing to get them to do as she pleased, so simple that she found herself increasingly bored by it all. Which is why she was on the constant lookout for some savory morsel to rekindle the flame that burned due south of her navel. The blonde down in the dungeon was typical of the current crop of sweet young things that passed as human chattel these days. Pretty enough, no doubt, but so fragile that there would be no sport in breaking her. "Pre-broken," she liked to say. But the other one, the dark-haired beauty, that one was a rarity. She recognized the clear eyed look, the glint of defiance that remained even after whatever cruelty had already been inflicted on her. No, she would have to be broken in stages, and over a long period of time. And she would make an oh-so-nubile bedmate when required, which might be often if she proved up to the task. But how to pry her from the clutches of this ridiculous little pup, Melody Shipwell? For whatever reasons, the girl wasn't for sale. And it made no sense that Shipwell would keep her for herself, that wasn't the business she was in. She was strictly retail, storefront sales of flesh and goods. It was tempting to just steal the girl. But there was the little problem of Daddy Shipwell, who was well known, well connected, and very well feared. It probably wouldn't do to trifle with his baby girl. On the other hand, rumors of his demise were being whispered, albeit by the seed-brained houseguests, not by Melody or her crew.

The convincing began over drinks after dinner. Problem was, Melody proved stubborn at all attempts at convincement. And equally recalcitrant at the mention of wildly large amounts of the

green stuff, amounts that might not have actually been available. Melody simply shook her head, not even bothering to voice her reasons. Her redheaded toadie looked on, not having the good sense to hide her smirk as she watched the "negotiation." She needs an attitude adjustment, the girl mused, imagining how that adjustment might be made to happen.

It wasn't money that turned the tide, it was alcohol, a bottle of red wine and a few glasses of brandy. Melody made a deal, simply to get the damned fool off her back so she could enjoy a nice buzz. Even in her addled state, Melody wouldn't relent on selling the girl. But she had decided to allow the skinny bitch a few hours with Fanni, to do whatever her ilk did with their tongues and twats.

It had been left to Valerie and Otto to see to arranging the visit. True to her malicious nature, Valerie did her best to sabotage things. She hadn't liked the idea to begin with, and she especially resented Melody giving in to this witch-looking lesbian. After securing Fanni in one of the guest bedrooms, Valerie fetched the girl, walking behind her as they neared the room, Otto trailing from a short distance. "What are you planning to do in there?" she asked, a snicker slipping out behind the words.

The girl didn't hesitate. "I'm going to inspect her pink little tongue with my pink little pussy, and I'm going to do it repeatedly."

Otto coughed, or maybe choked a little. Valerie shook her head, a disapproving perfect hetero. She also disapproved of the bitch's condescending tone. But Fanni's little pink tongue was going to be quite inaccessible to this haughty bitch, a fact Valerie knew. "Have fun with that," was all she said as she unlocked the door.

"I have to search you first," Valerie said with a half-smile.

"Bullshit," was the reply.

"Melody's orders," Valerie said. "No search means no licky-licky for you. Don't matter to me one way or the other."

The girl looked down at Valerie. "Make it quick, and watch where you put those chicken bones you call fingers."

"Hands against the wall, and spread your legs, hon."

She took her time, running her fingers slowly across flesh and expensive black silk. She lifted the long skirt and probed lightly with the tip of a single finger, having a little fun with the pompous bitch. "Seems to be clean," Valerie finally proclaimed. "But maybe Otto should double-check."

"For sure," Otto said.

Even as Otto stepped towards her, the girl removed her palms from the wall and straightened her dress. "You've had your fun. Now open the door or I'll complain to your employer."

"Lighten up, sweetie," Valerie snickered. Otto cracked his knuckles.

