



Reluctant Press presents:

A Good Catch

Marie Sweet



ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRISTA HAIGHT

A 'HER TV' E-BOOK

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A Good Catch

by Marie Sweet

Chapter One

I stood looking out of my hotel window, savoring my tenth-story view of San Francisco at night. Sparkling lights on the Golden Gate Bridge amid a kaleidoscope of twinkling streetlamps; at 1:00 in the morning, the rooms in the hotel across from mine were mostly dark, its occupants sleeping. Or out on the town like any normal person would be, I thought. It's a Saturday night, damn it. Here I am in the City by the Bay and I might as well just go to sleep.

At twenty-three years old, I, Marvin Hardington, was in product marketing for a conglomerate headquartered near Boston. I had just graduated from Boston College with a degree in Business, and for the first time in my life, I was not only West of the Mississippi, I was in one of the magical places I had always dreamed of visiting.

And now here I was, except it sure didn't seem like it. I could have been at any hotel in any big city. Yesterday afternoon I had reluctantly accepted my local sales rep's offer to give me a 'tour of the city.' "You'll have a blast", he said. Yeah, right. The guy was nice enough, although a little obsequious, and Pier 39 was a good place for T-shirts, but what I really wanted to do was explore the city by myself.

Tomorrow, I thought. It's all going to be different. Everyone knows San Francisco is a Mecca for liberals like I supposed I was. I grabbed the Yellow Pages from my nightstand, flipped to 'clothing – women.' I studied the ads carefully, trying to discern those that would look favorably – or at least not unfavorably – on my desire to buy some women's clothing. I'd never had the courage to do it before; I was too afraid of what someone might say, or worse, that someone might recognize me. Despite all I had read and the statistical evidence of males with similar desires, I felt like I was a secret agent hiding behind enemy lines, hiding my true identity with the sickening paranoia of what might happen – would happen – if one were caught and exposed.

Over the years I had spent hours surfing the Web, looking at the pictures and fantasizing about what I wanted to buy and wear; I just never had the courage to order anything. I couldn't have anything shipped to me; the damn postman left all packages on the floor in my tenement's mailroom. All of the residents had to paw their way through the pile to figure out what was theirs. I dreaded what would happen if someone saw a Victoria's Secret or Frederick's of Hollywood box addressed to me.

Of course, I also daydreamed of finding a woman who would appreciate and support my predilections. Who would not only understand, but also *want* me to dress. For her and my own pleasure and fun. Occasionally, I had to remove a woman's wet clothing from the building's communal washer, and sometimes it was tantalizing lingerie, like a silky negligee with matching panties, a camisole top, or even a lacy body stocking. Although tempted, I resisted stealing anything; I was just too afraid of what might happen.

Now, my fingers ran through the directory's pages, jumping from 'lamps' to 'linens' and finally reaching another Nirvana, 'lingerie.' I wasn't interested in those one-liner ads, like "Betty and Barbara's Boutique." I wouldn't have the time tomorrow to explore them all, and it seemed likely that stores like these wouldn't be accommodating. My target was those larger ads, with pictures and descriptions of their products; I hoped I could read between the lines and find a friendly store. And there it was, right in front of me in the upper right corner: Anastasia's Attic, on Haight Street. Open from 12 to 4 on Sundays. I would finally be able to satisfy my need, which had started when I was a young boy wrapped up in my grandmother's satin comforter.

I was too excited to sleep; I couldn't wait until Anastasia's opened, couldn't stop thinking about it. For the thousandth time I reviewed my situation, the possibility of detection or even utter embarrassment if they laughed or looked weird at me. What if our sales rep happened to be strolling past the store when I was there? Maybe with his wife shopping for that 'special outfit?' Stop it, I said to myself, I've got to do it. I've waited too long to do this and so what if they think I'm a little odd. I'll never see any of them again and maybe I'll finally be able to have some fun in my hotel room.

The following morning, I prepared myself carefully. I wanted to look nice, but not *too* nice. One thing for sure, I didn't want to stand out a tourist. I threw on a pair of blue jeans and tucked in a striped button-down shirt. It looked a little chilly so I draped a royal blue sweater around my shoulders and headed for the lobby. Little did I know then how my life was about to irreversibly change.

The taxi dropped me at the corner of Haight and Ashbury. Funny, I thought. The intersection sure didn't look anything like what I had expected. Not that I had lived through the Sixties, but the pictures I had seen of long-haired hippies smoking joints and flashing peace signs were nowhere to be seen. Now I saw a slightly off-the-beaten-track shopping and eating district, featuring used clothing stores and various small restaurants serving almost everything exotic: from Mediterranean to Thai to Indian.

Foot traffic was light, I noticed, and I hoped this would translate into a slow day for Anastasia's. There it was, a half-block down the other side of the street. Two large windows on each side of the entrance displaying scantily-clad mannequins wearing corsets and stockings; one of them was wearing a pink baby doll nightie, another looked like a

dominatrix in her tall black boots and bustier. My first inclination was to walk by a couple of times but I summoned my courage and stepped right in, jumping at the sound of a bell that announced my arrival.

I headed to the left, looking around to see who else was in the store and where everything was located. The racks of dresses, skirts and tops were near the front and along the sides and in the rear were shoes, stockings and lingerie. It was everything I was looking for until my eyes passed over a collection of black Gothic dresses, striped tights, and piercing jewelry in the back. I took a deep breath and started trying to look casual while browsing through the dresses, luxuriating in the feel of the satin, silk, and, my favorite, velvet.

I was lost in my reveries, examining a chiffon dress's lining when I was startled by the approach of a tall woman. Tall, at least for me. At 5'4", most people tower over me and she was no exception. She looked to be in her early forties, trim, wearing black pants and a loose red blouse. I felt my blush starting and my mouth go dry.

"Is there anything I can help you with?" she asked.

For a moment I tried to read her mind. Was she taunting me? Or suspicious? I wondered what she'd say if she knew. No, she looked okay, actually relaxed and pleasant, like she was talking to any shopper.

I reached deeply in my memory for my cover story. "Yes, in fact," I said. "I'm looking for an outfit for my girlfriend. I want to surprise her with something pretty from San Francisco for her birthday and, you know, I really would appreciate your help."

"No problem, what's her size?"

"She's a size eight. About a hundred and ten pounds, five foot four." Like me, I thought.

I thought I saw her eyes widen a little like maybe she was already suspicious of me, but she said, "Let's look over here. I saw that you're looking at the dresses – the eights are over here," she said, and turned to start flipping through them. From time to time she asked for my opinion, but nothing looked right. With her back to me she said, "What kind of outfit are you looking for?"

"Something sexier. Like velvet, or something." I paused and decided to press my luck. "But, maybe it would help if you showed me things that you think are sexy. You know, as a woman and all."

We finally selected a sleeveless velvet 'little black dress.' I snuck a feel of its lining; it felt equally as marvelous as the velvet. It had a small sprinkle of rhinestones at the 'V' of the décolletage, and its skirt was short. I figured it would fall about six inches above my knees.

Just then the front door chimed and three teenage girls bubbled inside, all simultaneously laughing and talking. They started weaving through the racks, heading for the Gothic corner.

"Here," the saleslady said. "Hold this." She handed me the dress on its hanger. "I've got to keep an eye on them – I'll be back as soon as they leave." She took off to the rear of the store.

The girls stopped their chatter when they noticed me and gawked at me, holding my dress. If I could have melted into the carpeting or otherwise disappeared I would have done just that. *Remember*, I said to myself. *Tonight is going to be hot. I'll have room service bring dinner. And, why not? A nice bottle of zinfandel – I deserved it after this ordeal.*

I tried to keep busy, to look nonchalant while awkwardly carrying a dress – I didn't want to get it dirty or wrinkled – until the girls finally left about a half-hour later.

"Black is the color for the lingerie," the lady said as she approached. "Did you want a corset or a bra?"

"Uh, a bra, I guess," I said, trying desperately to regain the confidence I had had earlier.

"And, what size does she wear?"

Oh my God, I thought. I didn't think of that. "I don't know!" I blurted and stopped himself from continuing, trying to conceal my discomfort and worries of her reaction to all this. "What do you think a size eight would wear?"

"Well, let's see. Something around a thirty-two or thirty-four. She's about as old as you?" I nodded. "And, is she fairly big up here, or?" Her fingers pointed at her breasts.

I tried to recall an image of one of my past girlfriends to give me an idea of what to say. "She looks good. Not too big and not too small. You know, just right."

"Let's go with a 34B. At least it won't be too tight around her chest." She watched me like she was judging my reaction. I was sure she knew, but also, that it didn't matter to her.

We headed further into the store to explore its most secret treasures. From a wall display, she selected a couple of bra and panty sets that she spread out on a glass counter for me. I decided to go for the garter belt; a lacy thing that I hoped would snug my waist into a more girlish shape.

By this time it was past four – I couldn't believe it had taken so long to get this far. She told me to wait for her while she locked the door. She made a quick phone call and we started looking through packages of stockings.

The door at the back of the shop opened and in walked a woman, but not just *any* woman. She was a mutt: built like an East German Olympic swimmer, with a linebacker's neck and a crew cut, with lips and forehead only a Cro-Magnon might have found lustful.

She walked right over to me and laid an arm around my shoulders, like we were old friends. She smelled of cigarettes and sweat, and I tried to slide out from her arm, but she held me steady against her side. "This the one?" she asked.

The saleslady nodded. "I'll put your things in a bag, Marvin, and bring them right out."

The Amazon said, "I'll be your cab driver tonight, honey. Let's go." She rushed me through the back of the store, through the stock room and into a dark alley. A rat ran across the road through dirty water for refuge behind a garbage can. There wasn't a cab in

sight. There was only a white panel truck with its rear door rolled open. A dim bulb showed that its interior was empty but for a small satchel.

It had all happened so quickly. I didn't have time to think and she wasn't going to give me any. She twisted my arm up behind my back to keep me moving. At the back of the truck, she waited for a moment, her arm still holding me tightly. The saleslady appeared out the back of the store with an Anastasia's Attic shopping bag in her hand. As she handed it to me, she grabbed my wrist, pulled my arm straight, and plunged a syringe into my upper arm.

I started to yell but Amazon Woman clamped her disgusting hand on my mouth. I started to push against her while spinning forward to the ground to get out from under her arm, but I didn't have the strength to fight. Soon she was holding me up under my armpits preventing me from collapsing on the ground.

The drug immobilized all of the muscles in my body; I couldn't move anything except my eyes and lids. It was like I was a paralyzed accident victim, unable to move but screaming for help inside my head.

"There, there now, baby," the Amazon said. "It's gonna be okay." She lifted me up into the truck and laid me down on its floor. The saleslady handed her something, which Amazon held up for me to see. A pair of silver scissors. More like heavy-duty shears. "Ever seen 'Silence of the Lambs'?" she asked. When I didn't respond, she said, "Maybe I'm gonna make me a Marvin suit. That would be funny, wouldn't it? Man, it'd take a lot of youse to make a big enough suit for me." My eyes darted between her face, the shears, and her bloodshot eyes.

