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MIRANDA

PART 2



A NAKED CAPTIVE TO BE TRAINED AND SOLD IN ANGUISH & AGONY!

ADULTS ONLY

HIT 113

Miranda

Volume 2

by F. E. Campbell

Note: All the characters and events are fictitious. No resemblance to real persons is intended or should be inferred.

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It was deceptively quiet in the Country House of Wilbur Herman. Perhaps it was his absence on another of his endless business excursions. Persis grinned at Miranda and hummed: “When the Pasha’s away his slaves can play.” Miranda clinked her handcuffs and stuck her tongue out in reply.

“You both need work. You’re becoming impudent,” Susan told them curtly.

Persis was intrigued. “You have some?”

“He’s in the drawing room.” Susan’s tone was deceptively demure. “He’s probably boning up on Kraft-Ebbing at the last moment.”

Miranda thrilled. Her training had instilled an immense confidence. She might once have scorned her new skills, but now she longed to practice them. She was something special. She was good! She felt pride. “Let us at him,” she pleaded.

Susan sparkled. “You must both look ravishing. Make

yourselves as wickedly erotic as I've taught you. Take time. I'll entertain him while he awaits his houris."

"Our chains?" Persis queried.

"Your ankles are chained now. That's all you need." Susan turned to Miranda: "You too. Your handcuffs will have to stay. No time to get 'em off. You look gorgeous with 'em on, so why bother."

Their walk to the Drawing Room was another of those in which the flesh quivered and the breath quickened. The metallic accompaniment of their chains seemed unduly loud. Approaching the portal, Persis grasped one of Miranda's cuffed hands. Even she was silent.

They had taken three paces into the room before they stood transfixed. There was the aroma of tea. The trolley was there with its cakes and little sandwiches and the big pot. Behind it sat Susan, the perfect hostess. But her eyes sparkled with mischief. Their startled eyes registered every detail. But were drawn and held by the occupant of the big arm chair.

It was Major Ballard.

He rose at their entry. His features held that same quiet self assured smile that Miranda remembered from her first sight of him. Gravely and with an old world courtesy he raised her joined hands and kissed them both. His touch lingered. She felt something pressed into her palm. On

being introduced Persis was plainly delighted to have her hand kissed too. She radiated happiness. The Major's gaze lingered on her charms. He was visibly impressed. Miranda opened her hand. In it was a small key.

"Compliments of Mrs. Crosbie." The Major told her.

Miranda was overjoyed. In her feminine world the Major seemed solidly and most attractively masculine. Excitedly she held up the small piece of metal for Susan to see. "May I…?" She pleaded, quite uncaring of a possible penalty to be paid later.

Susan waved airily. "Of course, Darling. But you'll feel naked without them."

At mention of the word Miranda did suddenly feel naked. She knew she was blushing as she fumbled with the key.

"Allow me." Major Ballard was at her side. His fingers swift and sure. Releasing her he dropped handcuffs and key in his pocket.

Again Miranda spoke on impulse. "Could I… Would you mind…?"

He laughed in instant understanding. "Of course!" he said, "a memento. Cynthie will be immensely flattered." He placed the shining familiar things in her right hand and the key in her left.

When he had regained his seat she looked directly into his

eyes. “I wasn’t thinking of Mrs. Crosbie.”

Persis giggled. Miranda realized the implication of her avowal and her cheeks flamed anew. Yet she had worn the handcuffs throughout the most vivid fifteen days of her life. She had become used to their grip upon her wrists. Susan had not been far wrong in saying she would feel naked without them. She did. She felt an odd nostalgia for the metal bands that had left deep red circles in her flesh.

Suddenly she was aware that all eyes were focused on her and the things she held. At this rate she would never stop blushing. The things in her hands emphasized her total nudity. Short of putting them back on her wrists she had nowhere to put them. Even the tiny key was a problem. She looked appealingly at Susan and, in response to an affirmative nod, took her keepsakes and handed them to her. “Sit down Darling,” Susan directed. Then to Persis. “Being the youngest you can hand the Tea round. After all this drama and heart throb I’m sure we can all do with a cup.”

“I suppose you are wondering why I am here?” The Major looked first at Miranda and then at Persis.

“Why, to help us escape and take us home, of course. The wicked plot is discovered and you’ve come to the rescue.” Persis affirmed as though she truly believed the romantic possibility.

Major Ballard viewed her with amused interest. Miranda

felt a touch of jealousy. Persis was blossoming into a vibrant and endearing personality. She could never be ignored.

“I’m afraid not.” Major Ballard gave Persis his most charming smile. “Sorry about that, but there are some unusual ethics involved here. Perhaps some other time…”

“But you know we were kidnapped and now we are slaves!” Persis said indignantly. She kicked her ankle chain. “Look! They keep us in chains!”

“I wouldn’t push it, Darling…!” Susan’s voice was soothing. But firm.

Major Ballard gave Persis his most engaging smile and produced an almost Gallic shrug eloquent of both regret and chagrin. “All of us in this room,” he said quietly, “are victims of strange circumstance. Had any of us, a few years or months ago, been told that we would sit as we are today we would have repudiated the idea with scorn. Yet each of us have, in our own fashion, adjusted and accepted compulsion.” His gaze swept lingeringly over his listeners. “You see me here in uniform. I seem of a world from which you have been taken. One of you has asked me for help. I do not give that help because, in my way, I am as much under duress as you. You call yours slavery. Mine is loyalty. There is mercy in neither.”

He paused, looking from one girl to another appealingly. “Because of an error, the Department to which I am at-

tached has become aware of Mr. Benson and Mr. Herman. Both are powerful men. Our department exists without conscience on the principle of 'You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours'. We are content, therefore, to know nothing —or to say we know nothing of certain activities these men engage in. They can do us favors. I carry letters today by which they authorize The Department to commandeer the services of one of you." He looked intently at Miranda. "A young woman who deeply impressed certain members of our Staff. She can perform an inestimable service for us." His voice lost its official tone and became almost boyish. "How about it, Miranda?"

"You mean go and get whipped by Mrs. Crosbie again!" Miranda asked bitterly. She was indignant and disappointed. She had hoped his visit had other motives.

By an inclination of the head he acknowledged her sentiment. "No. Cynthie will be there. But you will receive nothing but respect from her."

"But you want me to do the same sort of thing, don't you?" Vividly her hands remembered Mr. Bhuratta's cane.

"Physically, yes." He conceded. "But actually much, much more."

Miranda tensed. What more could a girl suffer or do! "Good Heavens! What more is there for a girl to do than we have been trained for…?"

Major Ballard ignored her outburst. “I will give you a brief outline. It will help you understand. If it sounds like Hollywood at its worst, I can’t help it.” He grinned ruefully. “Here we go.” He seemed to take a deep breath and gave his audience another lingering survey. “You see, the Department lives on expediency. It searches for advantage, for the thin edge of wedges; for weakness, and for the luck of pure chance. We are on a lucky chance gambit right now. Two days ago we found the corpse of a quite beautiful girl floating in the Thames.”

He raised his hand to still their obvious exclamations. “Oh, it goes back further than that! For a long time we have sought a man. One of these International types who foments trouble and profits from it. He deals in anything: all the vices, dope, armaments, but above all information. Secrets. He is immensely rich. Immensely powerful. A man we might normally work with. But he is ideologically hostile. He enjoys sanctuary in various States around the World. Interpol cannot touch him. We know a lot about him, of course. But until now it has not helped us put our finger on him. Chance has done that. The dead girl in the river is his wife.”

He grinned. “You see, the plot thickens! We have our fingers on a lot of pulses. Most of what we learn never reaches newspapers. We have discovered that our boy—by the way, he goes by the absurd name of Mr. Hussein, does not know his wife is dead. He believes her kidnapped. He has activated his tentacles all over the world searching.

Again by pure chance it happens that we had, quite innocently in the course of normal pursuits some time ago, arranged with this chappie the privilege of one of these famous—er… entertainments in which you excel."

Major Ballard's voice had regained a touch of enthusiasm. "Now this last bloke," he continued, "isn't exactly one of Hussein's tentacles. He lives mostly by selling info. That's how we use him. So we are not going to use our own premises. We take him to a private house. We tell him it's an exclusive Club we use on occasion. We don't know the girls personally. But have great faith in their ability to please V.I.P.s." The major paused and gave Miranda an apologetic smile. "So then you walk in and stun the blighter with your Arts and Crafts and while you are doing it manage to drop the message that you are Mrs. Hussein: that you are held captive: That you are compelled to do what you are doing under pain of torture…" Major Ballard coughed awkwardly and got slightly pink. "You can show him those marks you wear so becomingly. You always seem to have a few. And then beseech him to take the word to Hubby with a view to rescue. Be no harm in touching on a possible reward."

"But he'd recognize that I wasn't Mrs. Whatsername." Miranda protested.

"He has never seen you or Mrs. Hussein in his life." The Major said happily. "This is about as neatly dovetailed a gift of chance as I have ever known."

“I’ll do it!” exclaimed Persis joyfully. “What a simply marvelous adventure! Let me… Oh, please!”

“Don’t be absurd!” Miranda’s voice was tart. Persis was becoming a handful. “These men are terrible. You’re not ready…”

“You did it.” Persis argued. “Why can’t I?” She turned to Major Ballard. “You’ll let me, won’t you?” She pleaded in her most feminine voice.

“Hold on a minute.” Susan laughed. She held up a letter and turned to Major Ballard. “Did you read Mr. Herman’s instruction?” she asked.

He shook his head. “No. He said it contained the authority. He addressed it to you.”

“Well in it he instructs me to keep Miranda here and send Persis on your mission. He says, too, that you must keep her chained and not give her a chance to escape. He’ll hold you responsible.” Susan giggled. “She represents quite an investment, y’know. Here, read the letter.” She tossed it to him. Her eyes told Miranda that she was pleased.

The Major perused the missive, then grinned at Persis. “You get your wish,” he acknowledged. “It’s a lucky guest that gets you.” His eyes suddenly became intent upon her.

“I know what you’re looking for!” Persis assured him brightly. “I’ve got some lovely marks!” She raised her eyes from her own person to his enthusiastically. “If you don’t

think what I've got are good enough Susan can easily put some more on. I won't mind—not for something like this."

"It's absurd." Miranda said angrily. "She should not go. I should."

The Major looked distressed.

Susan laughed at his discomfort. "Judgement of Solomon, eh, Major. Well, you brought it on yourself walking in on three girls like this. I'll let you in on a secret. You see, Wilbur Herman's a bit sweet on Miranda. He doesn't want to risk her. Miranda's a bit sweet on you, and she also has a mother complex about Persis—at least we can call it that for now." Susan's voice held laughter. "See what you've got yourself into."

Major Ballard grinned cheerfully. "It would have been an impossible choice." He agreed. "I am indebted to Mr. Herman that I don't have to make it." He paused and looked troubled. "But isn't this a bit absurd… I mean, about keeping Persis chained?"

"You kept me chained." Miranda reminded him.

"Well, it was a bit different. I mean—"

"You mean we hadn't been introduced?" She finished for him icily.

"In a way, yes."

“Please don’t argue about me.” Persis demanded. She turned her full attention on the Major. “You must chain me! And do it properly. Don’t you see what a spot I’ll be in if you don’t! I’m only human. My conscience will be at me all the time to walk away and go home. Or I’ll bother you to take me there. I’ll be a nuisance—to myself more than you. So keep me chained properly. Then I won’t have to make awful decisions and can give my full attention to Mr. Whatsisname.

Awkwardly, the Major turned to Susan. “Very well. I’m out-voted. But… er, what would you say was usual for such an occasion?”

Everyone laughed. Susan considered the weighty question. “Her ankles are chained now. I’ll leave them on her and give you a key. Actually that’s enough. She’s learned to walk well in them, even though the chain is not long. But she absolutely can’t run. The girl’s ankles are always chained. It’s a sort of happy compromise. They can do anything except run or fight. You get so you don’t notice them…”

Susan flushed at the Major’s quick amused glance. “I won’t be embarrassed about it. Sure, I wore chains. A girl does get used to them.” She fingered the lovely metal round her throat and stuck out a leg on which the anklet gleamed brightly. “I’m wearing more than they are. But mine won’t unlock.” She said it proudly.

Major Ballard was still considering. He was a man who did

not take his responsibilities lightly. “Well, yes.” He conceded. “But y’know if I was in Persis’ place I’m not sure that would stop me. I suppose there are worse things than walking out in the street with your feet hobbled. Could be done, y’know!”

“Naked?” Susan sounded doubtful.

“Always grab a bit of curtain or something?”

Persis gurgled. “How positively priceless!”

“You do take things seriously, don’t you, Major.” Susan approved. “Wilbur will be what he would call: ‘Mighty grateful’ to you for looking after his property. I’ll admit Persis is a bit of a handful. I had an awful time with her when she first came. So just to be safe and keep you from worrying I’ll lend you a chain you can use to attach her to something solid whenever you aren’t with her or have her under lock and key. In fact, why don’t you also take those famous handcuffs of Miranda’s.”

“No,” said Miranda.

“You are being frightfully awkward, Darling.” Susan chided. “Come over here, please.”

With flaming cheeks Miranda obeyed. She knew she was at fault. But in front of Major Ballard! She wished she had kept quiet. Holding her temper in check, and stifling a longing to flee the room, she passively held out her hands and watched Susan notch the familiar steel bands about

her wrists and press them to the same snug tension that Mrs. Crosbie had used. She had not even had one hour's freedom from them. She was angry with herself. But said, thank you, in a pleasant voice and walked, doubly chained, back to her seat. She could not meet the Major's eyes. She was furiously sure that he was laughing at her.

"That's an ensemble that is quite effective." Susan suggested as though displaying a model. There was laughter in her voice.

"You are all just teasing!" Persis stamped her foot so that the links rattled. "Stop talking about me as though I'm a convict. I'm going to love this adventure. You don't really need to chain me at all. But just so that everyone, including me, is happy I'll ask the Major to chain me as much as possible every time I think I might be tempted. So there…!"

When Major Ballard and his willing captive had departed Miranda felt limp and let down. She sat idly examining her handcuffs and swinging one chained foot. Then, raising her gaze, looked dubiously at Susan, conscious of bad behavior. But could think of nothing to say.

Susan poured a cup of cold tea which she sipped without enjoyment, her eyes on Miranda. "You are worried. I know! Stop it. I'd judge that chap to be O.K."

"But she's so—so young…" Miranda sounded close to tears.

"Don't be silly. She might be a year younger than you.

That's about all."

"But she's never done this."

Susan laughed. "She sure is anxious to get started. No one has to worry about Persis. I think you are a bit jealous actually."

Miranda flushed. "What if I am! He's nice."

"I think he's nice too. But I'm not letting it get him into trouble."

Miranda bit off her next words. With Susan it was so easy to forget. But Susan didn't forget. "I'm sorry, Mistress," she said abjectly. She meant it.

Susan leaned forward. "Darling. I know this has sort of thrown you. I know about you and Persis. Good Heavens I ought to, didn't I take your mind off your troubles. How'd you like to take a message down to Sarah."

So she had gone too far! Miranda was now close to tears. The thought of that awful posture on the table and the pain in Sarah's kitchen… She couldn't bear it. Without volition she slipped to her knees in front of her Mistress and bent her head in submission. A salty drop sped down one cheek and fell on her thigh. She could not speak.

"I suppose I could offer you a choice." Susan's tone was pensive. "Yes, I think I should. Go down and ask Sarah for twenty strokes or come upstairs with me. Which shall it be,

Darling?”

It was an easy choice to make.