Valerie opened the door, then waved an arm towards the bed that Fanni was splayed out on. The girl stepped in and the door was closed behind her, with the unmistakable 'click' of a lock following. Fanni lifted her head to see what was going on, but the visitor was ignoring her. Shit, what's her deal, Fanni wondered. Ignore me? Buy me? Ignore me? What is it? But right now the girl was stretching her arms above her head, her eyes scanning the walls and ceilings. After a few minutes of checking for cameras or listening devices, the girl leaned over Fanni. She shook her head, but with a smile. The redhead thought she was a prankster, did she? Fanni was spread-eagled widely to the corners of the iron bed frame, each wrist and ankle metal-cuffed to a corner. An ideal position for what she had in mind, the girl thought. But Valerie had added quite a few roadblocks to any completion of that desire. The centerpiece was the metal chastity belt, padlocked on and with two plugs rammed home. And the harness gag also was secured by a padlock, Fanni's "pink little tongue" hidden by a fat red ball between her teeth.

Sitting on the bed, the girl took measure of the pinioned girl beside her. Even stretched out like she was, it was clear she had a pair of A-1 tits. And long legs on an athletic body, a truly fine piece of flesh. Her skin was flawless, her eyes clear and curious. That idiot Melody Shipwell had no idea what she had in this girl, and deserves to lose her. Which she intended to make happen.

"I've heard some rumors about you," the girl said. "Apparently you're a regular spitfire. Even that fat hulk Otto is afraid of you." She began to tease one of Fanni's nipples with the softest fingertip she had ever felt. "Let's get you in the mood a bit."

Mood for what, Fanni thought. Uh-oh.

While one nipple stiffened at the touch of a finger, the other was soon erecting itself at the flick of a tongue tip. Surveying the results the girl spoke. "Everything about you is just a little too good to be true. Are you an alien? Oh, let's get that gag off of you."

That's gonna be a trick, Fanni thought. It was secured at the back with a padlock. The girl lifted a knee up and fiddled with a garter strap, pulling free a small pouch attached to the back of one strap. Three skinny pins were slipped from the pouch. Fanni's head was lifted and the girl went to work on the padlock that held the straps together at the base of Fanni's neck. Less than sixty seconds later the lock was freed. The straps were loosened and the ball was pulled out, with more than a little effort. "Good lord," the girl said as she plucked a slimy wad of silk from Fanni's mouth. "I hope these aren't from that redhead's ass." They were, a pair of black panties that Fanni had been savoring for the past hour.

Before she could make a peep, a hand was locked over Fanni's mouth. "Keep your voice low. I'm sure that at least one of those jackasses is right outside the door. Understand?" Fanni nodded. The hand slowly moved away.

"What's your name," the girl asked.

"Carole Hill," Fanni lied, not sure why. But she sure-as-shit didn't trust this loony.

"Well, Carole, you and I are going to come to an understanding tonight. But first we have a little business to take care of. Ever been with a girl before?"

If it had been possible to squirm, Fanni would have. "Sorry. Straight as a ruler edge. Maybe Valerie can take care of you."

With a grin the girl brushed this aside. "No experience necessary, sweetie. Just make that tongue dance when I tell you to."

"No thanks," Fanni replied. "Plus my tongues a bit tired from trying to keep Valerie's knickers from sliding down my throat. Maybe some other time."

"No time like now, and I'll have no argument from you." The voice and demeanor had quickly reverted to a more natural tone, a tone of absolute superiority, of master addressing slave. She slipped on top of Fanni, knees on either side of Fanni's armpits. She held one of the lock picks in front of Fanni's eyes. "Want one of these? Your ticket out of here, if you have half a brain."

"You ... there's no way ..." Fanni sputtered, then got it out. "Fuck you. I don't trust you."

"That's too bad. You're gonna put that tongue to work whether you trust me or not. And if you put a little effort into it you're gonna leave this room with a nice set of lock picks to play with." Leaning close enough that Fanni felt the girl's warm breath on her mouth, she went on. "Not a bad deal, really." She grabbed Fanni's head with both hands and locked her lips against Fanni's. It wasn't a passionate kiss, it was a kiss of pure dominance, the predator marking her territory in a manner. Before she could complain the girl had moved, and Fanni's mouth now had another set of lips to contend with.

The deed was done. Fanni had no way of knowing to what degree she had satisfied the girl. Her effort was half-hearted at best, but it seemed the girl was off on her own little ride, obviously turned on by something. That something was the blissful prospect of owning the flawless creature below her, of the months she would spend breaking her.

The girl was leaning on her, an elbow on her right breast. Her cheeks were pink from exertion. "Do they check your hair every day?"