She took off my shoes and socks and started cutting my jeans up the leg. When she reached the top, she unclasped my belt and went down the other side. She did the same with my underwear, leaving me naked lying on my ruined clothing. She jerked them out from under me and started working on my shirt. All the while she was humming "I Left My Heart in San Francisco" as if she were happily doing her job, pleasantly keeping herself occupied.

Moments later I was stripped naked, laying on the anti-slip texture of the floor of the truck. I was cold and quickly became painfully aware of rivets and metal edges digging into my back.

Saleslady started spreading something made out of pink fabric on the floor beside me. She unrolled it like a sleeping bag and pulled a long zipper from the top all the way to its bottom. Like moving a patient off a gurney, she and the Amazon transferred me onto it. At least it was thick enough to provide a little relief from the bare floor.

Amazon guided my hands and arms into some stretchy inner sleeves, distributing the fabric smoothly from my hand to its end under my armpit. "A hell of a lot better than the last one," she said. Once my arms were secure, she held my chin and turned my head back and forth. "Nice skin, too. Look at his complexion! Like a girl's it is."

Saleslady said, "Look, you'd better get out of here. You've got a long drive ahead and anyway, the longer we're out here, the bigger the chance someone's gonna see."

Back at my feet, the Amazon pulled the taut fabric around my ankles, then began moving a zipper up my legs. "Yeah, he's a good catch, he is," she said. Gradually, she worked her way up my legs, drawing the sides together, holding and zipping. Just before she reached my crotch, she stopped and felt between my legs, pulling it a little, hefting its weight and size. "I see what you mean," she said. "He is pretty small." She continued working the zipper up to my chest. "What does she do with 'em anyway?"

Now I realized what my arm sleeves were for. They were sewn inside the mummy bag to keep them restrained, no matter what. At least, I thought, if they're taking this much trouble, I might actually wake up from this nightmare some day.

"Hell if I know and hell if I care what she does with them," Saleslady replied with an exaggerated drawl. "All I know is I hook 'em, you bag 'em and deliver 'em."

Amazon pinched my nose and pulled my jaw open to push a ball between my teeth. She fed its straps over and around my head, buckling them in place. The ball had a breathing hole in it that whistled with my anxious gasps. She finished zipping me up over my head, leaving me snug and unmoving, in darkness.

I heard them scramble out of the truck, roll down the door and lock the release. The engine started and I was on – what I would later learn– the ride of my life.

Chapter Two

"Wake up, sleepyhead. Come on now, open your eyes."

Groggy, I found myself lying in bed, peering at an attractive thirty-something blond, seated beside me, stroking my hair. Her hair was cut in a short choppy shag, in a way that made it stylish even with some strands tucked behind her ears.

Suddenly I remembered Anastasia's, the Amazon, and my paralysis. I flinched and started pushing against her to get up. She held my shoulders in place and cupped my cheek in her palm.

As if she knew the question I wanted to ask, she said, "You're safe, Marvin. Don't worry. You're staying with me for a day or two. Or more if you wish. You can leave anytime you want."

"What in the hell is going on?" I yelled, when I finally found my voice. "Where am I? Who are you?" I leaned forward momentarily before falling back on the pillow after catching a glance of the lacy top of a nightgown on my chest.

"You're with me, on my estate," she said, quietly, like she was talking to a small child, "and my name is Victoria North." Despite my fears, I started to relax into the softness of the bed, her attentions, the peacefulness of the room lulling me into a state of tranquility. She continued, "It can get lonely here, and I've found that I need companionship and some help. And yes, I've had others. But they've left and now I'm delighted to have the opportunity to get to know you."

"Look," I said, "I don't know what you're doing or what you want, but I'm outta here." I shoved her off me and dashed for the door, wondering if she really was going to let me go, or if I was suddenly going to feel the searing pain of a bullet or knife plunging into my

back. The hallway was plush, its plank floor covered in a silk Persian carpet that led to a sweeping stairway down to the foyer. I leaned against the marble balustrade to keep my balance, not paying attention to the fact that I was wearing only a baby doll nightie and panties. I was on a mission to get out of there.

I threw open the massive front door and ran down the marble steps to a gravel driveway that circled around a fountain in front of the house. From my vantage point, I saw only plants, trees, and lawn. No neighbors, houses, or anything that looked like civilization or anyone I could run to for help. I started sprinting down the driveway, and almost immediately I felt the jagged edges of the stones tearing at the soles of my bare feet. I had to stop after running only halfway around the circle.

"Yes, that's the way," Victoria yelled, from the front porch. "Head down the driveway about a half-mile. At its end I'll open the gate for you, and then it's only another mile or so on a dirt road that'll lead you to the highway."

I looked around to see if there was a better alternative. On the left was a manicured lawn surrounded by tall bushes. A redwood tree stood off to the side, casting a long shadow across the grass as the afternoon was turning to evening.

"That's not a good way for you either," she said. "There's a fast stream running along the bottom of the valley, and even if you get past that, it's a good five miles to the next town."

I turned around and found rolling brown hills, stretching for miles beyond a terrace that wrapped around behind the house.

She walked up behind me. "That won't work either," she said. I turned to look at her and noted that she was at least a head taller than me. Her jeans, silk blouse and boots gave her the look of one comfortable out in the woods by herself. "Really, Marvin, the only exit is the driveway. It's too late to go tonight, but if you want I'll take you back tomorrow."

Only then did I fully realize my situation. I looked down at myself, my nightie billowing out from my waist in the evening breeze. No clothing, no shoes, no identification. Nothing like I'd need to get back to San Francisco. I imagined for a moment walking through my hotel lobby dressed like this. Not a good idea. I turned and looked at her. Victoria smiled, and I followed her back to the house.

"I've got some dinner in the oven," she said. "Tell you what, let's get you a robe and we can talk over a nice dinner and a bottle of wine."

Suddenly, all I could think about was food as I caught a whiff of whatever was in the oven. God, I was hungry. It felt like I hadn't eaten in days. In my room, she handed me a satiny lavender robe, with white lace running along its hems.

"I can't wear this!" I said.

"Honestly, it's all I have, Marvin. I'm sorry, but they took your clothes in San Francisco, remember? But, it's just you and me, so who cares?"

Yeah, who cares, I thought. Who cared when I went to Anastasia's? The place I figured was perfectly safe turned out to be the most treacherous and possibly the most dangerous. I slid into the robe and tied its sash around my waist.

* * *

Her dining room table was walnut, with seating for twelve. The walls were painted a shade of burgundy with mahogany wainscoting; one wall was covered with a trompe l'oeil painting of a pastoral scene of lavender growing in the rolling hills of Provence. The crystal glasses glistened in the faceted light from a chandelier centered over the table. I mentioned that I thought her name fit her well, given the surroundings and her demeanor.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked, her curiosity piqued.

"Please, don't get me wrong. It's just that 'Victoria' sounds so elegant, as if for royalty. And you must admit, you are queen of an impressive kingdom."

She smiled pleasantly while she was uncorking a bottle of wine. "I bought this place a couple of years ago," she said, as she poured the wine. "It's over five hundred acres of rolling hills and the house is really huge, too big for me." She took a sip of her wine. "I have to admit, I was very, very lucky. I started a dot-com with an associate, and before I knew it, I had made a couple of hundred million dollars in our IPO." She took a bite of the roast beef and washed it down with more wine. "But I got sick of life in the Valley. It wasn't a life, really. Go, go, go, cell phone in one ear and employees, shareholders, and our board yelling in the other. I got very depressed and almost suicidal; I decided to drop out, and here I am."

I couldn't imagine her ever being that sad, she looked so calm and secure now. Between mouthfuls, I asked, "What's to stop me from telling the authorities? I mean, if you let me go tomorrow."

"We'll deliver you right back to San Francisco. You don't know where you are, and for obvious reasons, you won't be seeing much on the return trip. Really, I feel pretty safe." She shrugged and smiled at me as if to say, *See how simple it is?*

As the evening wore on I started to enjoy her company. We stayed up late that night, drinking cognac in front of a fire, talking and laughing like we were old friends.

* * *

The following morning I awoke just after dawn, the sun warming me through the room's gauzy curtains. I got up, stretched, and parted the shades to have a look. My goodness it was beautiful. My view was of the backyard, although that term certainly didn't apply here. A tiled patio wrapped around an infinity swimming pool, next to a thatched cabana. Beyond, a white gazebo was at the edge of a cliff that fell away to a valley.

"You like?" she asked, peeking her head past my door.

"Who wouldn't?" I replied. "It's magnificent."

"I'll show you around after breakfast. But first," she said while dramatically holding her nose. "You need a bath!"

The shower felt wonderful, cleaning and relaxing my body, restoring my sense of well-being. Naturally, the subject of what I was to wear came up when I finished. All she had in the closet were dresses and skirts. With her help, I chose a sleeveless denim dress with brightly colored ladybug buttons on its front. After I figured out how to work buttons on the 'feminine side,' I pulled the dress's ties around to my back and tied them into a ribbon. Fresh panties and a pair of sandals completed my outfit. It felt kind of weird, especially since she seemed to only wear jeans and shirts, which were way too big for me. I guessed that was just what she found comfortable, and it was her estate after all, so she wore whatever she wanted.

After a couple of days of this, I knew I wouldn't leave. In many ways, my lifelong fantasy was fulfilled although Victoria and I were still only friends. I wondered if our relationship might grow into something deeper but satisfied myself with simply living the life I had often dreamed of.

Our daily routine consisted of breakfast, followed by a hike around her property, although we never reached its extents, at least as far as I could tell. Sometimes we would bring a picnic lunch and play cards or just talk; other times we'd have a swim in the pool and take a nap in the shade of an umbrella. By the, I was getting used to only wearing dresses and bikinis, and regularly shaved off what little hair remained on my legs and arms. She started calling me 'Melissa' and I felt so happy when she told me how nice I looked.

On a spring day in April we set up a picnic by a stream and fell asleep for a while in the shade of a redwood tree. She woke me up and led me by the hand to watch the water flow down the river. I was watching a frog when she turned to me and bent down to kiss my lips. It seemed so natural that my arms floated above her shoulders with hers around my waist. We stayed like that for a minute, our kisses becoming harder. She pushed her tongue into my mouth where I sucked on it and teased it with my own. Through my thin dress, I felt the roughness of her pants against my skin, her knee pushing up between my legs.

We hurried to throw the picnic into its basket and ran back to the house, hand in hand. Once inside, she led me into her room. It was much larger than mine, with a king-size bed, a white coverlet, and lavender walls with intricate white molding at the ceiling. She held me against her body, kissing my lips and then my neck. Her hands found my dress's zipper, which she pulled down and helped me remove by sliding its straps off my shoulders.