They held hands going up the stairs.

* * *

To Persis it was a glorious adventure. The Major was exciting! The car was exciting! Freedom from four walls and the sight of fields and streets was exciting. Such excitement was infectious. The Major was not immune. He looked at the flushed and lovely face beside him. Already he felt affection for this vivid child. He was thankful her ordeal was but for one night. Persis sat entranced and mischievous. Her ankles were chained as Susan had promised. She sat naked under a rug that the Major had insisted on. From time to time she deliberately allowed the rug to slip until it reached latitudes that caused her embarrassed companion to draw her attention to it. Like Miranda, Persis had discovered that, once you grew accustomed to it, naked was the nicest way to be.

She was delivered to Mrs. Crosbie. Evidently that lady was the only feminine chaperone the Department could boast. Hearing the name, Persis immediately exclaimed “Why, you’re the handcuff lady, aren’t you?”

Mrs. Crosbie was amused. “Would you care for a pair?” she asked obligingly.

It was a mistake. Persis, eyes glinting, said: “Yes please,” and held out her hands.

It must be said for Cynthie that she was not easily flustered. With an air that plainly said ‘One up for our side!’ she produced the mate to those Miranda had borne for so long and clipped them firmly and tightly on Persis’ slender wrists. The result was quite shattering.

Holding them up for inspection, Persis twisted her joined hands this way and that eyeing the various angles of the shining metal with glowing approval. “They’re simply gorgeous!” She enthused. “You are a Darling to do this for me!” Without warning she bent forward and kissed Mrs. Crosbie soundly on the cheek.

Telling of it afterwards, Major Ballard always insisted that at the moment of impact Cynthie went into deep shock. Certainly for several moments she stood speechless. Slowly a small pinkness reached her cheeks. To the watching man she became more human than he had ever seen her. Amusedly he reflected that if Persis remained with the Department very long the entire unit might become disorganized. Mrs. Crosbie managed a small smile and patted Persis on the cheek. “You’re very sweet,” she said. “Here, let me unlock those things.”

“Oh no!” Persis was on the defensive. She hugged her

joined hands to her breast as though fearing to lose them. Her eyes flashed.

“Come on, old girl.” Major Ballard protested. “Let Cynthie take ’em off. No need to overdo it, y’know. We’re all friends. here.”

Persis was loving every moment of her new found power. She was inspired to mischief. She stuck her chin out with a pert assurance and declaimed: “You promised! If I said I felt like escaping you were to put extra chains on me. Well! I feel like escaping, so you must make me wear ’em.” She turned her attention to Cynthie. “Any other nice things you can fasten on me?”

Mrs. Crosbie took a prudent backward step and disclaimed possession of additional confinements. “Perhaps I can show you to your room,” she offered hopefully.

“See you tomorrow.” Major Ballard bent and kissed both of the small cuffed hands. Then, gently and lightly kissed the raised lips.

The day belonged to Persis.

The next day was spent on instruction and the study of background. She must be letter perfect in her role. She worked. She glowed. She flirted outrageously. All of it brought her finally to the strange house and the strange door to the room that was to be her stage. With the opening of the door the curtain would rise. It was not until that

moment that Persis proffered her hands and allowed Mrs. Crosbie to unlock the handcuffs. Pocketing the warm metal, the older woman hesitated for a moment then clasped her ward by the shoulders and kissed her warmly on the lips. A moment later Persis stood alone. Unaware of an honorable citation.

He was Eurasian. Or Lebanese. Or perhaps Egyptian. Persis was vague on Geography. But his English was precise and clear. “I would like to whip you.” He said urbanely. Then added politely, “If you don’t mind.”

Persis did mind. It was a bad start! It was also a challenge. She rose to meet it. “Of course, Master. A whip or a cane?” She asked brightly.

“A whip.” He was indeed a man of few words. Persis found it difficult to like him.

She brought the wicked thing from the rack. Knelt, kissed it, bowed her head. Then proffered him his choice with raised arms. “I am your slave, Master.” She knew that she had never done it better.

He did not take it. For a breath or two there was silence between them. Then he grasped her hand. “Where did you get this ring?” He demanded.

Her heart leapt. The ring had come from the finger of the dead girl. Already it had worked its magic. “It is my husband’s ring, Master,” she told him softly.

“Who is your husband?”

She told him.

“What are you doing here?”

She told him of the kidnap and the threat of torture. “Please help me, Master.”

He laughed angrily. “It is nonsense! You tell me a fairytale. Why?”

“It is true, Master.”

“It is a lie. It is a silly lie. I am not pleased that you make a fool of me. Because you have done so I will whip you very hard.”

“Thank you, Master. But I speak truth.”

“Because I am going to hurt you very much it is best that you be bound. Bring me much rope and cord. You have it?”

“Yes Master.”

“And a gag. I dislike a woman’s howling.”

“Thank you, Master.” The adoration in her voice should have melted a heart of stone.

She had been shown the cupboard earlier that day. Among many things it provided a quite prodigious amount of rope and cord and a blade to cut it with. She brought it all and placed it before her guest together with the gag that had a

so familiar look.

He wasted no time. Unexpectedly it was the gag he used first. Standing as he directed, erect with her back to him, her hands behind her back, she accepted the disagreeable mouthful. As he buckled it brutally at the nape of her neck she prayed that she had already said all that need be said. Certainly she would now say nothing more unless he released her from silence after she had been whipped. Had he truly disbelieved her. Or had his denial been too emphatic! She dismissed speculation. She had done all she could. Now she would be whipped. How gracefully would she bear it! After all it was no new experience. Certainly she would now be silent under the lash. If he used only a small portion of the cord she would also lie very still.

He was precise and definite. No doubt he had done it many times. Uncrossing Persis' wrists he placed her hands palm to palm. There was the bite of cord. She would not free them. Next her elbows. He circled them three times and drew the cords tight. She gasped with pain. But he stopped short of drawing her arms together. When the knot was tied Persis knew she was in the hands of a Master. Confronted with her chained feet he made an exclamation of annoyance. But ruthlessly circled her ankles, too, with cord so that the slack chain was wrapped and held and she found herself teetering on closely confined feet she could not move. It would be very easy to fall. If he whipped her as she stood she knew she would indeed lose her precarious balance.

It was then that fear struck Persis. Whip her! How could he when her back was protected by her bound arms and with her hands half covering her bottom! There was something wrong! But then, miserably, she realized that her front was beautifully exposed. All of it! Perhaps this was his 'Thing'. Her courage began to ebb. The total loss of movement was demoralizing. The gag placed its wearer in a world apart.

Her guest had gone to the window. Opening it he leaned far out examining the terrain. Quite casually he produced a small transmitter, raised its antenna, and spoke a few words in a foreign tongue. He was rewarded by a single emphatic response.

All his movements had purpose. But were unhurried. Such glances as he spared for the bound girl held only contempt. There was no lust. No interest. She had become an object. Picking up the rope so liberally provided by the department he placed a noose above his captive's breasts and under her arms and drew it tight at her back. Then picked her up as though she was weightless and sticking her legs out of the window allowed her to sit on the sill. Looking down a distance of perhaps twenty feet she saw a shadowy figure waiting. It raised its hand. Suddenly Persis was swinging in the air, the noose biting wickedly, but the rope paid out slowly and with care so that she reached the waiting arms which then carried and placed her on the grass and untied the rope. Helplessly and in wonder she watched it snake back up the wall and disappear within the window which then closed. Her new possessor was

busy with some twigs obliterating footmarks on the flower bed. They were in a narrow garden. She could see the area way leading to the street. It was dark. The street deserted. No one saw her carried to the car.

In the room above the 'Guest' neatly coiled the rope and replaced it in the cupboard, returned the unused whip to its rack, then went to the bar and poured himself a very large drink which he sipped in quiet meditation. His eyes searching the room. Satisfied, and still holding his glass, he opened the door. Going to the head of the stairs he called. His voice held a wealth of irritation.

It was, of course, quite impossible. First Mrs. Crosbie.

Then the Major. Their Guest listened to their affirmations with amused insolence. Then raised his hand. "You English are absurd. If such a girl ever existed it is obvious that she has changed her mind and gone elsewhere. What was there to stop her?"

"She was naked and her feet were chained." Mrs. Crosbie was angry.

Their guest raised a cynical eyebrow. "Oh come," he protested angrily. "You expect me to believe…"

"I don't give a damn what you believe!" Major Ballard said firmly. "This girl existed. She is not in this house now, so all I can do is offer our apologies. I'll place a car at your disposal and tomorrow we will be in touch."

When their guest had gone, stiffly indignant, the Major looked at his companion sympathetically. “Now! What really happened, Cynthie?”

“I took off the handcuffs and left her outside the door.”

“You didn’t wait and watch her enter?”

“No!” Mrs. Crosbie spit out the word bitterly.

“Hmm! I suppose then it’s theoretically possible.

“The little Bitch!” Mrs. Crosbie’s voice held fury. “She made an ass of both of us. I’d have sworn she was genuine. If I ever lay my hands on her again I’ll flay her alive and keep enough chains on her to hold a horse.”

“Do it for me too.” The major’s voice spoke sorrow rather than anger. He was remembering the pert beauty of the vanished girl. “Have the house and the garden properly searched. And if there is a naked girl wandering round London with her ankles chained together she shouldn’t be too hard to find. I’ll get busy on the blower.”

* * *

Persis estimated that it took her twenty-four hours to reach Mr. Hussein. A short ride during which she had lain blindfolded on the floor. Then a garage and a long fright-

ening wait in total silence. The little windowless room and a slatternly woman who padlocked a chain round the captive's neck and, with another padlock, fastened the adequate length to a naked hot water pipe, then cut the cords so that, for a moment, Persis felt an immense gratitude to a jailer who spoke no English and communicated only by signs. Persis slept. She ate. Finally she was provided with a bathroom and much feminine stuff which she gathered she must use to make herself presentable. She did her best. She was blindfolded. Her hands tied at her back. Perhaps twenty hours had passed.

The second ride was longer. She guessed she had been placed in the trunk and covered with a blanket. It was not too agonizing. But she was glad when it was done. Finally she found herself, once more, facing an enigmatic door. She was quite naked and quite free except for her familiar ankle fetters. The door opened. A hand at her back propelled her forward. The door closed behind. Mr. Hussein was a smooth handsome man with too much dark hair and too large dark eyes and a too large smile. He came to her with outstretched arms. "My Darling, my darling! A man without his wife is a nothing." He kissed passionately, held her at arm's length devouring her with his eyes, then kissed her again and again. Stepping back he swung, the palm of his open hand striking her cheek and knocking the naked girl to the carpet. Without a word he walked back to his seat behind the desk.

It took Persis a minute to gather her wits and rise doubt-

fully to her feet. She was bereft. She hurt. The man who had struck her was still smiling. But his eyes were cold. He motioned her to a hard chair facing him. He did not rise. Obediently she sat. She no longer knew what role she had to play.

“Where is my wife?” Mr. Hussein asked tonelessly.

“I don’t know your wife.” Persis disclaimed plaintively.

“Give me her ring.”

Persis handed it across the desk. Then wondered, too late, if the act had betrayed her.

“Ah! So you wear it and you know to whom it belongs?”

“It was given to me… along with a story.” It sounded lame.

“By whom was it given?”

Persis had an inspiration. She described her ‘Guest’.

“Shankalin! The man who sent you here?”

She shrugged and managed to look stupid.

Mr. Hussein cupped his chin in his hand and meditated. “Perhaps you might like to tell me the truth.” He suggested.

“Of course,” Persis said brightly. “What do you want to know?”

He waved his hand. “Don’t be clever. I mean that you may

wish to amend what you have already said."

"Well, that's the way it was," Persis said flatly. "Please let me go home."

"Where is your home?"

Persis knew herself trapped. Her mind raced. She gave Wilbur Herman's address. He was not involved. It would not betray Major Ballard.

"What is your status there?"

"I live with a man." Persis began to regain confidence.

"Then why were you provided for Shankalin's entertainment?"

"I do it for money... He doesn't mind! I get a hundred pounds a night."

"That is too much."

"Not for what those chaps do to a girl it isn't! Look at the marks on me." She managed a convincing bitterness.

She had scored a point. He considered her seriously. Then sighed. "Young lady, you are unlucky. You are... what do they call it... you are expendable. I do not really believe what you tell me. So I must test it. The testing will be most unpleasant for you. You will not enjoy it at all. While this is being done to you I will check out this name and address you have given. I do not think that what I will find will help

you much. But we will see."

His fingers strummed the desk. She knew she was being examined. "I am a businessman," he continued. "I have found that any situation holds possibilities of profit. You do. So I must warn you. In this… what I have called testing, we will hurt you very much but will try not to permanently injure you, because when we are done you will make a most valuable addition to an establishment I own in Cairo. You will not like that either, of course, and that is why I say you are a most unlucky young lady." He pressed a button.

The two girls who entered were young. Persis guessed them as about fifteen. They were beautiful. Their clothes must have come from Paris. Their most notable feature was poise. They looked at Persis with an amusement she found disturbing.

"My daughters," Mr. Hussein introduced, "Keturah and Hester. They are immensely capable and quite merciless. It pleases me to indulge them."

Outside the door Persis fought. Keturah and Hester subdued her with cruelty and ease. They brought her to a cell and gave her water, bread and two apples. "In the morning we begin," Hester said pleasantly. "For now, sleep."

Persis fought again when she saw the room and what it held. With frightening skill they spread-eagled her on the low bench and strapped her tight. Her feet, with their taut chain, protruded over the bottom edge, but were fastened

so that she could not move them. It all happened very quickly. She was able to raise her head enough to watch each girl pick up a cane and a chair. They placed the chairs conveniently so they could sit and gently cane the soles of Persis' feet. Keturah addressed herself to one foot, and Hester the other. For a minute she wonderingly watched their absorption in their task. Then her head fell back and something she had read long ago filtered slowly through her memory.

Whilst her hand kept active with the cane Keturah turned and surveyed their victim. "No. We are not funny little native girls. No, you won't be able to reason with us. No, we can't be bribed. We are being expensively educated in England and we mix in the best circles. We are highly sexed. We are lesbians. We are very cruel. We love to torture girls; especially if they are a little older than we are—like you. We have much experience because Daddy often gets hold of a girl who is a bit difficult. He gives her to us. In a few days or a week or so we persuade her to be very reasonable. We never hurry. If she gets reasonable too quickly we just pretend we didn't hear what she said. There, naked girl, does that answer all your questions?"

Persis knew fear. There would be no reasoning with these svelte moppets. But she tried.

"I like sex. I like it with girls. Let me loose and I'll give you both a wonderful time. I'm being wasted like this."

Hester laughed happily. “Silly! You are going to give us a wonderful time. Whenever we choose. But you are also going to be tortured. You just have to be a brave little girl and put up with it.”

“What is this house in Cairo?” Persis ventured.

“Don’t pretend you don’t know.” Hester made her voice arch. “It’s a most expensive brothel. You’ll get tortured there, too. Mostly whipped. Men love to whip girls before they stick those long ugly things they have into you.”

“They stick them in from both sides, y’know,” Keturah giggled.

Persis lay silent. There was nothing to say. She was lost and terribly afraid. Never had she known such total absence of human feeling. The strumming on her feet began to bother her. The taps had been light at first. Now she was not sure whether the canes fell harder or her soles more sensitive. Her legs flinched against the small blows. But only the nerves responded. The straps held her ankles immovable. Silently she began to cry. The girls noticed immediately. “Tears are nice,” Hester said approvingly. “We like them. We’ll make you cry often.”

Persis sobbed with total abandon.