"What?" Fanni didn't understand.

"Your hair. Do they check it for hidden things, like little lock picks that might have gotten lost in there?"

"No. Well, sometimes they wash my hair."

"We'll just have to take a chance, won't we," the girl said, using a small piece of black tape to attach the little pouch to a lock of hair near Fanni's neck. "You'll have to experiment with which pick to use. Don't jam it in the lock, just lightly feel around for something inside that moves. Shipwell didn't splurge on the locks, they're pretty simple things, so you should be able work it out."

Fanni's heart was pounding. Did she really have an opportunity to get away? Maybe this is a trick. But this was the first time in days that she felt a spark of hopefulness.

"Thanks," Fanni whispered, aware of the absurdity of thanking the person who had just abused her in such a degrading way.

"Sorry kid, but these gotta go back in." The girl held Valerie's still-slick panties between two fingers, like she was holding a blood worm. "Open."

Again, the voice brokered no debate, but Fanni chanced it. "Wait. What's your name?"

"Carole Hill," she answered with a grin, obviously wise to Fanni's lie. "But you'll call me Madame."

Never, Fanni thought. I'll call her a lot of things before I call her "Madame," none of them flattering. The panties went in her mouth, ending any possible debate on the subject, and soon the ballgag was strapped back on, Madame careful to lock it precisely as it had been earlier.

"It's up to you to get yourself free of this house," Madame said. "Once you get outside I can offer some help. There's a wire fence circling this property, but if you go about twenty yards up the driveway, cut into the woods to your left and keep going until you find the fence. My man has cut a nice hole in the wire. Keep going straight to the road. You'll see a young man waiting there with a vehicle to get you away from here. Don't worry, he'll be there day and night. He's a rather loyal boy. A bit scary looking, but he's as gentle as a lamb."

Madame rose and stretched her long frame, her eyes following the curves of Fanni's widely-splayed body. She straightened her dress, eyes still cataloging the sight before her. I guess she isn't ignoring me anymore, Fanni thought.

The details of her escape could be called "excitingly mundane." Less than eight hours from the time Madame had left her, Fanni was on the run, naked as the day she was born, but free. The soon-to-be-unemployed Valerie Morgan had cuffed her to a cot in a cell that was less bleak than her normal quarters, for reasons Fanni would never discover. Leather cuffs trapped her arms to the top of the cot, and her feet were likewise cuffed to the bottom. By stretching her body, Fanni was able to (barely) reach her hands into her hair and snag the little set of picks. After hours of ultra-careful probing with the picks, fearful each second of dropping one, one little padlock opened. Followed in relatively quick succession by the other wrist cuff and the two ankle cuffs. The lock on the cell door proved trickier, but desperate persistence paid off, and Fanni quickly

padded down the corridors of Dungeon Shipwell, then up into the house and out through the kitchen door. Not a person had been encountered.

The eerie pre-dawn light greeted Fanni once free of the house, plus a blast of cold air that didn't put the least damper on the quickening beat of her heart. She guessed it to be 4:30, maybe 5:00 AM. The guests probably wouldn't even be awake for a few hours still. Fanni ran crouched low, easily able to see the driveway in the gray light. The ballgag was still locked in her mouth, along with the glob of panties behind it – Fanni hadn't bothered wasting time with it.

Counting her paces, Fanni guessed at twenty yards, then darted left. She had a moment of vague déjà vu, recalling the last time she had tried to escape up this road, and the mayhem (and failure) that had ensued. There still was too little light to make out the fence until she ran into it. A few minutes of scouting its length and the opening appeared, less a hole than a ragged tear. It was rather thin and jagged, which Fanni grimaced at. She squeezed through, not at all thankful that she didn't wear anything that was going to snag on the sharp edges. It was another short sprint through the woods until she came into the open. Straight ahead, and not fifteen yards away was the road. She saw the van right away, but she didn't see the behemoth leaning on the front of it, just the red tip of his cigarette. Fanni didn't want anything to do with the giant, but she did want the van.