She started to undo my bra clasp, hesitated, and stood back from me. "Let's savor this, Melissa," she said. I followed her into the bathroom. She pushed one of the wall tiles and the door to a hidden room opened. Within it was a medical chair in its center and a Formica-topped counter and sink along the back wall. "Take off your panties and hop up here."

She started fiddling with something in the sink while I slid the panties down to my ankles and stepped out of them. The leather seat felt cold against my skin. She turned to me, holding a rubber bag and a hose. She hung these on a stand, lowered the back of the chair and pulled out some rests for my feet.

She pressed some clear gel onto her fingers, spread it on a thin plastic nozzle, and glided it into my rear passage. Slowly, the sudsy water entered me, filling my bowels in a warmth I had never felt before. When it was finished, she told me to hold the plug and go to the toilet.

We repeated the process and when I was thoroughly clean inside, she squirted more of the gel into me. When I stepped out of the shower, she wrapped a towel around my body and led me into the bedroom. Spread out on the bed was a sleeveless white satin gown with flirty, feminine pleats and an empire waist, and satin panties.

“Put those on and wait for me in bed,” she whispered in my ear, “while I get ready. I’ll be right back.”

She gave me a squeeze and returned to the bathroom. I pulled the silky panties up my smooth legs and up to my waist. The waist and leg openings were trimmed in a delicate lace whose whiteness was in sharp contrast to my tanned skin. I gathered the gown and dropped it over my head. It floated down my body until stopped by the thin straps resting on my shoulders. I pulled back the covers of her bed and carefully got in to wait, spreading the skirt of my gown around me.

When she came out of the bathroom, the first thing I noticed was a black phal-lus, held to her crotch with straps that reached around her waist and between her legs. She dimmed the lights, casting the room into shadows and joined me in bed.

We kissed, urgently pressing our lips together and exploring each other’s mouth with our tongues. She began kissing my neck, and then she pulled down



one of my shoulder straps, and began nibbling on my breast. I held her head tightly against me like I was in heat. I was consumed with her and wanted nothing but to be with her like this forever.

She gathered and pushed my gown up to my belly and took hold of the waistband of my panties. I arched my back to help her ease them off. She stroked me while we looked into each other's eyes. After a moment, she smiled at me reassuringly and edged my knees apart, knelt between my legs, raised my ankles until they rested on her shoulders. And then, with one hand guiding her dildo, she leaned into me.

At first I resisted, my body reacting to her invasion. She kept a firm pressure on my opening, until slowly she entered me until her belly was pressed against mine, her phallus deep inside. She rested for only a moment, then began rocking back and forth, pulling out and pushing in. We both were flushed, breathing heavily. She looked deep into my eyes, then I closed them, releasing myself to fully experience every moment.

I felt her body start shuddering and then she fell on top of me into my arms, where I held her as her climax subsided. It was then that I freed myself for my own release, the feeling of her penetration and our passions exploding within every nerve of my body.

Chapter Three

For weeks afterward, I continued refining my feminine appearance, manner, and dress. As the cool breezes of winter approached, I found that I needed opaque stockings or tights to keep my legs warm when we strolled around her property. She taught me the intricacies of make-up, which I applied daily for practice and to enhance my appearance, and she styled my hair, leaving me with pretty bangs on my forehead and tresses that draped to my breasts.

I was most often the one who prepared our meals and took care of all of the household duties, while Victoria worked in her office or left the estate to attend to her business or shop in the town. I still had no idea of my location, but I didn't care. The only thing that mattered was our relationship and how I might support her by being my best as her partner and lover. In the evenings, after the dishes were done and we grew sleepy, I slipped upstairs to change into something sexy or sweet; whatever I thought would give her the most pleasure.

Like a lightning strike, it all changed.

On the afternoon of an overcast, drizzly day, she parked her car alongside the kitchen entrance, and I stepped outside to help her unload the groceries.

"I'm having a friend over for dinner tomorrow evening, Melissa," she said. "It'll be fun for you to get to know her." She walked over, carrying a large brown bag. "I want you to look your prettiest tomorrow night." I blushed when she said, "I'm so proud of you, Melissa."

She kissed me on the cheek and continued into the kitchen, while I stood there dumbfounded. I had never been seen by anyone but her. "I, I'm not sure, Victoria. I'm scared. I don't know if I can do that."

“Sure you can,” she said. “If you haven’t noticed, you look too cute for words. Second, it’s only one lady friend of mine coming, and she’s been here before, so she knows what to expect. You have nothing to worry about.” She stared at me as her lips pulled into a thin line. Her expression changed, like the darkness before a storm. In a stern voice, she said, “Of course, Melissa, you can go whenever you want. Just say the word and I’ll deposit you back into your old life. But this is something I am going to do, no matter what you say. It’s as simple as that. No arguments.” She grabbed a sack of groceries and pounded into the kitchen.

As I stood under the carport, I tried to sort out what was going on. I was surprised by the tone of her voice. We hadn’t talked to each other like this ever before, and we certainly hadn’t talked about the possibility of my leaving her. I wanted to cry, I was so shocked. What had I done? I was afraid to cry in front of her; I wanted desperately to calm her, assure her that our lives were not going to change.

“It’s okay, Victoria,” I said, calling after her. I tried to sound lighthearted, “I want to meet your friend.” I hoped that was what she wanted to hear.

She came back out and hugged me to her, her fingers pushing on the clasp of my bra as she pulled me into a kiss. “I knew you’d come around, Melissa,” she said. She turned for another grocery bag. Over her shoulder, she added, “But there’s one more thing. You will not be eating with us. You will cook and serve the dinner to us and in general act like you are my personal servant. This lady is very important to me and it’s critical I make a favorable impression with her.”

“I won’t be eating with you?”

“Servants do not eat with their superiors. You will eat in the kitchen.”

“Okay,” I mumbled. “I guess so.”

She rushed up to me and grabbed my chin, pulled my face up so she could look me directly in the eyes. She leaned close to me and said, “No, Melissa. This is what you will do and you will do it cheerfully and with grace. Or ...”

“Or, what?” I surprised myself, interrupting her with a confrontational tone.

I had never seen her look as furious as she recoiled and then raised her hand to slap me. I cringed and closed my eyes against the blow, but she stopped herself. “Or, something I am sure you are not ready for.” She glared at me for a moment. “For now your punishment is that from now on you will ask me for permission to use the restroom. We’ll see how *that* corrects your attitude.”

From that moment, I knew that I was no longer her lover. I suspected that I would be replaced soon, as with others before me. I missed her old self terribly, our life as sweet as any I could ever imagine. All I ever really wanted was to be loved for what she had helped me become.

* * *

I worked all day in the kitchen the following, preparing their meal of duck a l'orange, asparagus spears with hollandaise sauce, and a crisp green arugula salad with pine nuts and a touch of mandarin orange. Miss Victoria – as she told me to address her – allowed me only an hour to get ready.

I ran back to my room and washed myself carefully, inside and out, combed and dried my hair into the soft flowing curls that framed and softened my face the way she liked. My make-up was spare, only a light touch of mascara, eyeliner and fuchsia lip gloss. I used the same shade on my nails and when they were dry, I put on my lingerie, the sheer black bra, panty, and satin waist cincher with garters for my stockings. For jewelry, I wore a pair of silver pearl-drop earrings and a single strand of pearls around my neck that drew attention to my exposed cleavage.

Miss Victoria had selected the little black dress I had acquired at Anastasia's so long ago to wear this evening. As I inspected myself in the mirror, I imagined that it would have looked a little silly on me back then. But now my curves and other feminine assets had been so enhanced by Miss Victoria's attentions and lessons that the dress looked very nice on me, as if I were born to wear it.

The doorbell rang as I descended the stairs. Once she was admitted into the house, I helped the woman out of her black leather coat and awaited Miss Victoria's welcoming. The woman was perhaps even taller than Miss Victoria, but looked much more commanding and ominous, dressed in a severely-cut black pantsuit, black silk blouse, with her pants' cuffs tucked into tall black boots that reached almost to her knees.

"Caroline! It's so good to see you," Miss Victoria said, as she entered. Miss Victoria turned and said to me, "Melissa, you will address her as Mistress Caroline."

"Yes, Miss," I said, curtsayed, and left the room to hang up Mistress Caroline's coat.

On my return, I stopped in the hallway and heard Mistress Caroline, "She is a sexy little thing, Victoria. Nubile, like Amy was when you brought her to me. Melissa looks like your best yet."

'She?' It seemed that my gender's pronoun now matched my appearance. Henceforward I would be 'she' or 'her.' I realized that I felt a little proud of having made such a convincing conversion of my appearance. There was no doubt that I would never be recognized again as a male. Despite the remaining equipment between my legs, my breasts, hair, and complexion, combined with my dress and demeanor were consistent with all of the cues for a girl.

Miss Victoria said, "Is Amy still with you? I thought she would have graduated by now."

"She's done quite well although at times she has been a bit impudent. I'm curing her of that, and in a few weeks I'm confident she'll be ready. In fact, I already have a placement for her who is quite anxious for her delivery."

Mistress Caroline studied me as I entered the foyer. I felt awkward having her stare at me like that, and suddenly didn't know what to do with my hands. I tried to simply let them hang at my sides and keep a pleasant, expectant expression on my face, but I felt embarrassed by her attention.

"I'm sure you won't be disappointed with Melissa," Miss Victoria said. "May I have her get you something to drink? Perhaps we should start with a glass of champagne? I have an excellent Veuve Cliquot chilled for us."

"That sounds delightful."

Miss Victoria snapped her fingers and escorted Mistress Caroline toward the living room. I curtsayed and left to retrieve the wine.

In the living room, I brought them their wine and a tray of canapés. They chatted merrily as I went about my duties, tending to the fire or refilling their glasses. During a lull in the conversation, I whispered to Miss Victoria that dinner was ready.

Miss Victoria, of course, sat at the head of the table, with Mistress Caroline to her right. I felt something of an undercurrent in the air, a level of tension masked by their camaraderie, but present nevertheless.

They seemed to enjoy their dinner and I would have enjoyed mine as well but for the pressure in my bladder that increased with every moment's delay in relieving myself. After serving their dessert and aperitifs, I could wait no longer. I whispered in Miss Victoria's ear that I needed to use the restroom.

"Melissa needs to use the ladies' room," she said to Mistress Caroline.

I was shocked that she would announce such a thing, but understood when Mistress Caroline instructed me to hold up the back of my skirt for her inspection. Once I was standing beside her chair, she slid her hand between my legs, fondling one of my garter straps, pulling it and releasing it to snap against my thigh. Her hand moved up beyond the stocking, stroking my skin like she was testing its softness. At my rear, she probed my passage with her finger and slid her hand to the front of my panties, where she rubbed me within its soft fabric. My breathing grew heavy as she fondled me; I forgot where I was and who was watching. I closed my eyes and bent over slightly to encourage her, all thoughts of relieving myself vanishing in my arousal.