* * *

“I have to be out of my cotton picking mind!” Wilbur Herman declared vehemently. “I lose one girl who costs me a fortune. Now you two, each costing another fortune, want to traipse off into the wild blue yonder. I ought to send both of you down to Sarah and let her knock some sense into you.” Both girls knelt respectfully. Susan calm, Miranda distraught.

“Alright, alright!” His tirade was directed to Miranda’s tears. “Think I feel any better than you! I like her. She’s one sweet kid. And I’m the damn fool that sent her off to oblige the cloak and dagger boys.”

He quietened. With a gesture of disgust he unlocked Susan’s collar and anklets. Then motioned to Miranda’s feet. “Unchain her. Might as well go for broke. I’ll drive you into town.”

By the time the Department had done with Susan the transformation was incredible. She matched the pictures so that beyond a range of fifteen feet she was indeed the dead girl. The pictures were taken of she and Miranda here and there about the house. In one she held the day’s paper so that the date could be read.

“It must be Shankalin,” Major Ballard vowed. “We underrated him. This time we stay out of the picture. You go to him, Miranda, with the pictures and name a price. His wife for Persis. No questions asked.”

It had all sounded very simple and very purposeful. But Miranda was trembling inwardly as she passed the pictures over the desk. “Ten thousand pounds and the safe return of the girl you are holding,” she told Shankalin firmly.

Shankalin perused the photos, even using a magnifying glass. He then examined Miranda. “All is very naive,” he told her musingly. “I have been accused. My house has been searched. Police have disturbed my business. I think I am the victim of conspiracy. Now you come. What am I to think?”

Miranda kept silent.

“I know there is something wrong.” He looked at Miranda as though expecting her to agree. He shrugged. “But perhaps you have a value of which you are not aware…” For a moment his features betrayed a faint glint of humor. “Come we take a ride. Agreed?”

“Agreed.” Miranda’s heart leaped. Wherever she was taken the Major’s men would follow. Not one, but many.

In the car Shankalin handed her dark glasses. “You will wear these. You cannot see through them. They serve as blindfold. But those seeing you cannot tell that. Now I search you. No weapons, please.”

She endured the probing fingers. But instinctively tensed at

his next demand. “I want no trouble. No changing of the mind. I must fasten your hands.” Sensing her reaction, he added with a sneer. “You may leave this car now. I do not mind. It was you who came to me.”

The die was cast. Miranda sat stiffly while a chain encircled her waist. It was attached to handcuffs that closed upon her wrists. Thus her hands were held in her lap. No one would see. But she was helpless. An odd reflection flashed through her mind: to be chained was nothing new. But to be chained fully clothed held a strange menace. In the turmoil her body had accepted the clothes thrust at it. But clothed she felt an absurd discomfort. “We may talk,” said Mr. Shankalin affably.

Miranda tried to pick up clues. But city traffic yields none to the ear. After a few miles they stopped. “For the petrol.” She heard her companion say something about brakes. An overhead door rose and they moved inside. “We change cars,” said Mr. Shankalin.

Another fifteen minutes brought another stop. “We park now at a pub.” There was amusement in his voice. “I place this cloak about you, so. No one see your pretty hands. We go for drink. You take my arm.”

It was not hard for Miranda to deduce that they passed right through a building. The car she was helped into was again a change. “A man and a woman who will look much like us will drive each car off in a different direction,”

Shankalin informed her pleasantly. “It will give your friends much occupation, eh.”

“If it amuses you.” She managed to sound indifferent. But fear clutched her with a cold hand.

Their next stop was their last. This time she was guided through a house, the cape discarded. There were deep rugs. Doors opened and closed. Finally she stood. The guiding hand withdrew. There was a moment of deep silence. Then a rich male voice said disgustedly, “Shankalin! I think you are a fool.”

A quite different hand held her now. But it was the same rich voice. “Come, my dear. After a boring ride you deserve diversion.” Miranda followed where she was led. A door opened to admit her, then closed behind her with a solid snap. She heard what sounded like gasps of surprise. A young girlish voice exclaimed: “Another one! I say, Hester! Look at her. Isn’t Daddy simply super!” A hand snatched away the dark glasses. Blinking, she looked across a large room to the anguished face of her beloved Persis.

* * *

The knowledge that their quarry was lost was a bitter thing for Major Ballard. Time was wasted before the garage and the pub were seized and searched. They yielded little

except a couple of known petty criminals and a great mass of paper. A day and a night had passed before a combination of enquiry and the perusal of documents offered a faint clue. A surveyor's map of a small area of the county pinpointed a large country house. The owner was a Mr. Robinson. He had bought it two years previously. Perhaps thirty hours had passed by the time the Major, in civilian clothes, knocked at the imposing front door.

It was opened by a shrunken little woman with bright peering eyes. Disconcertingly she said: "You are police. I smell them. What do you want?"

"Mr. Hussein." Major Ballard felt he had nothing to lose.

"Is Robinson here." She was vaguely foreign.

"Very well, then, Robinson."

"Is not in." She opened the door wide. "I know you. You think trouble. You come in. You search. You go away. That is good."

The Major waved to his two men. Leaving their car on the verge they joined him. The search was professional. It found nothing. Mr. Robinson maintained a very normal country house. A city number was provided if they wished to contact him. On their way back to town and a confrontation with Susan and Herman, which the Major did not relish, they again went through the pub and the garage. Undoubtedly the phone number would reveal Mr.

Robinson as a quite ordinary businessman. Disgustedly they returned to the Department. About to leave the car in the garage, Major Ballard remembered his briefcase in the trunk. Raising the lid he and his companions found themselves staring at the dead bodies of Mr. Shankalin and Mr. Hussein.

* * *

Both girls uttered the same exclamation: “Oh Darling!” Miranda in horror, Persis in despair. Miranda beheld the naked figure of the younger girl suspended a few inches above the carpet. Persis’ wrists and elbows had been tied tightly behind her back. A cord from the wrists had been passed down through the cleft between her loins and cinched up in front to a ring in a belt tightly encircling her waist. She hung from a trapeze, the bar of which was a slender rod at her back and under her armpits. She was obviously in great pain. On each side of her there sat a quite young girl. One toying with a small thin whip, the other nibbling a chocolate. They surveyed Miranda with sparkling eyes. “Won’t it be fun,” one of them said, “when we have you hanging like that.”

It did not take them long. Gleefully they tore her clothes from her while she was still helpless as Shankalin had chained her. They picked up a key from the floor and re-

leased her. She fought frantically, but with no more success than Persis had managed against the lithe strength and cruelly applied skills of Hester and Keturah. Soon she was suspended. The bar carrying her weight biting unbearably at her armpits. The cords about her elbows imparting their own familiar agony. She was still panting from exertion and pain. Her captors were scarcely ruffled. They resumed their seats negligently.

“Does it hurt very much?” Keturah asked in an interested voice.

Miranda did not answer.

“What about that nice cord that goes in between and comes up through your cunny?” Hester inquired.

It hurt sickeningly. Miranda told them so, then pleaded: “Let us go. We will do anything you want. I’ll tell you any thing you want.”

“It’s no use, Darling,” Persis said hopelessly. “I’ve tried that. They just do this for amusement.”

“Naughty, naughty! No talkie,” Hester admonished. She picked up the thin whip. “For talking, five strokes,” she decided. She slashed them viciously around the naked girl’s concave waist. Persis flung her head from side to side and moaned, but did not scream.

“Say thank you.”

Persis obeyed.

“Would you like us to whip you a little?” Keturah asked Miranda.

The tortured girl knew she was being played with. She suspected that no matter what she might ever say to these two girls, they were little more than children, the result would always be the same. But she deemed it wise to say something. A stubborn silence would act as a challenge to provoke more pain. “No, thank you,” she managed non-committally.

“Just one on each breast?” Keturah wheedled.

In a small voice Miranda said, “Thank you.”

The blows were vicious and very accurate. Miranda said her ‘thank-you’ without waiting to be asked. She realized, with smarting breasts, that what was being done to them had to be within the limits of non-injury. If it was indefinitely continuous they would eventually succumb. But, even though haggard and subdued, Persis must have been given sleep and food and some respite to have survived as she was. In that there was hope.

“Would you like us to eat you?” Hester asked brightly. “We’d love doing it if you’d like us to. Or even if you wouldn’t like us to,” she added coyly.

Miranda took a quick sideways look at Persis’ tired face. The younger girl made no negative motion. She prayed that

her interpretation of the word, eat, was correct. “Thank you,” she said humbly, “We would like it very much.” She little doubted that there would be a penalty.

“You are nice,” Hester approved. “I bet you are juicy too. I’ll take you. Ket’ you do the other one.”

It was quite incredible. If she had not been so terribly afraid Miranda might have taken an academic interest. As is was, she watched silently as the big room provided stools. Hester sat in front of her so close that, by reaching and clasping the round spheres of her victim’s bottom she could comfortably draw the dark triangle to her waiting tongue. Miranda gasped in pain as the cord was tugged from between the punished lips and edged to one side. But when it was done her pain was less. Then the avid tongue found her and she was taken to the wondrous land that only girls can know.

The blended eroticism and pain was fiendish. It was a situation Miranda could scarcely believe in. Stealing a moment from Nirvana she saw that Persis’ feet were still joined by the same chains she had been wearing when kidnapped. Keturah dealt with the small handicap by lifting the chain over her head and across her shoulders. Persis became completely open to her questing lips.

It was not a long journey. The moppets were too expert. Some time later when their victims hung limp, heads bowed, eyes closed, and their tormentors were again

draped across their comfortable chairs, Keturah's restless mind prompted her exclamation, "I say, Hester! Why don't we take one of them to school?"

"Let's!" Hester agreed with enthusiasm. "Which one?"

They chose Persis since she had been hanging the longest. Miranda almost felt thankful when they removed the wicked bar from her beloved's wracked shoulders and bruised arms. If only it was the end. But it was not the end. She watched as Persis was positioned with her ankles locked within wooden stocks that enabled her to stand normally upright but prevented her from moving even an inch in any direction. Then they removed the belt and the biting cords. The naked girl stood free except for her closely held feet. Thankfully she kneaded her chafed skin and stretched her arms. Miranda guessed she had been hanging a long time.

They did not hurry. But resumed their seats and, with evident enjoyment, watched Persis caress her wounds. "She hurts beautifully, doesn't she," Keturah observed. "Daddy never got us girls as beautiful as this before. Look at the way that new one hangs! She's sweet."

They discussed their captives with much detail. Their cheerful conversation did not inspire confidence. It had to end, of course, and did so with Hester's admonition to the naked girl whose feet were clasped in the wooden trap. "We are going to start school now and find out how much

you know."

Miranda squirmed inwardly. She knew something awful was about to happen to the girl she loved.

"Where does the river Jordan run?" Keturah asked.

The questions were sensible enough. Persis answered them. Her voice even gained a little confidence. But it was a game. The question came to which there was no answer. "I don't know." Persis admitted.

They enjoyed a great show of shock and indignation that a big girl like Persis should be so ignorant. Hester went to the rack and returned with the inevitable pliant cane. "I'm afraid you'll have to hold your hand out," she said with mock sympathy. But added brightly, "It will help you to know the answer next though, won't it."

Persis' shocked glance at Miranda was quite involuntary. Quickly she turned away and looked apprehensively at the cane in Hester's hand. As though suddenly confronted with the futility of resistance she held out her arm, hand open and steady, the small palm cruelly vulnerable. There followed the usual tappings and proddings. The measurement and the trial swish Miranda so shrinkingly remembered. Then the cut that sent the caned girl into a contortion of pain, her wounded hand clasped tight beneath an arm in a reaction as old as civilization.

Three pairs of eyes watched the writhing torso. Three pairs

of ears listened to the gasping breaths. Two with avid enjoyment. Miranda in agonized grief that, for a minute, made her forget her own plight. Yet she admitted to herself that the blow had not been near as hard or as brutal as those she had received from Mr. Bhuratta. She guessed bitterly that this punishment, too, was meant to last.

The questioning continued with the inevitable result. When she was forced to utter her pathetic, “I’m sorry. I don’t know.” Persis automatically held out her other arm.

“Oh no,” said Keturah chidingly. “It’s my turn to cane you this time. Put out the same hand again, please. I want to try and cut you in the same place while it’s still hurting. If I manage it I’m sure you’ll cry.”

Persis did not wait for the stroke. But began, then, to quietly shed her tears. However, without hesitation she held out her wounded hand once more. “You do cry sweetly.” Keturah approved. “See, I’m measuring carefully to be sure and hit the same spot.” The cane swept slowly up, then swiftly down. It struck the waiting hand exactly as the first had done.

Had her locked feet not prevented her Persis would have groveled on the floor. Instead, she gave a moaning cry of anguish as she bent double clutching herself instinctively. She had long since, in this room with these girls, given up heroics. They availed her nothing and only spurred her tormentors heightened endeavor. If tears and moanings

and writhing offered some small comfort she would use them.

She was given time. But finally had to come erect and look shamefacedly at those who watched her. Persis knew her only function was to endure. To absorb pain as a sponge absorbs water. Miranda's capture told her plainly that things beyond her prison must have gone sadly awry. Time would be their only ally if she and Miranda could endure through enough of it. The questioning began again.

By the time Persis had received five strokes on each hand Miranda, who had flinched inwardly each time with her loved one, could stand no more. "Stop it! Stop it!" She demanded. "That's enough. Don't you see she can't bear any more!" She looked at Keturah wildly with blazing eyes. "If you must cane a girl's hands, cane mine!"

Keturah turned to Hester with mock surprise. "Number two wants her hands caned," she said informatively.

Hester considered. "Not quite the thing actually, is it? I don't think we ought to indulge her."

"Perhaps not." Keturah gravely agreed, but with sparkling eyes. "I had been going to stop caning number one. But since number two thinks we have to keep caning a girl we might as well keep right on as we are. I'm sure she can stand another ten." She turned to Persis. "Can't you, sweetie?"

Persis moaned and held out her swollen hands. “I don’t know,” she sobbed. “I just don’t know. Look at my hands now! Please don’t cane them any more.”

“She thinks she’s had enough.” Keturah said. “Her hands are beautifully swollen and bruised. So I wonder if we shouldn’t just let her stand there and watch what we are going to do next.”

“Good idea, Ket’.” Hester responded agreeably.

“We won’t cane number two’s hands. But we could take her down for a rest.” Keturah continued her little charade. “I’d thought of letting her sit in that nice chair. You know the one with strong flat arms…?”

It was good to stand again. But Miranda almost fainted when the bar was withdrawn and the cord loosened from between her legs. How brave Persis must be to stand so much so well. Too weak and hurt to struggle she allowed herself to be placed in the chair and tightly strapped at waist, wrist and ankle. She had expected nothing less. She prayed it was not some electric contraption.

But the girls were not yet done with her fastening. Puzzled, she watched as her fingers and thumbs were spread and laced down through holes in the flat chair arms. Each lace cinched the last joint of each finger. Finally another crossed the back of each hand. When it was done her wrists, hands and fingers were solidly welded to the wood. Try as she might, she could not move them. Horrified, she

wondered if they were to be caned. Surely not! There were delicate bones… her hands would be destroyed.

“I think she is worried.” Hester said.

“It’s very nice.” Miranda vouchsafed without hope.

“Perhaps she’s bored.”

“No,” said Miranda.

“Well, a girl deserves a bit of amusement when she’s sitting up straight and well behaved like that.” Hester said. “I’ve just had a wonderful idea. You’ll love it!”