She maintained the element of surprise until the last second, but the ape turned toward her just as Fanni closed in on him. He's got good hearing, Fanni mused, let's see if he's got iron balls. She aimed her ankle for dead center, the time-honored classic of a kick in the nuts always a winner. Except this time. The monster didn't even blink, just kept his arms folded across his chest, cigarette hanging from his mouth. Fanni, on the other hand, dropped like a sack of onions. She screamed into her gag, her ankle sending waves of agony up her leg. Did this shithhead have iron balls? Probably a metal jockstrap, Fanni realized. Crap! The world was catching on to her tricks way too soon.

The ape reached down and grabbed Fanni by her hair. It didn't take much of an effort for Fanni to escape that clutch, since her hair was strands of wet spaghetti from hours of exertion followed by a bracing run. But the struggle was far from over. Besides being the size of a redwood, the brute was surprisingly quick. He pursued Fanni as she skittered along the wet grass, trying to get to her feet. Her ankle was recovering quickly, apparently not shattered as she had originally thought. If she could get a head of steam up she could outrun this ape, that she was certain of. But he kept stabbing at her as she twisted and flipped around the ground. It was a bit of luck that allowed Fanni to make her dash, just a small slip of the monster's foot on the wet ground, enough for him to briefly lose his balance. And enough time for Fanni to rise and send her naked ass on a sprint down the road. It was folly for the ape to pursue her, but he did and Fanni took full advantage of that foolishness. When she had gauged his speed, Fanni slowed her pace just enough to allow the brute to think he might catch her. The further they ran, the closer Fanni allowed him to get. Both of them were huffing and puffing, Fanni mostly doing it for show. Despite her stopped-up mouth, Fanni still had plenty of lungs on the cigarette-smoking bodybuilder. After a mile, Fanni made her move. She stopped in her tracks and bent down with her hands on her sides. Her pursuer slowed to a walk and approached to within ten feet, his chest

heaving. "You give up, girl?" he sputtered. Fanni straightened up, flipped him the bird, and darted to the other side of the road, then sprinted back in the direction of the van. "Oh, fuck," she heard him mutter as she raced off. That was the reaction she was hoping for, likely verification that the keys were in the van's ignition.

They were.

Alexander T. Shipwell, well-loved millionaire philanthropist and murderous gun-running degenerate, was found dead two weeks from the day Fanni Hall made her slightly-daring escape. It wasn't the injuries from his car accident that killed him, it was the fire that burned his mansion to the ground. Or maybe the series of explosions that sent pieces of the house flying in every direction before it turned to ashes. Either way, he was dead, enough body parts recovered to make an identification. The body of his daughter, local beauty queen Melody Shipwell, was never found and it was unclear if she died in the fire or had vanished of her own volition. Once the facts became known – that the Shipwell Mansion was a storage depot for illegal weapons – nobody really cared to investigate. Speculation was that the spoiled girl was living on some lush tropical island, bags of illicit cash lining her closets.

She was on an island, in a way. Long Island, New York to be precise. She had been "invited" there by the same ape-looking thug that Fanni had eluded earlier. Melody had shared a car trunk with Valerie Morgan for the frightfully long commute to the secluded estate. The classic "69" position was deemed proper for the best friends, and a bulwark of ropes and straps maintained that position in the strictest sense. Melody's pert little beauty queen nose was currently in the undignified process of sniffing Valerie's nether regions, while Valerie reciprocated at the other end. Both were naked, though various scraps of their clothing had been fed into uneager mouths and were being used to maintain the silence in the steamy car trunk, their various squeaks and grunts unable to rise above the roar of the road passing by below them.

Melody Shipwell, blonde and curvy, would bring Madame a nice suitcase of cash, probably from some Middle Eastern perv who sought an American blonde as a prestige builder. But a redhead like Valerie Morgan, skinny and freckled as she was, seemed destined to some African outpost, where life was rough, but usually mercifully short. Before they were put up for bidding, there was the small matter of properly breaking them down to more manageable property. Melody would get the standard treatment, harsh but not likely to mark or maim her precious flesh. Less money was at stake with Valerie, so her training was to be more severe.