"She likes it," Mistress Caroline said, increasing the rhythm of her rubbing. "I've found that that's a good sign, Victoria." She removed her hand and let my skirt fall back in place. "I expect you to report back to me when you are finished."

"Yes, Mistress," I said. I curtsayed for her and scampered for the door.

As I was leaving, I heard Mistress Caroline, "How much do you want for her?"

* * *

When I returned, I found them in the living room, sipping cognac in front of the fire. Mistress Caroline beckoned me to sit beside her on the red leather couch. I sat on its edge, the better to keep my skirt from riding up my legs, reviewing everything Victoria had

taught me about a young lady's manners. She slid closer to me, began stroking my hair, then she nudged me gently into the couch. My skirt uncontrollably slid up my thighs; I was unable to prevent exposing my garters and stocking tops.

"Melissa, my dear," she said, "you're such a pretty little thing. Such gorgeous hair, and your dress, it looks so adorable on you." She turned to Victoria and winked.

"Thank you, Mistress," I said. I blushed brightly. I was filled with pride; this was from a woman who had only seen me for a few hours! It was so nice for me to hear her complement, especially in contrast with how Miss Victoria was speaking to me.

Mistress' hand cupped my breast over the fabric of my dress, testing its heft and softness. Her hand traveled down my skirt and over my thigh until it rested on my knee, where she stroked my stocking for a moment. It was then that her hand began moving upward, between my thighs and under my skirt, pushing my legs apart as she insisted on unfettered access to my panties. I was startled and started rising up as if I was going to jump off the couch.

"Sit still with your hands by your sides, Melissa," she said in a voice that provided no room for discussion. "That is your first lesson from me."

I looked at Victoria for help but her expression was relaxed; she smiled like she was enjoying the show. She nodded to me, beckoning me to comply with Mistress's authority as Mistress's hand continued its ascent, finally reaching the softness of my panties and the hardness within. Her fingers toyed with the lace around my leg; she pulled on the leg opening and rolled her finger beneath my panties, feeling the ultra soft skin they protected.

She leaned closer to me, and in a seductive voice whispered, "You like your lingerie, and your dress, don't you?"

I whispered, "Yes, Mistress, I do." How true. I couldn't lie.

"I can tell. I think you would look fetching in just about anything." I noticed Mistress Caroline sharing a knowing look with Miss Victoria.

"Melissa." Miss Victoria removed her hand although my skirt remained bunched up against my waist. "Go up to your room. You'll find something pretty up there I want you model for me."

"Yes, Miss," I said. Mistress Caroline helped me up by pushing on my bottom as I stood.

On my bed was a black leather harness, with myriad straps and buckles connected by silver grommets and rivets. I looked more closely and located the straps that would fit around my neck, my chest, and between my legs. I didn't want to put it on; I had hoped that she would be giving me a new dress, or maybe a nightgown, but here it was, something I had never imagined. I reached behind my back and reluctantly pulled on my zipper, the sound like a dirge foretelling a bad omen about to befall me. I removed my dress and lingerie, started putting on the harness by slipping its halter-like collar over my head, leaving the straps dangling in front, the rivets and buckles clicking against each other. The top was like a bra, with pliable leather cups for my breasts, and had a buckle in back for

holding it together. Soon, all that remained was a pair of straps that came together in a leather pouch, which left a single fastener that I fed between with my cheeks like a thong and connected to a buckle.

Also on the bed was two pair of padded cuffs, which I slipped over my wrists and ankles, tightening the buckles for a comfortable fit. So long ago I had fantasized about something like this, but now it made me feel more naked and vulnerable than I ever felt without any clothing, or even when I had just began wearing dresses and skirts for Victoria; I was now merely chattel, available for anyone's wishes or desires.

I felt self-conscious as I walked down the stairs. My bare feet were cold against the marble floor and I was embarrassed entering the living room. Mistress Caroline checked each strap for its snugness, tightening some that I had had difficulty reaching. She finished by connecting my wrists and ankles together and pushing me onto the couch. She reached into her briefcase and withdrew a check that she handed to Miss Victoria.

"No!" I cried, but it was apparent that I was way too late; I was caught, prepared, and sold.

Mistress Caroline shoved me back against the cushion and said, "Girls like you should be seen and not heard," whereupon she removed a ball gag from her satchel and pinched my nose to encourage me to open my lips for its entrance. I was suddenly brought back to that night in San Francisco, lying within the body bag on the floor of the truck, wondering what was to become of me.

"Gretchen, in here," she said in a loud voice to be heard outside the room.

The doors opened and in walked the Amazon woman, whom I hadn't seen in months. She wore a gray security guard's uniform pants and shirt, with keys and other tools of her trade swaying from a tooled leather belt that rode on her hips.

"Put her in the car; I'll be out shortly," Mistress Caroline said.

The Amazon – whom I now knew was more properly called Gretchen – grinned at me as she hoisted me over her shoulder like a rolled-up rug. She bounced me to shift my load for her comfort and held me firmly in place with her hand wrapped around my harness's thong. "As you wish, Mistress," she said, and left the room.

I was hardly a strain for her as she opened the black limousine's door and propped me up in a corner of the compartment. I needed to scratch an itchy spot on my back and would have pleaded for that freedom, but the gag prevented me from uttering anything but small grunts and whines. Before leaving me, she wrapped a thick blindfold around my head.

On the highway, Mistress Caroline caressed my breasts, after freeing them of the harness. She gently pinched my nipples between her fingers and sucked on them until they were inflamed pink points. My arousal was becoming almost painful until, for some reason, she quickly tired of this and pushed me back into the corner. She opened a briefcase to retrieve some papers and a pen, and ignored me, leaving my breasts uncovered. Maybe she was only once again testing my pliability to her manipulations.

After an hour or so of driving along an unknown freeway, I fell asleep. The next morning I awoke when the car made a sharp turn into a driveway. Although at this time I more or less accepted whatever fate was ahead for me, I reprimanded myself for not staying awake so I could perhaps gain at least some impression of where I was.

Chapter Four

Once the limousine stopped, Mistress Caroline removed my blindfold and returned my breasts to their harness. Evidently she had no concerns about my restored vision as I stared outside the darkened windows of the limousine for anything that might provide a clue to our location. We were in a sheltered harbor by the ocean, but whether it was Pacific, Atlantic, or maybe even the Gulf of Mexico, I couldn't tell. The docks that would have berthed fishing boats were empty and, with the sun's light only peaking above the horizon, I decided that it must be early in the morning. When Gretchen opened the door, the sea air smelled fresh and I watched the gulls perform their ballet in the breeze. There were several docks with many berths, some holding large sail boats and speedboats of various sizes. Out in the bay was a multi-story white yacht with chrome railings that glistened in the dawn light.

Gretchen spread a green canvas bag open on the floor. She set me within it, and folded my legs tightly against my chest so she could secure its zipper and hide me within. From the outside I had figured it would appear like an ordinary large duffel bag, full of something like clothing or towels. Without a word spoken by either woman, Gretchen carried me to a skiff where I was placed in its scuppers. The hull resonated with water lapping against the hull until it interrupted by the sounds of Mistress Caroline coming aboard and settling in. Soon we were motoring across the bay.

After a few minutes the engine was cut and we bumped against something, presumably one of the yachts. I was hoisted aboard onto the deck and deposited within a tiny stateroom, where I was removed from the bag; my bonds restricted movement.

A powerful engine roared to life, its vibrations rumbling through the floor of my room. Soon, I felt acceleration as we headed out of the harbor. Through a small porthole, I watched the land slip away.

A key rattled in the door and Mistress Caroline stepped in. She unbuckled my hands and wrists, removed my gag. As I exercised the stiffness in my jaw and limbs, she said, "You will remove your harness, Melissa, and remain in this room for the voyage. No clothing will be provided for you, as you will not need it. If I hear any sound from you or you attempt to leave this room, you will be restrained for the remainder of the trip. I warn you: do not test me. I am quite strict in these matters." She paused, and began unbuckling my body harness. Once finished, she put everything into the green sack and left, latching the door securely behind her. I dared not test its strength, as I believed everything she said.

Several days later, we reached an island. During the trip I remained unclothed, and was checked from time to time by crewmembers who peered at me through my porthole to the world outside. At the start of our voyage, I rushed to cover myself, but when I saw how much they took pleasure at my discomfort, I barely moved when I saw them looking

in. I was like a goldfish in a tank, swimming for their enjoyment and wondering if the food or air they provided would sustain me or if I would end up flushed down some toilet.

Considering that Mistress Caroline had paid handsomely for me, I tried to remain confident that they wouldn't make me suffer too much, although the portions they provided barely satisfied my hunger.

With the splash of an anchor, I found that we were within reach of a small tropical island. From the flora, fauna, and the humid warmth I felt drifting into the air, it could have been in the Mediterranean, Hawaiian Islands, or the Caribbean. I just couldn't tell. On shore was a single-story building, like a white mansion on a plantation, with columns flanking the front door and a sheltered veranda on either side. Beside the mansion were several other small buildings, and connected to the shore by raised wooden pathways were several thatched cabanas supported above the water on stilts.

Gretchen and another powerfully built woman came into my cabin and escorted me to the deck, where they locked me within a small bamboo cage. My cage was raised high above the deck and delivered into a harbor boat to take me to shore. There they placed my cage on a cart and wheeled me into the mansion. I found that what I expected to be a foyer was actually a hotel lobby, with guests checking in and out, talking with the concierge, and strolling among the tropical flowers and plants that decorated its interior. They left my cage beside a parrot that was standing on its perch, evidently trained to remain still without the restriction of a cage. I had become another animal on display.

Several guests noted my presence and walked over to take a closer look.

"My goodness," one lady said. "She's a cute one, isn't she?"

"I'll say," said another, "I wonder if I can possibly extend my stay. I'd love to have her over for at least one night."

One reached through the bars to touch me, but she was tentative, as if she was afraid I might bite her hand like a feral cat. I moved as close to her as the cage would allow. Her confidence increased as she petted my face and hair.

"She's as soft as a baby," she said, on removing her hand. She turned and found Mistress Caroline talking with one of the staff.

"Caroline! There you are. When can I have this one for the night?"

"Not for several days, Margaret. I apologize, but Melissa will need familiarization with our resort and services before she's allowed to mingle with the guests. You may make a reservation with the concierge, something we always recommend."

The two women rushed to the concierge desk, like they were worried that I might already be overbooked. For what I didn't know, but could imagine.

After an hour or so, the excitement of my arrival dissipated and a woman dressed like a gardener wheeled me out of the lobby and behind the mansion, where we approached a chain-link fence that circled a smaller building. A woman who reminded me of Gretchen the Amazon opened the gate for my cart.