A glimmering of the wonderful idea had already seeped into Miranda’s cringing awareness. It was confirmed by the pincushion with its gleaming slivers of metal that Hester set on a stool in plain view. “No.” Miranda pleaded. “Oh no! Oh please don’t do that to me.” The thing that was about to happen to her was unthinkable, unbearable. She turned from one to the other of her tormentors. She was distraught. “I’ll do anything… anything…!”

“You will, won’t you, Sweetie.” Keturah selected a needle.

Miranda watched in fascinated horror as Keturah, with deliberate slowness, approached her task. She chose the middle finger. Inserting the tip of the needle under the nail, she paused and looked up. “Would you like me to push it in very slowly. Or would you sooner I just gave it one big shove?” She asked innocently.

Miranda had known much of pain and of the suspense of awaiting it. But nothing had prepared her for this. One might be heroic when punished with love, or even with indifference. But this sadistic delight in the studied torture of her flesh was a thing against which she had no defense. Like Persis she abandoned courage. What would it prove! She tried to say something in response to Keturah's question. Something… anything! But her mouth was too dry. She could articulate nothing. She saw Keturah shrug. She felt the needle point enter her flesh. She tore at her bindings. But her hand did not move. Her shoulders wrenched and her head tossed frantically. But her hand remained an invitation to the needle. Slowly and with intent purpose Keturah gently increased the pressure. Miranda screamed and screamed… and screamed.

The girls took much time. Each applied themselves to one of Miranda's hands. Each sliver of metal was carefully and very slowly pressed home until it had buried itself the full length of the nail under which it was inserted. From time to time they sat back and studied their victim's face. They made no effort to stifle her screams. They artlessly enjoyed them. They also found amusement in Persis' frantic frustration in her inability to come to the defense of the suffering girt.

Some of Miranda's agony had inevitably been shared by the girl who loved her. To have to stand helpless and watch was a nightmare. By the time three fingers of each hand had been slowly impaled and Miranda's screams were

becoming weaker Persis could stand it no longer. She burst into a wild anger and shouted and screamed and implored so that Hester and Keturah transferred their interested attention to her.

“She feels neglected,” suggested Hester.

“Or jealous.” Keturah giggled.

“Perhaps we should include her in the fun.” Hester eyed Persis speculatively. “We’ll make you an offer. Stick your hand out and hold it steady while we stick one needle up one finger. You can moan but not scream. If you do this for us we won’t stick any more needles in number two.”

Persis buried her face in her hands as though to seek refuge in darkness. “I want to do it,” she said vehemently. “But I don’t think it’s even possible. No one could do that.”

“Don’t even try, Darling.” Miranda’s voice was agonized. “I’m going to faint soon, so it doesn’t matter.”

Keturah shrugged. “Oh well, it was a nice thought.” She selected another needle and positioned it.

“I’ll do it.” Persis promised, her voice dull, without hope. She held out one cruelly swollen hand.

It could be an interesting speculation as to whether, had she never been enslaved, Persis would never have developed or become aware of the store of courage latent within her. Did she owe to the whip and the chain the de-

velopment of this unsuspected quality! Miranda still remembered with awe that time when, forced to whip her loved one's breasts, she had witnessed unflinching gayety instead of screams. She watched now in the knowledge that nothing she could do or say would influence the tableau taking shape before her eyes. She wished devoutly that Persis had kept quiet. But Persis had not kept quiet. Their love for each other defeated them both. Even with the exquisite agony of the needles tearing at her fingers Miranda's heart swelled with love and pride for the slender naked figure whose ankles were held so firmly in the stocks.

"How do you think we should go about this?" Hester asked Keturah.

"Only about two ways. I can hold her hand while you stick it in, or she can just stick her finger out herself."

"She's got to hold it out herself, Ket'. That's the deal!"

"I don't want to be held." Persis said miserably. She genuinely recoiled from the thought of the clutching small fingers on her wrist. "I'd like to be tied. But I know you won't do that. I'll try hard to hold it for you. But I still don't think I can."

"It isn't possible!" Miranda declared from a deep and anguished knowledge.

Persis closed her eyes. But opened them again. It would be

simple and less suspenseful to watch. She held her hand stiff, palm down, and watched as Hester inserted the needle under the center of the nail on her middle finger. She clenched her teeth, but opened them in an involuntary gasp as her flesh was pierced. She trembled. Her whole being was dewed with sweat as all eyes watched the inexorable progress of the sliver beneath her nail. It was as though Persis had contrived self hypnosis. Her face was a mask. But her hand held steady. Hester and Keturah witnessed her stoicism with obvious incredulity. Perhaps it was this very emotion that prompted Hester to a vigorous jab that caused the arm to buckle and Persis to double over with a cry of pure agony. The hand fell, wearing its ugly decoration of metal at finger end.

No one spoke. Persis writhed and twisted. Holding her limp hand before her eyes she viewed the buried needle with horror. But made no move to try and extract it. She let the hand fall away again. There was no means by which she could comfort it.

“Poor number one.” Keturah’s voice almost held sympathy. “She didn’t make it.”

“Never mind.” Hester responded generously. “She’s got a nice needle to wear. It’s almost three quarters of the way in. Now we can continue with number two. I wanted to anyway.”

In despair at failure, Persis nursed her wound and became

a silent spectator as four more needles were delicately thrust under Miranda's finger and thumbs. When it was done the shining metal was an almost femininely decorative embellishment of the tortured fingers.

They rested. Miranda moaning and sobbing with pain. Head bowed, slumped in the chair as far as the straps would allow. Persis drooping, arms limp at her sides in total despondency. Hester and Keturah draped across their chairs, eyes bright, avidly drinking in the results of their sadistic play. For perhaps fifteen minutes the tableau held. Then Keturah motioned with her head and the two sisters retreated to the far corner of the big room. There was much whispering and many giggles. Then Keturah left the room, returning after a few minutes with a small box which she deposited on a stool to the accompaniment of much juvenile feminine amusement.

Hester examined Persis with a gamin grin. "Oh, damn it, Ket', we can't use her. We can't get that chain off her feet. Daddy wants it left on. Don't know how on Earth you'd get it off anyway."

Keturah considered their problem. "Doesn't really matter. She can stand that one." There were protracted giggles. "We can give her a pickme-up. Just to make number one pay for her Grand-stand seat we can cane her hands some more. Leave the needle in her finger, of course."

The drinks were large. Both Miranda and Persis hoped they

contained enough alcohol to soften whatever might come next. They were given plenty of time, for the two moppets themselves indulged hugely so that Persis found herself worrying what they might do if intoxicated. The respite lessened no pain. But it rested. The drinks did instill a faint and false optimism. Miranda was so shocked by what had been done to her that she sat seeing little other than her fingers, each with its steel impalement. It was not until the girls unstrapped her ankles and waist that she was compelled to a new involvement. A noose of rope was slipped over each ankle and pulled tight. She was then completely freed from the chair. Hester drew it from beneath her while Keturah steadied her and carefully lowered her to the floor. Her hands were not touched. They need not be bound. She could not use them.

Miranda lay on her back uncaring. She wanted only peace, but knew it would be denied. Her hands had become a dull and awful ache. But if she refrained from moving her fingers it was now within her capacity to bear. Hester and Keturah each took a rope. Pulling her by the ankles they positioned her and, throwing their ropes over pulleys, raised her feet and spread them until she lay only on her shoulders, arms outspread. Her bottom was lifted high above the rug. Her legs were spread so wide and high that her hairy triangle was obscenely thrust into view. Satisfied, they snubbed the tethers. Miranda supposed she was about to be whipped in much the same way as Sarah had whipped her.

The next moves were puzzling. Hester began to knead and manipulate Miranda's exposed sex. Her fingers were cunning. Despite her condition Miranda knew she was responding. She supposed that she must be engorged and swollen so that the whip or the cane would hurt the more. But it was not long before Keturah came into view holding a strange metal instrument that, after a moment of panic, Miranda recalled seeing one before during an embarrassed visit to her doctor.

Grinning hugely Keturah inserted the flanges, probed them deep, then triggered the pressure that widened the lips of Miranda's vagina into a gaping cavern. Watching what was being done to herself the sprawling girl wondered if ever before a female had been so laid open.

"This is going to work just wonderfully." Hester applauded.

There was an air of expectancy now as though the sisters were savoring some unknown delight. "I say," Keturah exclaimed, "That really is a gap! I'd no idea they could be that big. Do you think ours could be?"

"I'll help you find out." Hester offered.

"Look, it's all red and purple and sort of palpitating."

"I expect yours would too if it was like that."

"Shall we get started?"

"No. Let her enjoy the air getting in there. Must be a super

feeling! What d'you say, Ket', before we start let's give number one a couple of strokes, just so she knows she's not forgotten." She turned to Persis, "You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

Miserably, Persis gave the required answer. Bravely she proffered one injured hand. When she had managed to control her reaction to the cut she looked at Hester imploringly. "Must I… with the needle in?"

"Of course, Sweetie! Rather novel, don't you think. Stick it out nice and flat."

The biting slash re-awoke the needles agony. It was a bitterly hurt and writhing Persis who watched what then took place.

From the small box Keturah extracted and held up to view the mouse she was holding by the tail. It was small but active. Expertly she dropped it into the waiting vaginal cavity and snapped out the spreader.

It was done so quickly that even Miranda scarcely grasped that a living struggling rodent was now deep inside her secret sex. But, instantly, it made its presence felt. She gave a wail of fear and an instinctive heaving against the ropes. The tiny creature bit and struggled and scratched so that she felt invaded by some monstrous thing that might fight its way into every recess of her belly. Her eyes were wide and imploring. But so deep was her awareness of impotence that it never entered her mind to ask that the frantic

animal be taken from within her.

The sisters watched with intent interest. Hester even laid one ear against the invaded triangle of hair in an effort to discern sound.

“Does it hurt? Or is a girl really scared to death of having a mouse inside her?” She asked with genuine interest.

It was a question that, after the first panic, Miranda was examining herself. She felt sure that had this been done to her at another time in another place—by Susan perhaps, she would have been frantic with apprehension and the age old revulsion mankind has against things that crawl and bite. But, measured against the pain she had endured and which still gnawed relentlessly at her fingers, this new pleasantry of the sisters was an anti-climax. She loathed it. But she could endure.

To them it was only a game. So the sisters quickly tired of it. Eventually curiosity prompted them to peek, and the poor sodden dead thing was withdrawn.

“Fell a bit flat.” Hester complained. “Y’know, there’s nothing as much fun as whipping or caning. Isn’t it a good feeling, Ket’, when the cane thunks into their bottom.”

“It’s super! You’re dead right.” Keturah mused happily. “Nice and flexible. You can give ’em one or a hundred. You can make it hard or soft. And there’s so much of ’em to get at. I think the whip’s really the best because you can use it

on their breasts and cunny."

"Let's whip them until bedtime."

"Bent over or hanging?"

"Oh, hanging is the best. You can get at their tits and their twat and everything…"

Neither captive had the conviction to struggle. Persis was soon standing with her arms spread and held high. They had removed the needle from her finger. Her pain made it easy for her to understand when Miranda fainted in the middle of the ten that must be tugged from her. The sisters used water and brandy so that soon Miranda also stood drooping from her tethered wrists. A whiplash round her middle caused her to start and come erect. They seemed satisfied.

Their whipping was a desultory affair. It was interspersed with refreshments, girlish chatter, much giggling and small cruelties. It had progressed for perhaps an hour when the door opened and a man entered. Hester and Keturah looked up in surprise. Even the captives spared a glance of curiosity. He was Arab. He wore a fez. His smile was not reassuring.

"Kemail!" The word burst from the sisters in unison. Both made a wild dash for the door.

With frightening ease he caught them by the hair. Shook them, one in each fist. Then, with open palm, released

them only to slap first one, then the other to the floor where they lay whimpering. “Wait until Daddy…” Hester began.

Brusquely he cut her short. “Your father is dead. Why else would I be here! First the Old Fox. Now his two vixens. But you will not die. You may be sure of that.”

Hester and Keturah set up a further wailing and even produced tears. Their grief was instantly stilled by a single word in Arabic from Kemail. He clapped his hands. A man appeared. Kemail made a gesture. Soon the two sisters hung in the same manner as the girls they had tortured. Another nod from him and they were ruthlessly stripped until they were as naked as Persis and Miranda. They were beautifully formed. It was easy to see Kemail was pleased. He surveyed all four girls with great relish. “To the victor, the spoils.” He intoned. Allah has rewarded his servant this day.

Both men left and closed the door.

“He knows about the panels, damn him!” Keturah said. “Even if the police search they won’t find anything.” She turned to her erstwhile captives and explained, almost with pride, “Daddy built a whole section of this house behind sliding panels. When they are closed people can live here and no one will know. Don’t think that because of Kemail you have hope of escape. There will be none. If he has truly killed our father he will take to himself all that was

ours. He will have the house in Cairo. You will still go there. But he will send us too. He will chain us together like dogs and ship us as Daddy used to do his girls that he bought."

Miranda and Persis exchanged glances. They found it hard to feel sympathy for their companions in distress.

* * *

"It has to be that house." Major Ballard said decisively. "Why?" Wilbur Herman asked morosely.

"Because there is no clue elsewhere. We are being tricked in some way."

"I figure they bunged those bodies in your car just so you'd call off the hunt. Someone knew you wanted Hussein. They gave him to you. They hope that ends it. After all, you're not the real police."

"But whoever it was that killed Hussein and Shankalin had to get in that house."

"And the bastard's got my girls." Herman was angry. "Thanks to good old British bungling."

The Major visibly winced. His mobile features were as set as his companion's. "I can see only two ways to deal with that house." He said. "We either take it apart brick by brick

or we get in there like burglars and see what we can find. We don't have time for the first." He looked up at Herman. "Well?"

"O.K. by me. Just the two of us?"

"I'll have men at a distance. But two is enough for a look-see."

"Probably get my ass shot off." Herman declared disgustedly. "But what the Hell! I'm gonna get them two girls if I take three houses apart with my bare hands."

To anyone adept at the art, entry to any house is easy. Major Ballard was adept. The night was dark. He and Herman had separated with a view to spreading risk. Memory of his previous visit and search was helpful. Avoiding light or any murmur of voices he soon found what he sought: a room he had not seen before. In quick succession he found kitchen and bathroom. Their existence verified, the sliding panels were easy to find. He deduced that the room in which the girls must be would exist as part of the whole length of the house. He soon found it. This time he did not bypass the door beneath which a light shone. But stood and listened. There was the sonorous drone of a male voice. In between sentences there came the quiet sobbing of a girl.

You can open a door inch by inch, risking the creaking hinge, the click of the latch or the change of light. Or you can hurl it open and plunge. Major Ballard chose the latter. He came to an astounded halt. The tableau before his eyes

offered little scope for using the gun in his hand.

At the far side of the room stood a line of four naked girls. Persis, Miranda and two younger ones he did not recognize. They were joined by a single chain to collars of metal round their necks. It was a slave coffle. The hands of each were handcuffed behind their backs. Testing the chains was the small woman who had greeted him on his previous visit. In front of Persis stood a large man wearing a fez. His face held a large cold smile. His hand held a revolver at the girl's head.

"Good evening, Major Ballard," he said pleasantly. "Please do not shoot. This young lady is most valuable, but if you raise the gun I will kill her."

"You're out of bounds in England, Kemail." The Major said.

"Alas, yes. But my visit is brief. An old score to settle. Debts to collect."

"You killed Hussein?"

"A small service for which I make you no charge. Surely there is gratitude."

"You don't own these girls."

"My title to the older ones is, I admit, doubtful. The young vixens I claim as spoils of war."