Melody would remain as near a virgin as the day she arrived at Madame's dungeons. The same wouldn't be true of Valerie, who spent her evenings attempting the impossible – satisfying the sexual appetite of the primitive ape that Madame considered her right hand man. Gorilla was his name, an apt moniker for a creature of his size and visage. This brute liked to casually go about his business while his victim was bound into the most excruciatingly impossible positions. It was only after Gorilla finally exhausted himself into slumberland that Valerie might catch a few winks herself. Then it was into Madame's clutches. The torture devices were cunningly designed to bring the most agony over the longest period, but without causing that wee accident

that one might never wake from. Taken to the very edge of the cliff, but never allowed to fall from it.

Melody was gone. The skinny rubber sausage casing she had been stuffed into had been shoehorned into a heavier leather sheath, this one strapped to eye-popping extremes by the ten incorporated belts. Her head and all that prized yellow hair was out of sight, crushed by the strict leather helmet strapped into place. A size-8 leather plug had been hammered into her mouth, though Madame had attempted a size-9 first. No one had ever tasted a size-10, so she hadn't bothered trying that colossus. The stiffly-sheathed body had been dropped into a long wooden box, which was nailed shut. The ride to the private airport would be brief, but the flight across the ocean would be many hours. Like usual, Madame had some reservations about losing a slave. It was never as simple as "good riddance." She had trained these creatures, she had turned them into her slaving pets, her lap kittens. Losing them was like losing a favorite stuffed animal, though less expensive to replace.

Valerie Morgan. It was a rarity that one of her slaves wasn't bid on, but a United Nations worth of miscreants couldn't be bothered to offer even a measly \$5,000. But here she was, still in the expensive gown that Madame had intended to remove before she was shipped out. But there would be no shipping of this pathetic thing. She was pretty enough, but all that red hair and brown freckles had no value to the cockeyed foreigners she dealt with.

"Well, Red, this has to be a new low for you," Madame said with a sneer. "Twenty-two of the world's slimiest millionaires and not one of them offered me a nickel for you."

Valerie was dangling from a chain that attached to her nose ring. Her elbows and wrists were strapped behind her back with thin leather belts. Five more of the straps held her legs together, most of them out of sight under her long gown. Another four straps trapped her arms to her body. The blue high heels matched the color of her gown, and despite the four inch heels, only the toes of the shoes maintained contact with the cement floor.

Madame circled the unfortunate reject a few times, clearly deciding on the girl's future. "You want her, Gorilla?"

The brute shrugged. "She's all fucked out. Too much work anymore."

Madame stopped directly in front of Valerie, her eyes locked on the shorter girl's. What to do with her? She had nothing to offer of any real value. But she had proven to be more defiant than Melody, and she still maintained some of that insolence. Not the worst thing.

"Take her to the whipping room," Madame said to Gorilla, her eyes never leaving Valerie's. She rarely whipped her slaves before an auction, but Valerie Morgan's unmarked flesh would soon be a thing of the past. Maintaining eye contact she continued. "But make sure you remove that dress. That gown is a lot more valuable than the scarecrow wearing it, apparently."

Yes, this was working out suitably, Madame decided. Valerie had a lot to answer for, her arrogant behavior not the least of it. The leather thongs of the cat, or the thin tip of the cane would reduce Valerie Morgan to her proper state. She smiled at the thought, a tingle running from breast to crotch. That tingle brought to mind something else – someone else. She had heard the name from Melody Shipwell on her first day of captivity: Fanni Hall.

The canned ravioli were terrible, but terribly inexpensive. Fanni ate them straight from the can using a plastic fork. She sat in the open doorway of the van, looking out over the valley below where she was parked. She was in Ohio, living out of the van that she had "borrowed" months ago. She was semi-destitute, making a few dollars working at the world's oldest profession – waitressing. This was not a permanent existence for our hero, just her way of laying low. The faint aroma of high test in the van reminded Fanni every day of what she had wrought on the Shipwell clan. She had skedaddled before the newspapers reported on the results, so there was uncertainty about who might have survived, and who might be looking for her. Fuck 'em all was her attitude.

It would be another few months before Fanni found out that the Shipwells were no more, gone off to whatever Hell would accept them (the old man got the better of that deal). It would be another year before she realized something else: the Shipwells might be gone, but someone else was still looking for her. And she would find it out in a most dreadful way.

Finished!!