Near the front door, my cage was opened and I was allowed out to stand, still naked, on the paved pathway. I saw faces pressed up behind bars in windows trying to catch a glance of the new arrival, and realized this must be a dormitory of some sort. Some were laughing and giggling, I supposed, at the situation I was now going to find myself in.

"This way, Melissa," the guard said. She steered me with my elbow, her grip leaving no uncertainty of what she could do if I resisted.

The guard took me into an infrequently washed white-tiled room where a woman in a lab coat examined my body from head to toe. It seemed almost mechanical the way she did it, like it was something she had done so many times before the process was rote and boring. She finished by inserting a large syringe that looked more like a turkey baster into my rear passage and filled me with a lubricant. She inserted a dildo that had a retaining ring around its base for my sphincter to prevent its discharge.

The hallway was dimly lit with low wattage bulbs. Five cells lined each side of the hall, with barred doors and cement walls between each room. Mine was number 3, exactly in the middle. Its walls were a mildewed pink, with a small bed, a make-up table and mirror, and a dresser and small armoire for my clothing. A dirt-encrusted window in a rusting frame provided a filtered view of the hotel.

The guard left me in the cell, saying, "Mistress Caroline will be here to see you shortly. I advise that you remain quiet; the others will try to talk to you, but if she hears it you will be severely punished." She locked the door and departed, her footsteps echoing down the hall.

As she had forewarned, several girls started asking my name, where I was from. They asked if I knew others like us. I refused to answer any of them; I was too afraid of what Mistress might do to me. Then my next-door neighbor told me her name was Amy, and I couldn't help it. I whispered, "I've heard of you! I'm from Miss Victoria's."

She asked me what I'd heard and I told her that she has a reputation as a beautiful and compliant servant, whom Mistress Caroline really values. She laughed when she heard this, as if she was cynically tired of the situation. "You'll see," was all she would say when I asked her to tell me more.

Thankfully, Mistress Caroline didn't hear us, so I wasn't punished for my misbehavior. I stood beside my bed as she entered my cell. "Good, Melissa. Now you will begin provided a return on my investment." She smirked as she confided, "I told Victoria that you needed much more training to help reduce your price, but I can tell that you are already quite advanced in your behavior. Keep it up and you will find that I can be, shall we say, rewarding."

"Thank you, Mistress Caroline," I said.

"Mistress will do, now that we are on my island."

"Yes, Mistress."

"Tonight we will see how well you perform here. You will be our featured Cabana-Girl, to be given to one of our guests for the night."

"Thank you for the honor of serving you and your guests, Mistress."

“My, my, Melissa, you are quite the sweet one, aren’t you?” She opened the armoire and selected a long burgundy gown. It was pure silk charmeuse that would pour itself over its wearer’s body. She selected a panty and bra set in the same color, and shoes. “You will be taken to our hairdresser’s and the cosmetologist. And this is what you will wear to our event this evening. You must be there by eight-thirty at the latest. Follow the guard’s directions; she will show you where to wait, and when I call for you, I expect you to be your prettiest as you walk out for the ladies.”

“Yes, Mistress, I’ll do my best.”

“Your best, Melissa? Best isn’t good enough. ‘Best’ presumes allowance for some reduced expectations. Think of yourself as a model in New York, displaying a celebrity-actress’s fashion statement from Versace, as indeed this is. You will walk with a stately gait, showing the ladies what a treat you may be for them to enjoy.”

As she departed, the guard led me away to the hair salon.

* * *

At the appointed time I waited just outside the main dining room, proud to be wearing such a beautiful gown, my matching strap heels barely peaking below its skirt. My hair was styled in soft curls that drifted over my bare shoulders, hanging down to my shoulder blades, and my make-up perfectly highlighted my eyes, lips, and cheeks. The dress felt so soft and slinky – my panties were a mere wisp of a thong, ensuring that nothing would disturb the flow of silk following down my body. Just then I heard Mistress saying, “And tonight, ladies, a special event. Some of you may have seen Melissa’s arrival to our resort, but for those of you who have not, here she is.”

The guard gave me a light push and I walked onto the stage. When I reached its center, I turned toward the audience, about one hundred women seated at round elaborately decorated dinner tables. After pausing for a moment, I walked slowly down the runway, seductively swaying my hips, luxuriating in my experience and their appreciation of me. As if it were a fashion show, Mistress was saying, “Melissa is in a gown created by Versace, worn once by an actress who shall remain nameless, who wore it to the Oscars in March.” The ladies clapped as I reached the end of the runway, made a sweeping turn to flare my skirt around my ankles, and returned to center stage. There, Mistress made a show of locking a collar and leash around my neck.

I looked out over the dozen or so tables, wondering which of the women would claim me as her prize. I hoped it would be someone tantalizing herself; with whom I could truly please however she desired.

“Ladies,” Mistress said, “Tonight is going to be very special for one of you. Melissa will be your Cabana-Girl for one night. Look under your plates! Only one of you has a coupon with the words ‘Melissa for one night’ on it.”

As one, they started looking under their dinner plates, the sounds of clinking glassware, laughter and disappointed groans echoing throughout the hall until we heard a shout: “I won! I can’t believe it!”

I descended the stage and walked to the woman, veering around the maze of tables. When I reached the lady, I handed her the leash which she used to lead me back to the stage. Luckily for me, she was quite attractive herself, a trim thirty-something wearing a peach-colored silk pantsuit. She posed with me for the camera, her arm around my waist, or just holding my leash. The guard repossessed me for delivery to her room while she returned to her friends for dessert and strawberry daiquiris.

* * *

In the cabana I was told to remove all of my clothes and put on a sheer lavender night-set of bra and panties trimmed in white ostrich feathers, covered by a matching nightgown. The guard locked soft cuffs to my ankles and wrists, and secured my collar to the headboard with a taut gold chain.



Two other guards arrived and assembled some sort of sling that hung from the thatched ceiling and a platform like a medieval stock, with holes for the neck and arms. They attached ropes to the corners of the bed and hung a whip and wooden paddle on hooks in the wall. The last one to leave lit several candles around the room and turned off the lights, casting me into a glow that pulsated with the flickering of the dancing flames.

A few minutes after the guard left, my winner arrived and came over to study her prize. "Hello, Melissa," she said, "I'm Linda."

"Good evening, Miss Linda," I answered, not knowing what form of address she preferred.

“Just ‘Linda’,” she instructed, answering that question. She sat on the bed beside me, unclasped my collar from the chain, pulled me to her, and started fondling me through the lush softness of my lingerie. I leaned into her and floated into her embrace. She held me for a moment and started kissing me, forcing her tongue between my teeth while her hands explored my body, beginning with my face and hair, descending to my slender neck, and then to my chest, kneading and pushing on my breasts, tickling and rubbing on my nipples, then descending down, down, to my nether world, where she rubbed against my panties, my excitement and hers melding into a fever of intensity, until her hand reached between my legs where a finger probed up and into me, as if she could penetrate me through my panties. I was helpless in her hands, hers and hers alone for her pleasure and what could be mine.

She untied the halter holding my gown and slid it down and off my legs, leaving me in my bra and panties. I returned to her and helped her in removing her clothes, unbuttoning her blouse, my fingers lingering over the pliant mounds of her breasts, tugging the ends from her pants and helping her with the sleeves. I then tugged and struggled with her belt buckle until it was free, unclasped the button at her waist, and pulled the zipper down. Anxiously, I pulled her pants off her legs and then, with my teeth and fingers, gripped the waistband of her panties and slowly, tantalizingly, moved them over her hips, from side to side, licking and kissing the newly exposed skin, feeling her heat on my tongue. When her panties were finally discarded on the floor, I dove to her pussy and sucked, licked and rubbed my nose into her, reveling in her juices that flowed over my face and into my mouth. She started bucking against me, her thighs and hands forcing my face tighter into her sex as her intensity reached its climax and she began shaking uncontrollably, crying out and locking my head between her legs.

As she relaxed, I moved up her body, back to her breasts, which I pulled free of her brassiere and sucked on her nipples until they were inflamed to hard red points. As I started to reach behind her to undo the clasp of her bra, she rolled on her side and grabbed my wrists in her hands, forcing me to lie back against the bed. She lay on top of me preventing my movement while attaching my wrist cuffs to the bed’s ropes and cinched them tight until my arms held straight out from my body, so that I was unable to even flex my elbows. She moved to my feet and repeated the process, wrenching my legs apart with the leverage of pulleys lifting a heavy load.

She moved up to my chest and unlatched my bra’s clasp between my breasts, allowing them freedom and her unfettered access. She descended on them like a bird of prey tearing at its dinner, teething on my nipples, sucking and pulling and scratching. I writhed on the bed, unable to escape, yet I did not want her to stop.

She got off the bed and went to the bathroom. For a few moments, my chest continued to heave with the after-effects of our exertions, but I gradually calmed as I waited for her. By now most of the candles had burned themselves out, leaving the room in a surreal glow, lit only from the moon’s light reflecting off the water that surrounded our private bungalow.

When she stepped out of the bathroom, my gaze focused on the protrusion from her belly, in silhouette with the moon’s reflection off the water, a tumescent member that stood proudly erect from her sex, held by an arrangement of straps she had buckled

around her waist and between her legs. As she neared, I saw that she was also penetrated by what I knew was a similarly sized phallus, that would ebb and flow between her legs as she took me.

She pushed a large cushion under my hips, raising my body, adding further tension to my bonds. She knelt between my legs and fell on me, kissing me again, forced her tongue deep into my mouth.

And then she leaned back, and with her hand directing her phallus, guided it into me, pushing against my resistance which I also wanted defeated, until she was inside, gradually penetrating me until her crotch as mated with mine, she could get no more closer or deeper. Slowly, she pulled out until only the tip remained within and then pushed back, feeling the resistance of my passage relax with her thrusts as her own passion built from our movements and her simultaneous penetration.

Rapidly, she pushed in and pulled out until I felt like I was being split into two halves by her, up between my heaving breasts, up through my throat and my lips. I begged her to continue, to take me completely with her thrusts.

We both cried out, uncontrollably moaning and writhing between each other, both desperately extracting the last pleasures of our intercourse. As she calmed, panting from her exertions, she let herself fall onto me, remaining embedded deep within my canal. I kissed and licked her neck and gently sucked on her earlobe, drawing out the final codas of the magnificent symphony we conducted.

She pulled out of me and left for the bathroom. I heard the shower as she cleansed her body of the exertions of our lovemaking. When she returned she loosened the ropes attached to my arms and legs, allowing her room on the bed but still restricting my movement; we fell asleep to the gentle slapping of waves on the pylons below.

The following morning, she allowed me to dress in my nighties and lingerie, and after attaching my leash, returned me to the lobby. She paraded me in front of the audience of her friends and fellow vacationers already surrounding the pool, lying in their chaise lounges to catch the morning's sun on their bodies.