"Very well. Unchain the two I claim and take your vixens

and go."

Kemail made a deprecatory gesture with his free hand. "I fear it is no longer easy for me to go. No doubt you have men in every bush. I require hostages."

"Let them go and take me."

"Oh come, Major. Don't be gallant. Who in Cairo would pay a single drachma to buy you!"

"You don't need two. Release one."

"Which of these jewels would you have me free?" Kemail asked slyly.

Avoiding Miranda's eyes Major Ballard pointed to Persis.

"Aha! I detect the absurd British romance. So! Hear my terms. You personally escort me and my party and these exquisite bits of merchandise to the cars and to my plane. It is close by. But first you toss me that gun. Otherwise I kill this girl and take my chance in killing you."

"Don't do it!" Persis said vehemently.

Major Ballard considered. The position was a stand-off. He knew this man capable of killing. He knew beyond doubt that he loved the girl who looked at him with adoring eyes. And yet…

His shoulders drooped. His arms fell limp. "Very well," he agreed disgustedly. "Here's the damn gun."

It was a large heavy service revolver that turned over and over as it made its short arc across the room. It distracted Kemail sufficiently to make possible the Major's quick grab and hurling of the stool so that it caught Kemail on the side of the head sending his fez flying and causing the shot he aimed blindly at his assailant to go wild. Half stunned by the stool he managed no second shot. By the time his head had cleared Major Ballard possessed both guns. Persis gave a squeal of pure delight. Miranda burst into tears of relief. For once in their short lives Hester and Keturah showed in their faces an honest uncontaminated emotion of joy.

Kemail leaned back against the wall, one hand caressing the bump on his head left by the stool. "Alas," he said resignedly, "I forgot about the cricket…"

It must be recognized that Major Ballard's success owed something to the efforts of Wilbur Herman. They were not inconsiderable. Lacking the Major's finesse, he gained entry by the simple expedient of smashing in a window and climbing through. The two men who rushed at him he disposed of, one with the butt of his gun, the other with a well aimed kick. Three other members of the staff met similar fates in his progress through the dark passages. Wilbur was angry. Surprise and the dark were his allies. The second floor produced light and an open door. When he entered the man at the desk looked up startled. "What the devil…"

"Where's them girls?!" Herman demanded.

“Look here, you can’t do this… My name is Robinson…!”

“Where’s my girls?”

Robinson’s finger pressed a button. Wilbur picked him up and tossed him through the window where he fell the twenty feet followed by the shards of glass and wood from the shattered sash. Of the two others who now rushed in, the first followed his superior, the other was kicked in the groin and neatly chopped as he doubled over. A belated arrival was picked up by the neck and quickly frisked.

“Where’s my girls?” Herman demanded once more.

“I show! I show!”

“You’re damn right you will!”

The guide led Wilbur to the big room with all its diverse and ugly equipment. In spite of its size it was becoming crowded. Still holding his captive by the scruff of the neck, he surveyed the quite bizarre scene. With his free hand he gave a sort of Western salute to all present. “Well,” said Wilbur Herman. “I’ll be a son of a gun!”

* * *

Persis surveyed herself in the large mirror. Going with Wilbur Herman to buy the clothes had been pure delight.

Wearing them was something less. Strange!

It had been a hectic time. The doctoring of injured hands; the shopping; the theatres and restaurants and the gifts Wilbur showered on his rescued maidens. His concern for them was touching. It was very personal, not simply anxiety for jeopardized property. Susan had joined them. It had been a ceremonial occasion when she had knelt and unlocked the shackles from Persis' ankles so that clothes and the life of the City might become open to her. There had been much happiness.

Through it all there had been a strangeness, an unanswered question in Persis' mind. She had been as happy as the rest, perhaps the happiest of all. There is no greater happiness for a woman than to be loved. Thus her happiness was different from the other's. The difference was Major Ballard. Suddenly he had become Dick, and very human, and much to be desired. Wilbur Herman was discerningly aware of her involvement, and had suggested she remain in London when he had returned home with Susan and Miranda. She had almost wept upon his shoulder in gratitude. Wilbur was not an ordinary man. On the morrow she, too, would return to her chains and to the girl she loved and to the man who had purchased her as a slave. How incredible it would all have seemed a year ago. But tonight belonged to her and Dick.

She turned and did a pirouette for the man who had sat quietly watching her with his own intimate grave amuse-

ment.

“Do you like me with clothes on?” There was nothing arch in her question.

“Yes.”

“Better than naked?”

“No!”

She flung her clothes from her body as though relieved. When she stood, nude and proud, before him she stretched provocatively, deliberately enticing. “Until now you have only known me naked and in chains. Now…” She flung her arms to encompass the room and all that lay beyond, “Isn’t there… a change?”

He laughed at her mood. “No! You are utterly enchanting and, I suspect, quite wicked.”

She was still intent on something in her mind. “But the chains! Wearing them or being free of them makes me two different people. It does, doesn’t it…?”

“They become you. Your femaleness knows they do. You wear them as other women wear jewels.”

“You love a slave?”

“I love you.”

“Dick! What should I do?”

It would have been easy to make a flippant retort. Major Ballard did not do so. He had sensed the turmoil in the mind of this lovely feminine thing that had invaded his life. He had known they must talk. Matching his mood to hers he said without emphasis: “It’s a bad one! I can easily tell you to do this or that. But the real answer lies in a feeling within yourself. What is the first wish that comes to mind now?”

“You!”

“You have me.”

“But you don’t have me. Do you!” Said Persis. “There’s the rub.”

“There’s something else, though, isn’t there?”

Persis faced the thing squarely. “Yes! Should I run? Should I go home to Mummy and Daddy?”

Dick considered. “The fact that you have asked the question at all is, in itself, half an answer.” He waved a hand in a gesture of bafflement. “Dammit, the whole situation’s weird. The obvious doesn’t apply to you because stacked against your parents and what, I suppose, we have to call your freedom is Wilbur Herman, Miranda, and I suspect, Susan.”

Persis knelt beside his chair, took his hand and fondled it against her cheek. “Mummy and Daddy think I’m dead. They must have adjusted to it by now.”

He kissed her. “If my work was other than it is. If I had not seen the things, quite incredible things, that such work reveals, I might find it hard to understand. But I have to realize that for a long time you have been subjected to circumstances that make the Arabian Nights or Fanny Hill seem anemic. It had to change you! I’m looking at a different girl from the one that walked into the park that day with Miranda. Your values, your needs, your capacity to love has changed.” He grinned ruefully, “Don’t let’s close our eyes to good old Sex. I’m well aware of what the whip and the chains and enslavement can do to a girl. The end result…” He chuckled, “Well, it’s something you couldn’t talk to Mummy and Daddy about. They could never possibly understand it.”

“I’m bothered about Wilbur.” Persis admitted. “He’s been so damn good. He bought Miranda mostly out of kindness: though I think he does like her more than a bit. He bought me just to keep her happy and to rescue me from training.” She chuckled reminiscently, “Not that Susan’s any easier to train under than Pat was. I don’t know how much money he paid for us. But it was an awful lot. I say, Dick… what do you think of this slave business?”

Major Ballard shifted uncomfortably. “On the face of it I would pick you up, take you home and marry you. I’d say the slave business was an outrage, and I’d go to the police.” He sighed. “But that’s just a normal reaction. Fact is The Department enters the picture. They value Benson and Herman for whatever favors they think they might get out

of them sometime. They have instructed me to hear nothing, see nothing, and say nothing."

"Do you think that Benson and Herman are bad men… that they are wrong?"

"In their own way, no. Great wealth changes perspective. But we all make our own judgements. I would flout the Department and take you back to Mummy and Daddy if it was not for one significant thing: simply that you are happy. Unbelievable as it would be to most, you and Miranda, and Susan, are happier and better adjusted than most girls your age: or even twice your age. Looking at you I have to know you have found something."

"If you did that… I mean flout the Department. What would they do?"

"I would resign."

Intuitively Persis confronted him. "I bet you've been told to deliver me back to my owner?"

Major Ballard shrugged. "Of course."

"Probably in handcuffs… so I won't give trouble."

Dick laughed. "Well, actually yes. They even mentioned Mrs. Crosbie. But I dissuaded them."

Persis held out her wrists. "Put them on me then."

He kissed her again. "Sorry, don't even have a pair."

“Dick…”

“Yes?”

“If I had just said I wanted to escape and go home, you’d have let me.”

“Of course. I love you. Will you marry me?”

“I know. And, yes I will! But I’m damned if I’m going to ruin your life. I won’t! I won’t! You’d ruin it for me. But I won’t let you! Oh, Darling! Now we are back where we started. What should I do!”

Passionately they clung together as lovers do at such moments. After a long time the Major suddenly raised Persis’ head from his shoulder. “Y’know, we have forgotten someone. What about Miranda? Is her decision that much different!”

Persis looked startled. “Good Heavens! We both forgot. I feel ashamed. This is the first time I’ve allowed myself to think about it or to speak to anyone. It’s all been so wonderful…”

“Phone her. She’s had time to think. Perhaps she’s had an inspiration. I think whatever she had to say might help you.”

Persis giggled. “Darling. You forget where she is and what she is. Slaves don’t have phone calls.”

Placing his burden gently in the chair, Major Ballard went to the phone and dialed. He spoke. In a little while he turned and held out the instrument. “Here she is.”

It was a long conversation. When it was done Persis’ eyes were bright. She was laughing. “Sorry, Darling. It’s awful of me to laugh.” She giggled again and settled herself comfortably on Dick’s knee. “When I asked her if she was going home she said her feet were chained and that Susan had put those handcuffs back on her. She wasn’t going anywhere,” she sobered, and there shone a trace of moisture in her eyes. “She didn’t say anything because she thought I was happy. She was happy. So why spoil things. She says she made her mind a blank on the subject. She feels guilty, too. But she didn’t want to make a decision in the middle of all the turmoil. She says she wants to wait and see what happens to us all. She thinks Susan understands and will keep her enough of a prisoner so that she doesn’t have to worry about decision. You can’t very well go home when you are naked and in chains…”

“Ease your mind at all?”

“Oh, Dick. If it wasn’t for you I’d run back to Susan right now and ask her to chain me so I’d never get away. Being a slave spoils you… You don’t have to make decisions.”

Major Ballard chuckled. “You see, without knowing it you have looked up all the paths and found the right one.”

She looked at him doubtfully.

“It seems as though we never go in a straight line.” Dick said thoughtfully. “People, I mean. Not just us. We get where we have to go in ways made devious by our own natures. But they are the only ways we can get there. For us individually there are no other paths open. These last days and this last hour point you directly to Miranda.”

“But what about us, Dick?”

He kissed her and bit her ear so that she squirmed. “Will you trust me?”

“Of course, Darling. But you do understand, don’t you, when I go back there I become a prisoner. Susan will never set me free unless Wilbur Herman tells her to. Even if they let you visit me, and they probably would, my ankles would be chained.”

Major Ballard examined the lovely face quizzically. “I’ll admit to being a bit out of my depth when it comes to those places where you have been… I think you are a bit, too. But I get the feeling you are not unhappy there. I’m not going to pry. But you and Miranda made some sort of discovery…?”

Persis nodded. “Yes. It’s a mystery. But there it is. We haven’t tried to analyze it. It just… sort of happened.”

“Then Miranda has the right idea. Just mark time and leave things to me.”

“Promise? No resigning to elope with little slave girl?” There was laughter in her voice. But her eyes were intent.

“Honor bright! I promise.” Dick looked at her with love. His voice was that quiet half amused tone she had always thrilled to. “No bull in a china shop. You see, you delightful creature, there’s not just you and me. There’s Miranda. And there’s Wilbur Herman—don’t know him well, but he seems a damn decent sort in spite of whatever oddities go on in his house. In his way he’s been kind to both of you. He also stands high with The Department. Then there’s Susan!” He grinned knowingly. “I suspect Susan is probably a remarkable young woman.”

Persis blushed. “How much have you guessed, Dick?”

“Probably all of it.”

“And you want to marry me?”

“Of course! I’m getting something special, arn’t I?”

Persis blushed almost to her shoulders. “Don’t tease. They did things to us…”

“Don’t tell me. Keep them as a surprise.”

“You are teasing!” She accused, pouting. “Darling, I’m not going into an orgy of awful confession, or pretend I’m unduly sorry for myself. It’s amazing what a girl can survive. I’m not a ‘Fate worse than death’ damsel. But there is a thing or two I want to know that you know.”

“You have emerged immaculate… Honest, Persis, you have.”

She kissed him tenderly. “It’s damn strange, but I feel immaculate,” she pondered, “Long ago I met a… what do you call ’em, a scarlet lady. She wasn’t that old either. She told me a girl only looks hard and raddled if she has convinced herself that she really is soiled. Or if she believes that what she has done, or what has happened to her is a sin. It wasn’t that way with me or Miranda… or Susan.”

Persis fell silent for a moment, looking back. Then took the plunge. “They stuck great big wooden things into us… You know where! They did it day after day, after day. They even made Miranda run a race with one locked inside… They do it with a belt affair, and there’s a padlock. You can’t get rid of it even if your hands are free.”

“So! I have a versatile wife.” Dick chuckled. “It’s done. Let’s call it a little something extra for our more erotic moments.”

“You are sweet, Darling. Now only one more.” She made a small grimace. “In a certain part of our training it was done by men. They instructed us and they used us: about every way imaginable.”

“After we have been married a year you’ll be used a great deal more.” Dick’s voice was amused. “Come, poppet, you haven’t shocked me. I’ll even overlook those little affairs you girls have going between yourselves. Herman was laughing about them and telling me…”

“That’s just between us girls.” Persis affirmed archly with a

demure look that lacked deceit.

Silence fell. Each reading the thoughts of the other in their eyes. It was a moment they would always remember. “You don’t mind not having to undress me?” Persis asked.

He picked her up and carried her to the bed.

* * *

To analyze the mind of Wilbur Herman would not be too complex an exercise. He was a big man: physically big, who had come with complete naturalness to trade only in big things. He had never failed, so never considered failure in anything he undertook. He dealt only in huge sums. His profits were commensurate. He was simple and direct. As a husband he would not rank high. His first love was always for the vast projects he sponsored. For most of his life they had also been his pleasure. Coming, by chance rather than design, to the House in the English country he had found there his first true diversions: A quaintly sardonic amusement in the incongruities of British manners and customs, and finally in Susan. In Susan he found his ideal. An adoring female always erotically available, poised to his slightest whim. A female on whom he could lock chains and leave behind in the certainty she would be instantly on her knees before him on his return. He bothered little as to

whether it was his wealth, his power over her, or her affection that kept her happy as his slave. It was a state that suited both of them. He was satisfied.

His purchase of Miranda was typical of him. She had reached out and touched a tenderness he would deny. Then, with a 'whole hog or nothing' prodigality he had included Persis in the belief that three females in his menage might mean less domestic strife than only two. He had known, too, of the passionate love between the enslaved pair and their fierce loyalty to each other. He would be amused to watch their impact upon Susan and Susan's reaction to them. There had never been, for him, any other thought than that Susan was, and would continue to be, number one girl.

He was subject to anger. He could be provoked. His marital failure had left a scar that was partly responsible for the extra curricular function of Sarah in her kitchen. He amusedly admitted to himself that it gave him satisfaction to send Susan to her to receive the punishments that, even in his angers, he found himself loathe to inflict. It piqued his sense of humor that now, with three damsels all capable of raising his ire, the cheerful Sarah might be kept busy. He had never witnessed her way with the whip. But had been more than satisfied with a Susan who always returned from her visit to the kitchen in a most tractable and uncontentous state of mind. It was typical of Susan that, knowing herself truly a slave, she never complained. Even when he questioned the cruel marks on her body she made

light of them.

Wilbur Herman had made a deliberate experiment with Persis. His heart had warmed to her courage. To him she was a vivid child, more like a daughter than what she was. He viewed her involvement with Major Ballard with cynical regret. He was dubious about love, deeming it no more than the urgent dictates of potent glands. But he did not underestimate the reactions it prompted. Thus he saw an amusing psychological test in giving Persis a twenty-four hour freedom with the man who had captured her heart. Would she return to Susan and the chains! Would she flee to her parents! Would the handsome Major walk away with her. Whatever she did, he had no fear that she would cause him trouble. That a large investment hung upon the girl's decision did not much concern him.

He was pleased and flattered when Major Ballard and his delighted charge re-entered his home. It was made a gala occasion. Susan even removed Miranda's handcuffs and refrained from chaining Persis until after the Major had gone. Herman found himself possessed by a great hunger for the two girls whose talents only Susan knew. A delicacy, of which he was half ashamed, forbid him to claim Persis so soon after her parting with her love. But he used Miranda avidly in all ways known to them. For several days he could not get enough of her. He was amazed that the rebellious girl of his hunt should have been transformed into this vibrant but submissive pleasure slave. Herman was a man of great and uninhibited sexual ap-

petite. But he sensed a mutual affection which caused him often to treat Miranda with much tenderness.

He was shrewd enough to know that after the shared travail of the abductions it would be too easy for his household to fall into a loose and ill defined freedom that would impose tension on all. Wisely he re-established authority and discipline. He locked the lovely slave bands on his Susan and instructed her to be adamant in her demands on the two slave girls returned to her sovereignty. He found a puckish delight in marshalling all three girls downstairs where, for Sarah's benefit, he made a further declaration of discipline which delighted Sarah immensely. He explained that should the girls fall prey to feminine perversity their visits downstairs could be frequent. Miranda, Susan and Persis could cheerfully have murdered the beaming young woman who regarded them with a knowing and possessive eye.

Wilbur had harbored qualms about Susan. But they had proved groundless. She had contrived a remarkable adaptation to being adoringly submissive to him whilst imposing on the other two girls a full but affectionate weight of authority. He admired her most for her relationship with Sarah in matters domestic. Thus he could guess her deep shame and humiliation on those occasions when she wended her way to the kitchen at his behest and delivered her painful message. Yes in this, too, she contrived so separate her vividly contrasting situations so that neither made the other less potent.

Dinner in the evening had become, by some natural evolution, a pleasantly informal time of conversation and humor. Barriers were dropped. Chains were often not even visible, except on Miranda who, not unhappily, had to accept Susan's conviction that she looked delightful in handcuffs. After the meal each reverted to role. But, while it lasted, the lengthy dinner was a happy time of repartee. Wilbur Herman's acute observations on people and motives were diverting. But when his dissertations touched on the frailties of women and wives it behooved his audience to tread carefully. At such times he was easily piqued. There came the evening when, advancing some outrageous premise about marriage and women's rights, he was lustily challenged by Susan, ably abetted by an emphatic Persis. In the heat of battle they failed to discern the danger signals until that awful moment when they found themselves delivering their animated salvos to a blank faced Wilbur and a frantically grimacing Miranda.

"I think you'd best take a little walk downstairs, Honey," Wilbur Herman said heavily to Susan.

Silently the sentenced girl bent her head in acknowledgement and rose slowly to her feet. Her face had paled, her breath quickened.

"But that's not fair!" Persis exclaimed passionately, "Susan was only explaining the way she saw things…"

Miranda cringed at her loved one's temerity. Herman

swiveled a baleful eye toward the younger girl.

“You may as well go down with her.”

Miranda almost wept as she watched the pair go hand in hand from the room. She shivered at her own memory of Sarah. She longed to protest and to tell her companion of Sarah’s severity: perhaps a far greater severity than he wished to invoke. But she knew the moment inopportune. Her joined hands lifted her glass. She took a deep swallow. Then turned interested eyes upon the man who owned her.

“Where the Hell was I?” Herman demanded irritably. “Them damn girls put me off.”

On the stairs Susan paused and clutched Persis by the arm. “Look Darling,” she whispered, “he’s sent us down without a message. Sarah loves this. It gives her carte blanche. She can half kill us. He probably forgot. But I daren’t go back and ask. I’ll have to grin and bear whatever she wants to do to me. But I won’t let you! The least we can ask for with you is five strokes. So that’s what I’ll say the message is. Understand?”

Persis nodded glumly. “You are sweet to me. I’m scared. She’s awful, isn’t she?” Then, vehemently, she demanded, “Can’t we ask the same for you? She wouldn’t know…”

“She’d suspect. You are new. But I haven’t had as little as five in ages. She’s quite capable of asking confirmation and then we’d both be in hot water.”

“Well then, don’t let’s fib about me. I expect I’ll live.”

Susan shook her head determinedly. “No! I don’t want that for you: not now anyway. It’s five and only five. You’ll be glad that’s all it is. Come on. We best get it over with…”

Sarah was a new experience for Persis. It was hard to believe this friendly, smiling, athletic young woman could take such delight in what she would do to them. She recalled Miranda’s puzzlement over this fresh country girl’s ingenuous use of the cane. Probably it was her robust rustic associations that had left her as uninhibited in the punishing of a naked girl as in the building of a haystack. She gave to each the total vigor of her lithe muscles, finding joy in either. Her laughing greeting was typical.

“One of you come to watch? Or have you both spilt your soup?”

“Both of us.” Susan affirmed crisply. “Mr. Herman didn’t give any number for me. But Persis has to have five.” She gave a winning smile. “I say, Sarah, you know Persis is new… go easy on her.”

“Well, that’s for me to decide, Luv’. I allus reckons the Master ’ud never send ’ee down here if he wanted me to go easy like. He could give ’ee a few love taps himself.”

Susan shrugged resignedly. “Well, do what you want to.” Without further ado she disposed her slender nudity on the low table.

“A right good girl, she is!” Sarah approved to the quivering Persis. “Here Luv’. Let me tie your hands. Then you won’t be wondering what to do with them while I looks after the young Mistress here.” Sarah produced a length of thin cord. Persis allowed her wrists to be painfully bound behind her back. “Would you like me to fasten you to something so you won’t go wandering off. Or will you stand around and watch while you wait your turn?” Sarah’s cheerfulness made it sound like a choice between coffee or tea.

“I’ll wait my turn. And I won’t run away.” Persis tried not to sound as unhappy as she felt.

“Made a little change since last time, dear,” the bustling young housekeeper told Susan as she tightened the straps on the outstretched wrists. “I used to put a strap round your tummy. But that prevented me getting your bottom as high as I like. See what ’ee thinks on this one Luv.”

The new improvement was a light beautifully made small harness or halter to encompass Susan’s breasts. A light supple strap above, another below. They crossed in an X between the twin mounds. By the time Sarah had cinched the buckle tight to the table the contours of each breast were delightfully enhanced and thrust into prominence. The watching Persis could tell that her companion in distress had been deprived of all movement above the waist.

“Oh Sarah, I can hardly breathe,” Susan protested. She looked up appealingly at the purposeful young woman

who had prisoned her. “Why must you use this awful position? Couldn’t I just stand up and bend over?”

“Don’t be silly, Luv’. You knows perfectly well you can’t stand still for what I’m about to give ’ee.”

Susan knew it useless to plead on her own behalf. But tried again. “When it’s Persis’ turn please let her stand and bend over. She’s only got five.”

“You know what that means, dear. She’ll end up with ten. But I will let her make her own choice after she’s watched your little bit.”

Persis watched, incredulous, as Susan’s stretched nudity was hobbled, then raised up, over and back, then fastened to Sarah’s satisfaction. The sudden transformation shocked her. Susan’s weight now rested on her shoulders. Her back was bowed, her torso raised so that the round bottom became its most prominent feature. Her legs were spread wide and pulled back. Prisoned thus she must look to either side and see her tractioned legs, or absurdly view her own sex staring at her from its unnatural elevation high above the table.

“It’s my own idea, Luv’,” Sarah assured Persis proudly. “I’ll bet you’ve never seen the like.” She surveyed her work with obvious pleasure. “Except it was a man what thought up the old bending over bit. But it took a girl to think on this one. Champion, ain’t it?”

Persis said that indeed it was champion. Her eyes sought Susan's in desolation.

"Want to be gagged, Luv'?"

"How many are you going to give me?"

"You'll find out!"

"Oh, all right then! You'd better gag me or I'll howl enough to bring Wilbur down here. I don't want him to see me like this."

Persis watched sympathetically as the gag was made secure. Susan could speak now only with her eyes. They were eloquent.

Sarah picked up her cane. Correctly divining Persis' thoughts she said, almost pleadingly, "'Tain't that much fun downstairs all the time. And the village ain't all that much either. Good as a holiday for me this is. A girl deserves her bit o' fun, don't she! Mr. Herman's been a real brick... letting do this for him!"

Persis glimpsed a state of mind and acknowledged its plausibility. "But must you be so cruel?" she queried innocently.

"That brings your five up to six," Sarah told her pleasantly. "Downstairs little girls don't ask questions." She swung the cane in a swift hard stroke.

The watching girl had felt the cane often enough. But had never been positioned to observe its effect as advantageously as now. Her eyes widened in distress as she saw the pliant rod bend itself across the bent victim's flesh leaving a beautifully etched stripe that rapidly turned from white to red to purple. She cringed as though it was her own bottom that had felt the lash.

"Always make the first one nice and easy." Persis realized Sarah's remark was totally devoid of sarcasm.

The second stroke was not, by anyone's standards, easy! It was the one Sarah obviously loved best. Falling on one curved cheek and over between the spread legs its tip exhausted itself across the most secret place. Susan went into such contortions as her bonds would allow. Persis thought it possible to see the screams beating against the gag. The third duplicated the second from another angle and produced the livid X that was Sarah's special brand. When five other diverse strokes had explored Susan's flesh the girl with the cane suddenly smiled hugely as though remembering something. Putting down her weapon she went to the pantry and returned with a cucumber, the end of which she was anointing with grease. Both girls instantly divined her intent.

"I've heard tell of the goings on at the Benson place," she said happily. "One of the chaps there told me about something they do to you girls." Sarah divided between her prisoners a look both arch and curious. "I'll never forgive

myself if I don't find out."

Carefully and competently their tormenter introduced the smooth, slippery green object into the tractioned girl's rectum. The watching Persis, scarcely believing what she witnessed, saw it disappear inch by inch between the striped cheeks. Susan frantically and negatively threw her head from side to side in a mute plea. Then, realizing the inevitable, lay quiet accepting what she must.

To do Sarah justice it must be said that she used caution. But it was obvious that she was also curious. Persis watched with a mixture of horror and fascination as the cucumber sank lower and lower into the lovely girl who could do nothing to hinder her impalement. By the time Sarah was satisfied, about six inches of vivid green protruded from Susan's bottom.

Sarah laughed delightedly. "It was true! I half didn't believe it. But you couldn't shove that up my backside." She grinned at Persis. "I'll have to see if yours is just as big."

Persis had circled the table. She cringed at the marks on the white loins and at the sight of the obscene protrusion. But it was the piteous expression on Susan's face that triggered her impudent tongue.

"It's beastly! It's awful! Oh Sarah, don't humiliate her like this! You shouldn't do it to her in front of me!"

The words had scarcely left her lips when she saw her

transgression mirrored on Sarah's face. Shaking her chained foot defiantly she admitted, "Oh, very well! So now I'm up to seven."

"Who said so, Luv'?"

"Well, arn't I?"

"No, Luv'. That little lot cost you a packet. Now you're up to ten."

Persis quailed. Ten! She was uncertain of her ability to endure what Susan was enduring. But then: once a girl was strapped down what else could she do but endure.

"Now this is sort of an experiment," Sarah commented in an interested voice. Before Persis' instinctive protest could earn her further punishment the words died as she saw the cane make its wide swift are and plant itself squarely across the softness where thigh and buttocks meet. The bound girl writhed and heaved. "Thought it might bounce out when the cane hit." Sarah sounded disappointed. "Let's try one on the other side." Once more the cane bit. But the buried length did not move. "Give you a surprise now. That was the last one, Dearie." She bent and loosed a buckle.

When the punished girl had been freed and the gag removed she rolled to her side and painfully rose to her feet. It was a slow and careful process during which she managed to give Persis a reassuring smile which flitted across her lovely features leaving them bleak with suffering. Su-

san turned to the intently watching girl with the cane, “Thanks, Sarah, for only making it ten.” Her voice was heartfelt and sincere. Persis wondered what shocking inflictions she must have borne that would make what had just passed something to say thank you for. Susan’s voice was uncertain and tentative, “I say, Sarah, can I take this thing out now?”

“I’ll do it for you. Spread your legs,” Sarah offered breezily. “Got to be careful with it. Still got its uses…!”

Susan smiled poignantly at Persis. Then leaned against the wall and closed her eyes. She made no move to sit. Her fingertips explored her stripes.

Expectantly, Persis looked at Sarah. Then moved beside the table. If stoic acceptance was best she would follow Susan’s lead. Turning she stood passive as Sarah untied her wrists. Then, with a pounding heart, lay on the unyielding bed as had her fellow captive.

Reluctantly and strangely she was thrilled by the halter. It so beautifully separated her breasts. She was proud of them. But she could breathe only shallowly by the time it was cinched tight. Offered the gag she refused. She was not sure why: perhaps the memory of Susan’s hurt eyes frantically seeking expression. Her temperament was such that words helped. “Are you going to whip my sex?” she asked conversationally.

Her answer was a lash that caused her to leap against the

straps. Looking up at her own body she saw the bright red spring out on her loins and plainly show through her triangle of hair. She accepted as inevitable that the second should cross the first. She bore them panting and moaning. But did not scream. Sarah nodded approvingly and fetched the hated cucumber. “I’m afraid you’ll find lots of room for it,” Persis said. It was a small victory. But she was pleased with it.

“You are a cool one, arn’t you, Dearie. Arn’t you going to tell me I shouldn’t do this while someone’s watching?”

“It doesn’t matter with me. I’m not a Mistress. I’ve had all sorts of things up there, so I might as well have that. If you do it right it will go in a long way.”

“Serve ’ee right if it disappeared.” Sarah grinned, intent upon her task. “I think you’re a bad lot, you are! But, my goodness, it’s amazing what they done to you…!”

“If there’s any left sticking out, won’t it get in your way?” the culprit asked puckishly.

“Well, a girl can’t do no more’n try,” Sarah admonished.

She tried with much skill.

Before she had finished Persis screamed many times.

* * *

The closing of the door behind the two sentenced girls left Miranda distraught. Despite the younger girl's demonstrated capacity for stress she still thought of her as something lovely, a gamin sprite from another world to be treasured and loved. Her own memory of Sarah's cane snapping down between her legs almost drove her to importunities that would help no one.

"Alright, alright!" Wilbur Herman admitted irritably, "So I'm a bastard! I know you're worrying about young Persis getting her bum striped. I'll let you in on a secret. I ain't all that happy myself. I never am after I've set a girl downstairs. I do it when I'm riled. Then when it's done I'm stuck with it. I'd go down there right now and bring 'em back. But, Hell, a man's got to stand by a thing like that. No girl's going to respect him if he changes his mind and expects her to be grateful." He grinned confidingly, "But I will say, whatever Sarah does certainly sends 'em back in a right accommodating frame of mind."