Mistress accepted my leash from her, led me to the dormitory and my cell. After showering my body, she held me against her until I fell asleep for the remainder of the day, the previous night's experience with Linda still reverberating within my soul and my growing passion for my Mistress kindling within my breast.

* * *

The first time I met Amy was in our dormitory's prep room, which was bare of adornment except for a pair of full-length mirrors and hair salon make-up tables. The prep room served as a salon where our hair was styled or colored, where our cosmetics were applied, and where we went for examination and coaching before release to the hotel grounds, to flirt, entertain and serve the guests. As the resort's senior "Pleasure Girl," Amy took great pride in performing final inspections, often requiring novitiates to undress for her, ensuring any stray hairs were plucked, or lubrications complete. This morning, in

preparation for her own shift, she wore one of the barmaid costumes, consisting of an aquamarine bikini and a sarong wrapped around her waist like a skirt with a seductive slit that opened as she walked.

I wore a seductive yellow maillot swimsuit with a deep V exposing the tops of my breasts, a halter top that tied into a bow behind my neck, and high-cut leg openings that, in combination with my heels, served to visually lengthen my slender legs. My assignment was to entertain our guests at pool-side, talk with them, laugh at their humor, and tease them until one either brought me to her room or they merely had fun from my attentions and company.

There was something about Amy that disagreed with me. I had seen her many times around the grounds, her expression and manner that of one who is too aware of her beauty and the desirability of her body, as if merely by her presence the rest of us looked dowdy and rejected, like wilted flowers in the otherwise elegant vase of our surroundings. Now I resented the freedom she had over me, the tone of her voice when she leaned over my shoulder while her fingers felt between my legs. "I may visit you one of these nights, Melissa, and have my own way with you," she chuckled. "You'll find that my demands will, shall we say, require a bit more service from you." She leaned against me; I felt the firmness tucked within her bikini bottom pressing against my thigh.

I felt revolted, a violation of my own heterosexuality as it were, although I suppose it would be more accurate to define myself as a lesbian at this point. Although she was certainly feminine in appearance, voice, and dress, like all of us she retained her masculine organ and I wanted nothing to do with her, or for that matter, any male.

Luckily, another arrived just as Amy was growing more passionate, interrupting her time with me.

"I'll see you later, Melissa," she said with a sneer. I left the room as fast as I could in my heels, regaining my composure as I followed the path to the pool area.

* * *

I spent the afternoon with several of the guests, sometimes swimming with them, rubbing suntan lotion on their bodies for about an hour, retiring to a room with one of the guests for some more private services. When I returned to the pool, I noticed Amy sitting on Mistress's lap while Mistress was carrying on a lively conversation with a guest I had been with much of the day. As I approached them, it seemed only right that Mistress would replace Amy with me, but she only glanced me, waving me off to others. Amy gave me a knowing smirk that was like a spear driven into my heart.

As I walked away, I noticed a broken sprinkler on the lawn that bordered their chaise lounges. I carefully directed it toward them and hid behind a bush as turned it on. Mistress and Amy screamed with the shock of cold water and although I tried to look nonchalant as I rushed to help, my face gave away my guilt. Soon Mistress was leading me back to the patio by my earlobe, her hair dripping like ropes after a storm.

“Ladies,” she announced. “I think you may enjoy this impromptu demonstration of one of our Pleasure Girls. Melissa was especially impetuous just now and I’m sure you would agree; she needs to understand the ramifications of her actions. Come on now, gather around.”

A ring of women formed around us. Mistress sat in a chair and roughly pulled me over her lap, my head almost reaching the ground. My hair draped and hung into a puddle of pool water. She grabbed the waistband of my bikini bottom and yanked it down to my knees, baring my rear to the audience. Then she started spanking me. Not so hard at first, but increasing in tempo and ferocity until I could stand it no more and started kicking my legs, crying out my sorrow to her, Amy, and anyone who would listen. She stopped and started, giving herself a chance to rest, finally removing my bottoms entirely, and then beginning again with renewed vigor. When she was satisfied, she had me to return to the dormitory half-naked, with my bright red bottom on display for all to see.

* * *

From then on it was clear that Mistress’ disappointment in me had reached a point of no return. Nothing I did or could do would serve to eliminate the memory of my jealous prank.

From time to time, Pleasure Girls were sold to guests who requested them, vanishing from our small sorority, unlikely to be seen again. And so it was really no surprise to me when an extremely wealthy Middle Eastern woman, Princess Karinna, wished for me to join her harem, I was whisked away in the middle of the night via her private jet for delivery to her castle in Saudi Arabia.

I was surprised how calm I felt as I was once again confined within a restrictive body bag. Someone hoisted me into the jet and left me somewhere in the plane for several hours, until I heard the roar of the engines and felt the acceleration of our take-off.

When we arrived at Princess Karinna’s castle, I was taken to the harem and removed from the bag. I found that the harem was a collection of rooms in the basement somewhere beneath the castle’s grand hall and ballroom. A huge man, with the crossed arms of a sergeant, wearing a loincloth and turban with a bronze scimitar hanging from his massive belt, guarded the only entrance to the harem, preventing both unauthorized admissions and departures. Just inside the entrance, a raven-haired Persian girl touched a finger to her lips and beckoned me follow her deeper into the warren, its halls covered with billowing yellow and red silks. Her light-green dress flowed around her, sensuously transparent, but like sheer curtains, providing tantalizing hints of what was available within. A solid brass collar without clasp or hinge encircled her neck like a choker. It was narrow, and fit closely, allowing perhaps only a finger’s breadth between it and her tawny skin. A single ring hung from its center, providing, I assumed, a tether for securing her as needed. The door closed loudly behind us followed by the unmistakable sound of keys securing its lock.

In a room lit by the soft glow of filtered light through the wall fabrics and a floor littered with soft pillows decorated with small mirrors embroidered within, she indicated I

should undress, and as I was still dressed in the bikini I had been wearing at the hotel, I accomplished this quickly. She also undressed, and I found that she was not like me; she was in every way a young woman, and I became slightly aroused, being naked and alone with her, appreciating her doe eyes, slender body, flawless skin. She ignored my flirtatious glances and led me into a tiled room with mosaics embedded in the floor and walls. In the center of the room was a circular pool, with steam lazily floating above its water. Indeed, the water was warm but not too hot, and I welcomed it flowing over my body. She wordlessly directed me to sit with my back to her, and once positioned, she soaped my back with a soft cloth. She reached around in front and gently massaged my breasts and neck, washing away the sweat and stress I had accumulated on my journey.

I became fully aroused, reached for her, but she rebuffed my hand, preventing me from approaching her in the manner I desired. I accepted the situation for now and luxuriated in the attentions she provided me, cleaning every crevice and orifice of my body, and afterwards, she toweled me dry, sprayed a sweet musky scent over my smooth skin.

I started to speak to her, but she grew alarmed, her eyes widening with fear when I made any sound, so I restrained myself. Both of us still unclothed, she led me down a hall

and left me in a room where the man with the scimitar was waiting, his muscular arms crossed over his chest. He indicated I should lie face-down on a red-velvet platform and fit my face into a pillow that would support my head yet leave my neck exposed. I did so and soon felt him fitting my own collar around my neck. I startled and twitched at its coldness and he stopped, fit a strap over my head to secure me in position. He returned to his task and soon I felt him fit a tool over the ends of the collar, followed by the electric snapping sounds of shorted wires, permanently welding it together.

Once released, I stood in front of a mirror; my collar was like a brand. Even if I were able to escape into the city, I would be easily identified and returned to the harem as one of its indentured members.



* * *

He held a torch as he led me down a flight of stairs. At the bottom, he unlocked a heavy wooden door; we went into a room the size of a dining room whose walls were made of old stone. He attached my collar to a ring in the wall and secured my wrists to a leather belt he buckled around my waist. The light of his torch vanished into darkness as he closed and locked the door. I heard the heavy shuffle of his shoes fade as he made his way up the steps.

Sometime later, as I grew weary from standing against the rough stone, a woman entered the room carrying a lantern that she set on a wooden table. "You must be the one they called Melissa," a woman said in a heavy accent laced with contempt. I recognized her as the Princess Karinna I had seen at the resort, constantly attended by one or two attractive servant-girls. She wore a long white muslin dress, trimmed in gold, with a heavy gold chain around her neck and jewel-encrusted rings on her fingers.

"Yes, Madame," I said in reply.

She slapped my face with her hand and then again with the other, whip-lashing my head against the stone. She grabbed my chin and said, "I am your Princess, Melissa, you will never forget that." She dropped her hand away, and laughed at the expression on my face, the tears that formed in the corners of my eyes. I thought this was my worst nightmare made real, thousands of miles away from home in a foreign country that supported – if not condoned – my treatment, or was stayed unaware so that they would never care. I was one of the faceless masses serving her masters, as they had for thousands of years.

She grabbed and pulled at my breasts while I writhed against my bonds, testing me as it were, for the pain I could endure. I was quickly covered in a sticky sweat that coated her fingers; she wiped them off on my hair as if I were a hand towel.

"You are now a small part of my personal harem and no longer have a name. You are simply 'slave' or 'slave girl;' my possession that I will do with as I see fit." She stooped to pick up a bucket. "Like this, you are merely an appliance; something I will use until it grows tarnished or rusted, and then dispose of." She threw the bucket against the wall where it banged loudly and rolled across the stone floor, the sounds of a tin can kicked across the street echoing within the chamber.

I shivered and trembled as I wondered how I would ever survive this. "Yes, Princess," I said, my gaze focused on her polished shoes. "I am your slave girl, here only to serve my Princess."

She pulled my head up to look me in the eyes. Hers were black, as dark as the cave became without a torch, their absence of light unwavering. "You will come to me tomorrow night when it pleases me. I will decide how long you will stay as part of my harem." Now she laughed into my face, holding my head so I could not turn from her.

She turned to the door, booted the bucket across the room and departed, casting me again into darkness.

While I remained chained against the wall, my imagination churned out horrible images of what might be coming. The sounds of my chains and the remembrance of her

words emphasized the danger I faced. My life here seemed to only get worse with each hour.

I heard steps coming down the stairs and tried to prepare myself for what might be coming. The girl who had bathed me returned along with the giant. He unlocked my wrists and collar from their bonds and I fell into her arms, unable to stand from my exhaustion and devastation. She led me back to the hot tub room where she bathed me again in its soothing water. Now, I was unashamed of my nakedness and even the attractiveness of this girl; the Princess had stripped me bare of any modesty or desire I once possessed.

'Girl,' as I came to call her in my mind, helped me onto a floor cushion, where she covered me with a thin sheet and left silently. I slept for hours, dreaming of the time Miss Victoria first kissed me and took me in her bed; how happy I was then with my new life.