With difficulty Miranda turned her attention to her owner, her eyes stricken.

"For Pete's sake don't look at me like that!" he demanded. There was a little anger in his voice, "or I'll send you down too and feel a complete asshole." His voice softened, "that Sarah's quite a gal, ain't she. I got a notion she hurts you more than you and Susan let on. She's a good kid. I'll have

to give her a raise." He looked at Miranda shrewdly, "Why don't the two of you complain about her. I've seen some marks…?"

Miranda shifted uncomfortably, "I think Susan likes her in spite of… what she does."

"And you?" he grinned. "She hurt you like hell, didn't she?"

"She isn't consciously cruel. It's a sort of excess vigor and good spirits. A 'whatever you do, do it well' approach. You can't really hate her…"

Irrelevantly he said, "It's been good between us these last days, hasn't it?"

Miranda was both surprised and pleased. As a slave girl she had long since ceased to expect tributes. It had been very good for her, too. She told him so with sincerity.

"Ever wonder why a man would make love to a girl and then have her whipped?"

She was becoming accustomed to his changing moods. "I would think it must give him a tremendous sense of power."

"That what you thought the time I sent you down?"

Miranda considered. "I'm afraid it hurt so much I didn't think about you at all," she confessed. "When I'm being whipped, that's all I can think about: just being whipped.

It's one of those rare times when you live entirely in that single moment."

"Y'know, ever since I got mixed up with Benson and his girls, and when I bought young Susan, I've thought a lot about how they train you to stand pain, even to ask for it, and then to say thank you kindly kind sir. I've figured out the whole deal is a lot more simple than the psycho' boys want us to believe."

Miranda registered interest. Apart from her obligation as his slave, she often found Wilbur's dissertations diverting.

"It's this fool dream thing we have." He continued. "The gorgeous golden girl. Most men won't talk beyond that point. But, of course, in his mind he has to end up in bed with her… and that's where the trouble starts!" He ruminated silently, then went on. "I suppose just once in any poor bastard's lifetime he must have made it big. Not with his wife, but somewhere along the line. If he hasn't, then he's read books or been told stories. They all end up one way with his great big erection ramming into her so that she squirms, moans, twists, cries out loud and pushes back like blazes. In short, the only way a man knows he's made a woman happy is if she acts like she's in agony. I've seen 'em both and, believe me, there ain't a hair of difference between a girl getting a successful fucking and that same girl being whipped."

Miranda blushed remembering the same thought had oc-

curred to her.

Wilbur noted her blush. It pleased him. “So now we can divide the world into two different kinds of men. In this thing that’s all there are, just two kinds. But they both finish with the same hang-up. They want to hang a girl up by her thumbs and whip the pelt off her ass.”

“All men?” Miranda asked, incredulous.

“Maybe not all.” Wilbur conceded. “With a Helluva’ lot it’s subconscious. The little clerk going home at five to a wife who’s spent her day knee deep in shitty diapers don’t look like he’d have such a thought in his head. But them diapers is half his fault. He might surprise us all. And the chap with the big cock who scores every time, you wouldn’t think he’d have such a notion either, would you! But he has!” Wilbur’s face took on his belligerent look. “The joke is both these poor bastards want to whip a girl for the same reason. And that reason ain’t hard to find. It’s because the price and the things they have to do to get that little bitch to twist and clutch and moan is too damned high.”

Wilbur smiled with a genuine warmth at the half frightened girl across the table. “I don’t mean you and me, Honey. We got it good.”

“You have it good!” Miranda ventured.

He examined her musingly. “Quite sure you haven’t got it good too?” His voice was serious.

Miranda felt herself divided. She could not honestly deny her debt to him or her happiness of the preceding days. She had returned to him voluntarily when she could have gone home. “What you are really saying is that the only working relationship between man and woman is Master and slave?” Her voice was not bitter. It held tenderness.

“I have to believe in that, don’t I!” He spread wide hands. “Look at this house and all of us in it. Think of us, Honey. Three women and a man. Couldn’t hold together any other way. But I got myself off the track here, or you did it for me. I was telling you about the high price of tail.”

Suddenly Miranda found it easy to join his mood. “Very well, dear Master.” She laughed. “Tell your slave why the cost of her little hairy triangle is exorbitant.”

“First let’s take money.” Wilbur continued. “The price of a high class whore is fifty bucks. So measure that against the one and only piece of tail his wife gives him willingly: that’s on his wedding night before she starts that headache routine. To get her into bed the poor twit had to buy a house and a car and a fur coat and a lot of furniture and lend her brother money to keep him out of jail and have a Honeymoon in some place he can’t afford. Even at the poverty level I’d say fifty thousand bucks. It goes up from there. Even at that, chances are the high class whore is peddling the best piece of ass. But either way it’s one helluva’ lot of dough for a gasp and a groan.”

“Do I gasp and groan nicely?” Miranda asked demurely.

“Damn right you do, Honey!” Wilbur affirmed heartily. Then added, “In either situation!” He collected his thoughts. “But now we come to the real nitty gritty that makes these two different types brothers under the skin. It’s simply that after all the money, and the trouble of talking her out of the headache, and the wedding bells or the fifty dollar whore, the bit at the end that he’s been waiting for only lasts about forty seconds. For the guy with the limp dink who goes off on the sheet it ain’t even that. But the lucky one who does the job right don’t even get all that good a deal. Mostly not as much time as you’d spend on a cup of coffee.”

“My Master is at least a three cup man!” Miranda said proudly.

Wilbur glowed. “Thanks, Honey. You are a damn good girl, y’know. I got a bargain when I bought you. But, anyway, a man gets to the point where he’s not too happy about Mother Nature and how she sort of rations him on whatever bits of squirm and moan that comes his way. It’s right there he gets the picture of the golden girl hanging up taut and ready for his whip. If he’s good at it he can make her twist and cry out the whole day long. For most men it’s just a swell dream. But for Benson’s customers it’s for real.”

“Do you really believe most men go around frustrated because society won’t allow them to whip their wives, or

their girl friends, or any girl at all?" Miranda found the premise intriguing.

"That's about it. The thing surfaces here and there. Those chaps that fool Department compelled you to service for them. They wanted it. Any good whore house will have at least one girl who lets herself be whipped for a big, big price. It shows up in war time and in prisons. Sometimes you read in the paper about some poor devil who couldn't hold it in any longer so he stripes up some little bitch who probably deserved it and gets seven years hard labor—"

Wilbur Herman was interrupted by the opening of the door and the appearance of two pale and depleted young women who walked tiredly and bore about their loins purple ridges as evidence of their visit to Sarah's kitchen. They smiled wanly. Coming to attention across the table in front of the man who had sentenced them, each said in turn, "Thank you for having me whipped, Master. I deserved it."

"Well," said Wilbur Herman expansively, "I'm glad that's done with. Sit you both down. We may as well have dessert."

Miranda looked at her Persis with love.

The punished girls went to their chairs and very slowly, with tenderness and much caution resumed their seats.

The days passed evenly enough. Yet Miranda was not en-

tirely at ease. She admitted to herself that she was still adjusting. It had not been easy for her to relinquish the preferred status Wilbur had bestowed on her after her abduction. Now he chose a girl every day without pattern or rotation. She supposed this must indeed be the awareness by which woman knew herself a slave. That her body should be available on demand or discreetly withdrawn at the whim of he who owned her. Wilbur had engendered a warmth in her that she had no wish to share.

That there was humor in the situation, she was willing to admit. All three of Wilbur Herman's possessions had developed robust sexual appetites. Had it not been for the love they shared for each other friction would have been constant. Wilbur Herman was no mean performer. But even his prowess would have failed to appease the three youthful lusts. Miranda wryly wondered if the female inmates of a real Harem all became lesbians just from necessity. The future had been blotted from her mind by swiftly moving events. But sometimes it confronted her. Was this her life! Would it go on and on thus until she aged and was replaced! How truly was she a prisoner?

The last question nagged. She had been free and had returned to bondage. Did this mean that she might be free again! Would she be granted the same latitude that Susan enjoyed! She doubted her own ability to come and go as Susan was allowed to do and still retain the perspective required of her. In the meantime she was not free at all. She was always chained. In addition to the chain linking

her ankles, just as Persis wore, Susan persisted in compelling her to bear the handcuffs. Miranda did not much mind. It had become a joke between them. But the shining metal on her wrists never let her forget she was a prisoner.

Often she speculated on the reaction if she was to ask her Master's permission to go up to town for a day. Or if her best approach might be to Susan. She had no real wish or need for such an excursion. She likened herself to the caged animal pacing the bars believing that surely one of them must be loose opening the way to freedom. But she did not speak such thoughts, even to Persis. Within the code that governed her they were punishable. To voice them might hurt two people she had no wish to hurt. There was also the too real possibility that such notions might earn her even more chains and heavier locks. Susan took her responsibilities seriously. She was not playing games. Miranda did not worry about these thoughts. But they were there.

On a day when her hands had been freed and she was happily engaged in some small task about the house, Miranda was suddenly confronted in one of the passages by a smiling face she had once much feared.

"Why, Rhoda!" She exclaimed. "You are visiting? How nice."

"I've got a surprise for you." Rhoda said cheerfully. "Here, let me…"

A moment later Miranda's wrists were cuffed behind her

back. Rhoda was adept at such matters.

“What on Earth…!” Miranda was genuinely puzzled. “Have you joined the staff?”

“This way.” Rhoda gripped her captive’s arm in a manner which clearly indicated that explanations might be long delayed.

Their journey ended in the garage and a small panel truck. Thrust inside and the door locked Miranda discovered she shared the confined space with Susan and Persis. Their wrists, too, were locked behind their back. Susan shook her head at the newcomer. “We don’t know either,” she said, puzzled. “Wilbur just said he was going out and to do whatever Rhoda wanted… and here we are.”

“I expect he’s sold the three of us.” Persis advanced brightly. “Ungrateful, I’d say, after all the pains we take to please him—”

Her words were cut short. Their vehicle started with a jerk that sent them sprawling on the seat. There was no window, but a small bulb provided sufficient light. “Abducted again!” Persis groaned. “I wonder what we are in for this time.”

The ride was short. It was Rhoda again. This time she carried a burden. The three girls stared unbelievingly at what they saw.

“I’ll fasten them on you in here.” Rhoda said briskly. “You

first, Miranda. Get into position."

It was the largest of the phallic objects Miranda remembered with distaste. Her ire rose in an indignant protest that she bit off before it was uttered. She was helpless. All three of them were. She bent and spread her legs. The Thing was well lubricated. Under Rhoda's capable manipulation it slid into her up to its hilt. She stood passive as the belt circled her waist, and did no more than flinch when the cutting strap was drawn beneath her loins and cinched so that the instrument of her impalement was held firmly within.

Miranda watched glumly as Persis suffered the same indignity. But was startled when it became obvious that Susan, too, must bear the tight clutching harness. Susan took a step back, her face registering disbelief.

"You too, m'lady!" Rhoda assured her. "Bit of a come down, I must say." She chuckled. "But who's to say but what them little thingummies don't need a stretch now and then. Sort of a refresher course…"

Susan shrugged resignedly and took the shaming posture. "Must have made a good job of you." Rhoda said with pride. "It slips in real well." A moment later a dejected Susan looked down as the straps bit at her. A click of the padlock and all three girls were similarly confined.

Out of the truck Miranda looked at the lovely and familiar Park with pleasure. But while the ankle chains and hand-

cuffs were being unlocked she realized they were standing at the starting place from which she and Persis had so often commenced their frantic race in the pseudo Hunts of other days. She knew disappointment. There had been a zest in evading capture past the awful deadline. But not with this thing locked about her loins.

“Mr. Herman thinks you need exercise.” Rhoda informed them. “He’s in town for the day and asked me to arrange it. So you are going to have a nice run. Be like old times for all of you.”

“Why me?” Susan asked.

“Don’t you need exercise same as the others?”

“Not really. They have to wear chains. Mostly I don’t.”

“Mr. Herman thinks you do. ‘Be sure and include young Susan’, he says to me. ‘It’ll do her good’.”

“But why must these things be stuck into us? We have all been trained?”

“Well, that’s my doing.” Rhoda admitted. “It amuses me, so you’ll have to put up with it. I’ve changed the rules a bit. First off, there’s no horse and no lasso. The first two to get caught pay a penalty after I take you home. The last one is the winner and gets a prize from Mr. Herman.”

“What is the penalty?” A terrible memory spurred Miranda’s question.

Rhoda seemed amused. “We all know Mr. Herman hates hurting you girls. Sarah and I swap stories. She’s my cousin. We often laugh about the way he sends you downstairs. He’s done it again now. On your return you go to her…” Seeing their stricken faces, she laughed with enjoyment. “Don’t be so down. I expect it will be bad: I’m not sure myself what the losers are in for. But I do know one thing—it won’t be what you are all thinking. But that’s for later. Right now you run. Go anywhere you like. There are three Hunters: Bates and two of his boys. This ensures each a fair chance. They are on foot too. There is no deadline. Just the order in which you are captured. I won’t tell you when they start after you or where from. O.K. Get going!”

“Suppose we won’t play?” Miranda asked, mutinously.

“Forgotten those fifty already, Dearie?”

Miranda began the race. Susan and Persis caught up with her so all three ran abreast seeking what comfort they could from each other.

“Take it easy,” Susan admonished. “Rhoda could just be having fun. How badly did this damn thing we’ve got locked on us hurt you last time, Miranda?”

“It chafes horribly. The strap that goes down and under is the brute.”

“Can we actually run all out?”

“Oh yes. It hurts more and more so that even when you try

you keep slowing down. You have to force yourself."

"I know we are beat for today," Persis interjected, "But can't we complain? I don't see what right Rhoda has to lock these round our middles. Wouldn't Wilbur make a fuss?"

Susan laughed ruefully. "Dear Wilbur! No, he won't make a fuss. Don't you see the pattern with him. He neatly sidesteps the job of actually inflicting pain on us. But he doesn't begrudge Sarah or Rhoda their little bit of fun, a sort of perquisite of Office for them. Never forget with Wilbur that even if he loves us, and maybe he does, he isn't a bit fond of women as women. I know from my life with him he sincerely believes that this sort of thing, and Sarah, and all the rest is good for us and makes us possible to live with."

"Ever thought he might be right?" Persis asked mischievously.

"He is right, dammit!" Miranda felt angry at the recognition.

"It's for sure the three of us couldn't live as we do with him if there wasn't a whip around somewhere," Susan conceded. "I've given up worrying about it or feeling inferior. I simply accept what I must and enjoy what I can. It works fine. I say, kids, let's slow down and walk. What the Hell are we running for. I can't even see anyone coming. We can't talk if we are puffing."

They slowed to a walk, keeping wary eyes alert for pursuit.

“Seems to me whoever wins today is going to feel simply beastly about the other two.” Persis said somberly.

“Of course she will!” Susan acknowledged. She turned and looked significantly at Miranda. “Look, Mother Hen, none of this nobility stuff letting yourself get nabbed ahead of Persis.”

Miranda flushed. Persis trilled laughter. “She would, you know. She’s sweet.” She, too, turned an admonitory eye on the girl who loved her. “Promise, Darling. We each take our chances?”

“Oh, alright!” Miranda conceded. “I suppose I could say the same to you.”

“It will probably be more chance than anything else who gets caught and how.” Susan ineffectually fingered the confining leather. “Damn. This hurts! It’s beastly. I could murder Rhoda! But seriously, about the other thing, I agree we ought to go easy on playing martyr. They’d catch on and we might all end up in the soup.”