My depression was overwhelming when I awoke to the utter misery of the harem. But my spirits lifted when I thought about the Girl. She hadn't looked abused or even unhappy, so perhaps my treatment was like a hazing or boot camp, first stripping me of my identity so it could then be more easily replaced by another more suitable to my new role and environment. With those thoughts I smiled at Girl when she appeared in my doorway, carrying a soft mound of fabric that I suspected was to be my clothing.

The dress spilled and flowed over me, with faint swirls of pastel and tiny gold threads woven into its hems and seams. Although it had no buttons or zippers, it molded itself to my body when I was still, or in its lightness, streamed around my legs and chest when I moved or encountered even the slightest breath of air movement. Underneath, I wore a small panty-thong and brassiere of the same material, veiled within the gossamer cotton of the dress, or alone, blended with my skin to form a collage of color that highlighted the privacy of my breasts and nether region.

When Girl finished dressing me, I examined myself in the mirror. The clothing was flattering and comfortable, like a diaphanous chiffon gown I once wore at Victoria's, whose soft skirt I felt around my legs only when the wind was blowing, or when I was sitting in a chair, delicately spreading and draping the skirt with my fingertips.

Girl led me past the guard and upstairs into the Princess' private quarters, down a hall resplendent with tapestries and oil paintings on the walls, a ceiling that towered above us, gilded with gold leaf on its molding. Our slippers padded silently down the corridor until we reach a pair of ornately carved white doors. She knocked and after hearing no reply, opened them to reveal the Princess's private chambers.

Here, the opulence was more balanced, with a king-size canopy bed along one wall, a collection of saffron colored cushions and pillows in a corner for comfortable seating on the floor, beside a window that overlooked the sand-colored courtyard. Everything was white, the walls, linens, and furniture, with gold accents and trim that brought the room to life and conveyed the understated wealth of its owner.

She settled me onto the cushions and chained my collar to the wall. I made myself as comfortable as I could and tried to calm myself by shutting my eyes. My past encounter with the Princess had left me petrified of what she might do next.

* * *

By the time I heard the Princess open her doors, I had decided on my plan. She approached me; I immediately knelt on the floor and pressed my head to its surface.

“I am your devoted slave, Princess,” I said, emphasizing every word and syllable, “here only for you and your pleasure. Please, my Princess, how may I relieve the tensions of your day and bring you to the heavenly state of blissfulness and peace?”

She stood in front of me; I dared not look up even at her toes. I waited as I suppose she also waited, to see who would make the first move. If maybe a lack of sincerity would surface, demanding her immediate punishment. When I had not stirred, she said, “You may help me cleanse myself, slave.” She released my collar from its chain and I followed her into her bathroom.

I helped her from her clothing, which consisted of pressed white cotton slacks and blouse, elegantly expensive panties and bra, carefully folded them on the étagère. Her figure was voluptuous, not overweight, but full and soft, her heavy breasts tipped with dark nipples, her skin the color of café au lait. I assisted her into the scented bath and then removed my own clothes so as to wash her in the manner Girl had done for me.

From the bath water, she watched me undress, taking note, it seemed, of my every movement. As her servant, I had nothing to hide from her; I resisted my own modesty and remained facing her so she could see everything about me.

I stepped into the bath and began soaping her back. I squeezed warm water on her shoulders, allowing it to flow and warm her skin. I went slowly, taking care to leave no spot untouched and only then did I move to her chest. I used the sponge on her breasts, kneading them with warmth and soap, and supported them with my hand to clean them, as if I were polishing fine silverware. Her skin glistened in its freshness and I detected her beginning to relax herself into my care.

The water crept up to my neck as I knelt on the tile floor for access to her legs. At my slight pressure, she propped one ankle on the ledge. I began at her foot, massaging her toes and ankles, slowly working my way up to her thigh where I stopped for the other leg. Here again, I drew out the process until I was at the apex of her legs. She arched her back to bring me even closer and I soaped and caressed her, ensuring every fold of her vagina was cleansed. Then I moved my sponge more deeply between her legs, my sponge and fingers massaging the area I was so personally familiar with. Her passion increased as I felt her legs flex and she thrust her pelvis against the sponge.

With my hand, I guided her from the bath and wrapped a fluffy towel around her body. With another, I dried her feet, moved up her legs. I quickly dried myself and then unwrapped her towel and finished refreshing her skin with my rubbing, making sure she was thoroughly dry and comfortable.

No words were said as I took her hand and led her into the bedroom. I turned down the sheets and nudged her into their cool embrace. I leaned over and began kissing her lips, at first gently like a lover who is only starting to arouse her partner. She pulled me against her and ground her mouth against mine in an urgent embrace. After a moment, I

pulled free of her arms and descended to her breasts where I licked and sucked her nipples until she her hands pushed on my shoulders, directing me to descend further.

Her bush was like a soft brush against my skin as I wriggled down her body, and once there, my tongue followed her curves up and down, teasing them open for me, and as they became excited I pushed my tongue within her while sucking on her lubricating water that bathed my face and mouth in its freshness. I pushed my nose against her clitoris and rubbed against it while tonguing deeply into her heat.

At last she began bucking against me. In waves, she moaned and thrashed around the bed as she released herself into her ecstasy. And as it subsided, I returned up to her face, kissed her, and rolled beside her.

She pushed me over onto my back and kissed me while spreading my legs apart with hers, her strength once again apparent, and now, exciting. I was surprised at her attentions but encouraged her by noticeably responding to this new chapter of our evening. Now she was kissing and sucking on my nipples, transmitting shockwaves and current through every part of my body. I found I couldn't stop shifting against her, rubbing myself against her pelvis, moaning and crying out with pleasure with every lick on my breast.

She shifted herself from between my legs and moved her head below my belly where she took me deeply into her mouth, its soft warmth inflaming my desire. Every nerve in my body was firing as she slowly moved me in and out, occasionally pausing to tease me at its tip with her tongue and plunging herself back onto me. When I released into her throat, I felt that I was turning myself inside out with each spasm. Over and over again, I released into her until I was sated. She stayed with me in her mouth as I relaxed and rested against the mattress.

When she slid back up to me, I held her in my arms, her head resting on my breast. As I was drifting into sleep I was startled to hear her crying softly. I pulled her against me and held her tightly which seemed to spur her on to more waves of what sounded like remorse or utter sadness.

"What is wrong, my Princess?" I asked. "Have I displeased you?"

Between sobs, she said, "No. No. It was wonderful, more than I have allowed myself to wish for." For a moment she was silent. "More than I deserve."

I was pleased with myself but also concerned that somehow this all could haunt me in some way. Would I again experience her brutality? Was she going to lash out at me for my seeing deeper within her, as if I might expose her weaknesses to others? I imagined how hard it would be to attend to her as I just had, how difficult to inflame my own desires to push the hurt out of my core, if she beat me again.

She said, "What is your name?"

"Melissa, my Princess."

"Thank you, Melissa. For being with me and allowing me to be with you. It has been too long since I have been with someone who wanted to be with me, who I didn't have to force or coerce into my bed. Although it satisfied my needs physically I always knew that

without my privileges she would abandon me to my own personal misery. They had the power, not me. It was within their power to refuse me and no matter how I forced them to submit I could never bridge the gap which grew wider with everyone in my harem, and for that matter, my life.”

“Thank you, Princess, for your kind words. You have no need to beat me or anyone else. You can be soft and when you allow others to see you as the compassionate woman you are, they will come willingly and with their own internal passion which will combine with yours.”

“Come with me, Melissa,” she said as she removed herself from my arms. “I have something to show you.”

She led me to her closet door, which opened, into another room lined with shelves and racks of Western dresses, coordinates, and shoes. In the center was a tall chest of drawers that she opened to reveal a bouquet of luxurious lingerie: panties, bras, slippers, stockings, and more, all from the most exclusive designers.

“This is my treasure,” she said with a conspiratorial smile and delight in her voice. “It is where I go for my dreams of what it must be like to live where you come from.”

“Why don’t you just leave and go live there?”

“I cannot. My brother, the king, has me watched me constantly; his spies follow my every movement. If I tried, I would be treated as a traitor and stoned, to death.” Again her eyes clouded in her thoughts. She wiped them on a tissue and looked back at me. “I see in your eyes that you doubt this? Believe me, he has told me this and when you meet him you will know it is true.”

“I’m sorry for you,” I said. “I can’t imagine living with your privileges and wealth and also feel like you are locked in a cage, like a peacock in a zoo. It must be horrible.”

She went to one of the dress racks and started flipping through them as if she were selecting an outfit to try on at a store. As she was looking, she said, “Enough of this sad talk. Will you stay with me and be with me tonight? Within my castle I am free to be whatever I want, and I hope you will play with me and show me how a Western lady lives.”

“I would be honored, my Princess.”

Like two girlfriends alone in a high-fashion store, we selected designer outfits for both of us and dressed to look our best. Arm in arm we left for her dining room where we enjoyed a dinner of traditional meat and rice dishes and fine French wine. Later we walked along the parapets where she pointed out the landmarks of her city. We ended the evening by returning to her room where we slept in each other’s arms.

The Princess and I became great friends although I often longed to be home. I always had to be on my best behavior; I never forgot my first encounter with her brutality and was always on edge about anything I might do or say that would trigger another episode. What might happen, for example, if she became tired of me? Maybe the rage boiling within her would again explode and – I shuddered at the thought.

Her husband didn't pay any attention to our relationship, besides making sure the Princess didn't try to escape his kingdom or otherwise embarrass him. My presence probably made his life easier; at least she was occupied, wasn't bothering him any longer.

Now I lived in a private room in the main castle, adjoining the Princess's suite. Sometimes I thought of how I might make my escape; although I still wore the brass collar I was otherwise unfettered and unguarded. If I made it outside the castle, past the guards and the king's surveillance, my collar would bind me to the Princess as if I were held by the strongest chain; I was in a very foreign land and had no one I could turn to for help.

Chapter Five

From time to time, the Princess would open her doors for admirers, well wishers, and others who hoped to gain access to her supposed wealth or power. Like a priestess, many hoped that an illness or other calamity might be lessened or cured by her attentions. Even some foreigners came, sometimes journalists who were investigating a story, or others who merely wished to experience the majesty of the Princess's castle and presence. But only women were allowed access to her; the king forbade her contact with men; that was his purview and after all, men were the ones who had the real power in the country.

The visits were short; frequently less than a minute, where the individual would first shower praise upon the Princess, and when she nodded, they would tell her why they had come. On occasion, the Princess would wish to talk further with the woman and would invite her to stay for tea, or dinner, and it was on a special day like this that my future became so much brighter.

I was always beside her chair, kneeling on a pillow or perhaps leaning against her legs, my face resting against her thigh. She would stroke my hair or palm my cheek as the women filed by. There was no doubt that I was her special servant, if not only for my repeated presence but also by the clear difference in her attitude once I had taken my place at her side.

The Princess's golden chair sat on a raised dais, within the reception room whose high ceilings; enormous Persian rugs on the walls, and Italian marble floor emphasized her lofty position amongst those who called upon her. A line of at least fifty women stretched beyond the door, waiting patiently on the red carpet that led up the stairs to her throne.

"If it pleases you, my Princess," said the conservatively-dressed supplicant, in a baby-blue jallaba that like a long-sleeved dress, covered her from head to foot. "Please help me with my daughter, who is abandoning our traditions. She is refusing marrying the man my husband chose for her and I fear for her life."

"How is it that she has access to Western clothing and customs? Is it not the parent's responsibility, particularly the mother's, to insulate her from these temptations?" the Princess said to her in an imperious tone.

As their back-and-forth continued, my mind drifted as it often did on these occasions. So many of the women's complaints and concerns were like so many others; it was remarkable when someone told the Princess something new. My gaze strayed down the waiting line of women, playing a game with myself where I guessed what each would

want to talk to the Princess about, based on my appraisal of their facial expressions and dress.

To say that I was astonished when I saw Victoria in the line is putting it only in the most placid words. I was leaning against the Princess's leg, and sat up abruptly when I saw Victoria. While continuing her discussion, the Princess patted me on my cheek as if to calm her pet, yet like a cat that spotted a mouse, my gaze remained focused on the one I had given up hope of ever seeing again. She was as beautiful as ever, dressed also in a Middle Eastern costume yet her skin color and facial features showed that she was Caucasian; to anyone in the castle she was another one of those foreign tourists who availed themselves of the opportunity to speak with royalty.

She stared directly at me, her expression blank as if she did not recognize or know me. But as her gaze didn't falter I was certain she was here to see me. How she knew I was here was impossible to guess, but it didn't matter.

I started to smile but checked myself; how might the Princess react if she saw me? While she wasn't particularly jealous, in many ways she made it clear to whom she expected allegiance. Memories of our first meeting flashed before me and I decided that I would limit myself to the delight of watching Victoria, while I recalled our life together, how it had once been for us on her ranch.

When Victoria finally joined us on the dais, after her ritual introduction, she said, "Princess, thank you for seeing me, it is an honor I shall never forget."

The Princess, who secretly enjoyed seeing a Westerner, smiled. "And thank you for coming to see me. What is it that I may do for you?"

"I am a reporter for the San Francisco Journal, one of the most recognized newspapers in my country. I am investigating reports that women in Saudi Arabia are suppressed and deprecated by its men, often punished for independent action, and generally kept in a state of constant fear of reprisal. I was hoping I might talk to you about this. It seems that there are many women in your country that need your help, if only through your example."

The Princess thought for a moment, watching Victoria for signs of her sincerity or deceit. "I think you have come at a good time in our history, Miss North. I need more time to talk with you about this than I have at present." She waved her hand at the line of women. "Perhaps you could join me this evening for a meal?"

"I would be honored to be able to spend time with you, Princess. Thank you so much for your consideration and generosity."

With that, Victoria bowed to the Princess, and without so much as a sidelong glance at me turned and departed the way she had come.

That evening, as with others when the Princess entertained guests, I served the Princess and Victoria their dinner, on a balcony overlooking the city and beyond that, the black darkness of the desert. A short time into their entrée of lamb and rice curry, Victoria expressed her need to visit the restroom.

"Show our guest to the ladies room, Melissa," the Princess said.

“Yes, my Princess,” I replied.

As Victoria and I entered the hall, she started to speak, “Melissa, it’s so good to – “

I waved her off with a finger to my lips, well aware of the guards, their suspicious eyes and ears. We continued to the restroom where I held the door for Victoria, followed her inside, locked the door.

“Victoria,” I whispered. “I can’t believe it’s you! Be careful here, there are many dangers.”

She folded me into her arms, almost pulling me off my feet. Instantly, my familiarity of her embrace and body returned to me as if we had never been apart. And then she pushed out of our embrace, held my shoulders, looked squarely at me, taking in all that I was now. Her eyes focused on my collar.

“Melissa, I have come only to see you and bring you back. I have missed you more than you can ever realize. Are you okay? Are you happy here?”

I looked away from her, ashamed of myself for no reason other than where Victoria had found me, a slave to a princess in a castle where I was merely a home accessory of hers, no longer a real human being. But then all I could think about was Victoria’s betrayal, how she had sold me into this so long ago. It was so strange that she said she missed me after how I had been packaged and sold to Mistress Caroline.

“No, Victoria.” I worried that I might sound too formal, or worse, what if my using her name upset her? “There was only one time that I have been with my heart’s desire.” Now, I felt cold in her presence, wary of what she might do next.

“I have come to take you home, Melissa.” She smiled at me and again embraced me. In my ear she whispered, “With me, where we will never again be separated. I love you Melissa. I have never been so sorry and unhappy as I have been over the past two years.”

I flushed red with her revelation, but just as quickly realized the impossibility of her words. “But how can you free me? More than anything I want to go with you but I don’t think I could survive the Princess’s anger if she caught me. And I am sure we’ll be caught; her security monitors everything in the castle, including her.”

“Let me worry about that. I have a plan.”

Chapter Six

Late that night, I was awakened by the sounds of a commotion and alarm. I smelled smoke and I turned on my light; it was billowing into my room under the door. Sirens in the distance were converging on the castle. We were on fire!

“Melissa!” I heard Victoria’s voice hissing at me from outside the window.

Victoria’s clothing was black, her face covered in black makeup that blended with the night. “Victoria, what are you doing?” I said.

“Quickly, Melissa. We have to get away from here before they come looking for you.”

I was dressed in a flimsy cotton gown, hardly ready to rappel down a rope in the darkness. Images of the Princess filled my mind with horror. "I can't do it."

"Melissa, look at me." It was then that I fully appreciated her calmness, her control, and through it, found some strength return to me. "Trust me. I will get you out of this and back to our home."

It was then or never. If we didn't make it, at least I would have tried and if we did, maybe then I could find the happiness that had eluded me for so long. I climbed out the window, and with Victoria's help we descended the two stories to the ground.

The fire engines and police were roaring into the grounds, converging at the front of the castle where the fire was most evident. Victoria and I stayed close against the castle wall and moved to its rear. There she had parked a small delivery van, painted like those that delivered our food and laundry. I scrambled into its cargo space and she slammed the door behind me. As she raced the engine and pulled around to the front of the castle, I watched over her shoulder as she accelerated toward the reinforced gate where soldiers stood guard, cradling submachine guns.

Victoria reached into the glove compartment and removed a metal control box. She pushed one of its buttons; an explosion roared behind us as the castle's decorative fountain disintegrated into pieces that rained down on our van. The soldiers shouldered their guns toward us as Victoria pushed the second button, detonating a charge that threw open the gate's doors. The soldiers fell away from us in fear for their lives.

Now, Victoria floored the van as we careened around a corner onto the main highway. We drifted into another turn as she slammed on the brakes as we halted within a one-car garage. The door closed behind us a moment before several high-pitched sirens screamed down the street.

"Change your clothes!" she yelled, directing me toward a small suitcase behind the passenger's seat. I opened it and found a traditional Arabian woman's black abayah dress, hejab scarf, and boshiya face covering. Without hesitation, I pulled my nightdress over my head and slipped into the abayah, drawing its sash around my waist.

As I was dressing, Victoria cleaned off her make-up and began dressing herself in a similar outfit. When she was finished, she helped me cover my hair with the hejab. My face was masked by the boshiya, my vision obscured by a coarse mesh that covered my eyes. For anyone seeing me, I was simply an anonymous conservative Arabian woman, dressed appropriately for shopping in the market.

Victoria led me to a door at the rear of the garage, where she lit a candle and directed me to follow her through a maze of rooms and passageways. Several times we found ourselves outside walking along back alleys as we made our way.

Finally she opened a filthy door into a room that contained only a sleeping mat and a chair. She locked it behind us and pulled up her boshiya. I did the same and immediately collapsed onto the mat, exhausted from the upheaval of our escape.

She held me against her as my heart slowed, until I was again calm enough to hug her in return. She released her hold and kissed me on the lips with the passion I had missed so much.

Again my heart started racing as I considered our situation. "How can we escape the country?" I asked her. "The king has spies everywhere. By now I'm sure they are looking for me, and you, as the one who burned down the castle." I trembled with the thought of what they would do to me if I was caught.

"It's okay, Melissa. Really, it'll be all right. Tomorrow morning we will go to the market, along with the women. There, a car will deliver us an airfield where a private jet is waiting for us to take us back to the States." She smiled at me with delight. "Within twenty-four hours, we will be home."

I started crying as I felt the relief and anticipation wash through me. We lay down on the mat, holding each other. Soon I fell asleep.

I awoke early in the morning and found Victoria looking through a narrow crack in the window shade, watching for our pursuers. I watched her for a minute, until I couldn't wait any longer. Despite my appreciation of her arranging my escape, she was still the one who had betrayed me.

"Did you have others?" I asked.

She allowed the curtain to close, shifted her attention to me. "What do you mean?"

"You know, like me?" I felt my eyes begin tearing up. I was so afraid of her answer.

She waited a beat. "I won't lie to you, Melissa." Again she paused, as if she was trying to come up with the right words. "I was scheduled to receive another, but I just couldn't do it. After you, I've been living alone. You're all I've thought about, all I've wanted." She cleared her throat. It seemed to me that she was also nervous about something. "I am so sorry for what I did to you. I love you, Melissa, and I want you back, with me."

I jumped up and wrapped my arms around her neck, pressed my body against hers. "I love you too, Victoria. I only want to be with you. I'll do anything."

She pulled me back to her. "Melissa, you're mine and I'm yours. As it should be."

Chapter Seven

After landing at San Jose International, Victoria and I drove north on the 101 freeway toward San Francisco. Traffic was light at ten o'clock in the morning, and after an hour we were following the turns that directed us toward the Golden Gate Bridge. But then, Victoria left the freeway at the Duboce/Mission Street exit.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I want to show you something." She seemed serious now, like something was weighing on her.

When she turned onto Ashbury and parked near Haight Street, I was getting scared. "Please, Victoria, don't take me back there. I don't think I can take it again."

"Do you trust me, Melissa?"

For only a moment I thought about it. "Yes, I do."

We walked hand in hand down Haight Street, past the restaurants and panhandlers, until we reached Anastasia's. The store was closed, empty but for several mannequins wearing cobwebs in the storefront.

"What happened?" I asked.

Victoria smiled at me. "After I told Anastasia to go to hell, her store was raided by the DEA. Seems that among other things, she was dealing drugs on the side. She'll be in jail for a very long time." She laughed. "And that's that!"

I stared through the glass as memories came flooding back, of that Sunday, my kidnapping, Victoria, the island. I shuddered when I thought about Saudi Arabia.

Victoria pulled me away from the store and slid her arms around my waist. She kissed me as my arms circled her neck. "Melissa," she said, "let's go home."

THE END