“Susan, I’m curious.” Miranda sounded embarrassed. “You really are a privileged slave. Why would Wilbur toss you to the lions with us today?”

Susan was amused. “Nothing significant, Darling. Sure I’m privileged. I know it. But Wilbur never lets me forget. You saw me sent downstairs. Today I’m in for just as much trouble as you. In all the time he has owned me, and it’s a

long time now! I don't suppose there has ever been a couple of weeks passed without lucky me getting some sort of stern reminder. Some of 'em damn good and stern. It's never affected my feelings about him. It's almost as though it's quite impersonal. I know you and Patricia do a lot of analyzing about these things: you know, 'How a slave gets to feel like a slave'. But I just don't bother. I'd much sooner go down to Sarah every week than go back to the sort of half starved existence I'd have had if I'd never been kidnapped and sold to him."

"I've often wondered," Miranda mused, "about Persis and me, I mean, what would our lives have been… whether we are being cheated; you know, no lovely young man and no white wedding and no maisonette—"

"And no filthy diapers. Don't forget them, darling." Susan's voice was bleak.

Miranda accepted the amendment. "Alright. But look into the future. We'll still be in chains when we are thirty, and forty, and fifty… It just doesn't seem real."

"I don't even think about it. Best not," Susan advised.

Suddenly she yelped in surprise. "There's something that's real. Damn good and real!"

From behind a bush three men had emerged, laughing at some private joke. "Those bastards!" Susan exclaimed. "They've been sitting waiting for us, and we walked right

into them. This is it girls!" In lithe leaps she sped away. If her harness hurt she had, for the moment, forgotten it. Miranda and Persis followed suit, but in diverse directions. They could not, then, be cornered as a group.

It became, of necessity, a race between one man and one girl. Handicapped as each girl was by pain and the confining straps it was a race they could not win. Miranda knew she would soon be overtaken. Her best recourse was to dodge and to evade. A quick glance told her that Fred Bates had chosen her for his quarry.

She made it last what seemed to her a very long time. Or perhaps the pain just made it so. It became a childish game, feinting this way and that on opposite sides of a bush or dodging round a tree. But it could have only one end. When Fred's hand found a firm clutch on her arm Miranda instantly capitulated. A rough and tumble would extract even more pain from her harness than had the run. She had had enough.

"You're a good plucked 'un." He greeted cheerfully. "Always liked you. If it wasn't for that damn idea of Rhoda's this really could be like old times. Let's have a look… just as I thought, a damn padlock. She's probably laughing…"

Miranda blushed, but did not tell him that this was the first race that had not ended in ravishment. She flinched at what he withdrew from his pocket, but was docile in allowing him to handcuff her wrists behind her back. She

would have happily embraced his lovemaking in exchange for release from Rhoda's infliction, and told him so. He laughed in genuine pleasure at her admission. It was not until that moment that she remembered the race…

"You are number two." Fred told her. "Bad luck, that." He laughed again. "I'd have caught you sooner if I hadn't been watching Persis. Bill was after her. But she climbed a tree. Every time he climbed after her she hit him with a dead branch she'd broken off. Good thing he's got a thick head. Anyway she was able to hold him off long enough to be an easy winner. You should have seen…"

"Well, that was a short exercise." Susan said in disgust. "Only good thing about it is getting rid of Rhoda's little gadgets. Everything about them's horrible. Except, I s'pose, they saved us getting fucked at the finish. Gosh I'm tired. Hope this van takes us straight home." She suddenly remembered, "But when we get there Sarah will be waiting. Oh, Heavens."

Sarah was indeed waiting for them. But an amused Sarah enjoying some quiet joke of her own. She glanced with interest at the note they delivered from Rhoda naming the winner and the losers, surveying Persis with a speculative eye and knowing grin.

"Left a surprise for 'ee, Mr. Herman did," she informed them. "Wanted something different, like. Not just me belting a cane into 'ee. He's a nice man, he is. Says to me:

‘Sarah, you think up half a dozen little surprise for the losers. Write ’em down. Seal ’em. Have the winner pick one out of a hat and see she inflicts whatever it is on the other two’. I done it, and here they are. Pick one out, Dearie.” She proffered a china bowl, in which reposed some folded bits of paper, to a startled Persis.

The younger girl eyed the offering with distaste, then looked imploringly from one to the other of her companions. “Must I?”

“Of course, Dearie. Come along now, don’t be silly.”

“Better do it, Darling,” Susan advised. “Luck of the draw, y’know. You have to do it anyway… no use feeling bad.”

Persis selected a slip. “When do I open it?”

“In the punishment room. Go on up and get busy. Do it right. I’ll come and inspect. So don’t let that tender little heart of yours get in the way. Be off with you…!”

In the big room that held so many memories of pain for all, the three girls looked doubtfully at each other. Persis unfolded the paper and read it with stricken eyes. “It’s two hours on the bar,” she told them dolefully.

As though by prior consent Miranda and Susan became very business-like. “No tears, now,” Miranda admonished. “It has to be done. We’ll get into position and help you all we can. Fix us properly so that Sarah can’t find fault and think up some penalty for you. It won’t be fun for us. But

we've sat on the damn thing before and survived." Suiting action to words, the two delinquents found stools and quickly straddled the hated bar, supporting most of their weight on their hands as they watched Persis dismally going about her task of cinching their ankles.

"Tighter," Susan demanded peremptorily. "It's no kindness to us to botch it, Darling. It's supposed to hurt. So make sure it does."

There were many hesitations and much admonition to an unhappy Persis. "If you don't buckle the straps as tight as you can we could fall off and really get hurt." It was this injunction of Miranda's that finally prompted their temporary taskmistress to draw their anchoring hands as tightly as Rhoda herself might have done.

"You'd better use handcuffs, Darling," Susan suggested. "I know you. You'll never tie our wrists properly with cord."

It was the moment that Miranda had wryly referred to once as 'The moment of truth'. When the straddled victim was, at last, compelled to relinquish the pain saving support of her hands and cross them behind her back. Always it is a shocking tax upon a girl's control to surrender her hands for the duration and thus suddenly accept the full burden of the agony she was intended to bear.

Even with the handcuffs they had to tell Persis to tighten a notch, and then another until they were snug. Both girls fought against the crescendo of pain thrusting at their loins

so that their voices and their features might retain a degree of normalcy that would not disturb the younger girl beyond her ability to fulfill her task.

“Better leave us alone,” Susan said when the job was done. “Go and talk to Sarah, or something. Don’t stay with us. If you are gone we can gasp and groan and cry all we like.”

Persis did not budge. But waved the bit of paper. “That isn’t all,” she said as though forcing each word out against her will. “You know those horrid clips with the cute bows you use on us, Susan. This says I have to put them on both of you.”

Susan’s groan was genuine. “Damn that girl! Isn’t she ever satisfied!” Tossing her head in anger and distress, she looked down at the girl holding the slip. “Alright, Darling. It can’t be helped. Do it. And then run. I’m no little heroine…!”

“I can’t,” Persis declared flatly. “They hurt so much they make you squirm. I just won’t clip them on you when you are already on that bar. It’s too much. I’m going to go and tell Sarah so.”

She turned to leave. But was halted by a word from Miranda.

“Persis! Do as you are told. You go to Sarah and you’ll find yourself sitting here with us, and we’ll all be wearing cute little bows on our tits!”

Amidst her pain Miranda reflected how strange it was to sit on the bar and look down to examine a part of her own person while she watched her nipples being massaged to erection and then clasped in the small cruel pincers hidden within their bright ribbon. She could not control her gasp and toss of head as each breast received its decoration and settled down to endure the steady burn that would last and get worse until it was removed. Watching the similar treatment on her companion in distress she could not but acknowledge how well the infliction set off and enhanced Susan's beauty and thus, presumably, her own.

"Better than I'd expected!" Sarah approved. She had walked in unobserved. "Bet you two had to lay the law down to dear little Persis to get yourselves fastened that well." She chuckled as she examined every focal point of the prisoners distress. "Perfect job! Now we leave you to enjoy yourselves and come back in a couple of hours to let you loose." She turned to Persis and took her by the hand. "Come along, Dearie. You can talk to me and have a cup of Tea. They don't want you watching them with big sad eyes when they shed a few tears and start to sniffle."

Reluctantly Persis allowed herself to be led away. At the door a backward look wrenched her heart with their beauty in distress.

The steaming kettle helped, as did the china teapot and the rattle of the cups. The kitchen suddenly seemed less like a dungeon.

“Do you want to chain me… I mean so I can’t leave the kitchen?” Persis asked, more to make conversation than from caring either way.

“Your ankles are chained, Dearie. That’s enough. You can’t run.”

“Suppose I edged out of the door when you aren’t looking and did the best I could. What would you do?” Persis asked mischievously.

“Yank you back by the hair.”

“And punish me?”

“If Mr. Herman told me to.”

“But you would report my attempt to escape?”

“What nonsense are you hatching up in that little mind of yours?” Sarah asked good humoredly. “You know you can’t do nowt’ but walk careful, like, with your feet chained together. Here, drink this ’n stop dreaming.” She pushed a large steaming cup in front of her charge.

“But haven’t you ever thought about us girls!” Persis persisted. “We really are prisoners, aren’t we! We haven’t any hope of ever getting free!”

“No, that you haven’t!” Sarah agreed matter of factly.

“But doesn’t it bother you to think of us chained like this and getting whipped… and everything, all the rest of our

lives?"

"Not a bit, Dearie. You are all damned lucky if you ask me. As for the whip, well you know I love caning you. I hope you are here for life. I ought to get real expert at it in another couple of years with you to practice on."

"You don't feel sorry for us at all?"

Sarah stopped what she was doing and turned, arms akimbo, to gaze with a frank sincerity at the girl who had asked the question. "Dearie, to show you how sorry I feel for the three of you I'm going to tell you the straight truth: If I had the shape you all have I'd walk right over to Miss Patricia and ask her to enroll me as one of her slaves in training right now."

"Oh Sarah, you are joking. You must be!"

"I'm not, y'know! I even talked to Rhoda about it. But she says I don't have the figure: too much work and too many muscles and a good few too many pounds. My face might pass, and I have good tits. But the rest of me says I have to stay in the kitchen."

"You wouldn't want to get whipped and chained?" Persis said incredulously.

"I'd put up with the chains. They wouldn't have to whip me much—Not me! I'd be wanting to learn. I'd be a jump ahead of them always. You girls get whipped so much because you ask for it with your Miss Hoity-toity and your

sarcasms."

"You envy us! Sarah, you must be kidding!"

Sarah made an impatient gesture. "You don't know when you are well off. Look at Susan, now. She won't leave. She doesn't want to. Mr. Herman gives her lots of chances to run. But she never takes 'em. You and Miranda are just too new to it all. You only just got trained, and not the full course either, I hear tell. Mark my words, you'll end up same way as young Susan. Damn lucky, I'd say."

"You call it lucky, sitting up in that bar?"

"Bothers you, don't it. Thinking of them, 'specially Miranda." Sarah chuckled understandingly. "Would you feel any better if I set you up there with them? I could y'know, if 'ee asked me."

Persis considered the outrageous suggestion seriously. "It would ease my conscience," she admitted. "But it would not do them any good. Wish now I hadn't kept hitting Bill with that bit of wood. Then Miranda would be sitting here, and I wouldn't feel so bad."

"But your little thingummy would, Dearie. Up there on that bar." Sarah surveyed her companion with affectionate amusement. "Tell you what! Run a little errand for me. Go and get a pair of those clips with the bows on and a pair of handcuffs."

It was a short errand. She who ran it guessed its portent.

Returning, she handed Sarah the items requested. Then, without a word, turned her back and placed her hands behind her. A moment later she felt the grip of steel and heard the familiar clicks as the shining bands circled her wrists in their tight embrace. Turning again, Persis smiled straight into Sarah's eyes, took a deep breath and stuck out her chest.

It became a duel of eyes. Sarah's fingers were busy with her captive's nipples but she did not look at what they were doing. Instead she gazed as intently at Persis as Persis did at her. Each daring the other to speak first of what was about to happen. Each, in their own way, amused to give the other no advantage. Persis determined not to plead or even to acknowledge what was being done. Sarah curious to provoke a plea or protest.

The spell broke when the fingers ceased their friction. Persis involuntarily lowered her eyes to behold her nipples stiff and demanding. Then, smiling far more brightly than she felt, said gaily, "It's sweet of you to do this for me, Darling. I'd never have thought of it by myself."

"A cool one, you are." Sarah paid tribute to a courage she could recognize. "See if you can keep smiling with these."

Persis always vowed she would not look. But she always did. There was something fascinatingly awful about the gradual approach to her nipple, the careful positioning of the small jaws, and then the burning bite as they clenched

their teeth on her tenderest possession. She watched now.

It was evident that Sarah was as familiar with the little metal clips as Susan had been. The victim watched breathless as first her right and then her left breast received the gay adornment, beneath which there was only pain. It took all her fortitude to neither gasp or wince; but to smile cheerfully so that when Sarah raised her eyes, the task over, she saw only the outward appearance of grateful enthusiasm. “You do that so well,” enthused the seemingly gratified recipient of her bounty. “You get them just where they hurt the most and so I can’t shake them off.”

“Why don’t you take them off yourself?” Sarah suggested, piqued.

“I wouldn’t dream of it, Darling. Besides, I can’t.”

“Well, let’s stop being heroic and have another cup of tea,” Sarah poured and stirred. “Here, I’ll hold it up for you.”

Persis sipped the proffered cup. She was hurting badly. But was still impelled to test her companion. “Darling,” she said impishly, “I don’t mind, of course, but wouldn’t it be much easier for you if I had my hands. Unlock the cuffs, please. I promise to be a good girl.”

Sarah rose to the challenge. “Don’t be silly. You couldn’t keep your hands away from your tits for ten seconds.”

“Try me!”

Sarah was intrigued. How much pain could this delightful child absorb and still smile sweetly. Surely it was not humanly possible to refrain, with freed hands, from relieving the torment. Spurred by a mocking smile, she fetched the key.

Persis played her self-designed role to perfection. When the metal fell away from her wrists she stretched sensuously up on her toes, arms lifted high so that her breasts thrust into prominence, each bearing its small bow. It increased her pain. But she knew it the most flattering of all postures. Suddenly she lapsed and, clasping Sarah's startled face in her hands, planted a long warm kiss on the lips of her surprised tormentor. "You are so good to me," she said simply. "Come, let's finish our tea." With seeming naturalness her hands never once rose to her breasts.

It was not until they were washing the dishes and an unguarded motion brushed one of the pert bows that Persis flinched and her features betrayed their anguish. She gave a small gasp and one hand flew toward the pain. But she willed it back down and resumed her task. She even managed to compose her smile.

"Take 'em off, Love," Sarah had seen the brief weakness. She was satisfied. "I couldn't wear them things and grin. You take 'em off and we'll declare you the winner."

"I won't!" Persis flashed vehemently. "If my hands were behind me I couldn't. So why should I now."

“Take ’em off.”

“No!”

Sarah shrugged. “Suit yourself, little Miss Martyr. Wear ’em as a penance if you want. How about a bit of sackcloth? You’ve proved your point. Now you are just being silly.”

Persis was annoyed with herself. She longed to remove the scalding adornments from her breasts, but knew she was trapped by her own conceit. Suddenly she was sobbing into the tea towel and then upon Sarah’s ample shoulder. But when the other girl’s hand reached to perform the act of mercy she drew back and insisted, “No… no… no! I will wear them! I can. You’ll see…” She stepped back. Drying her tears, yet feeling better because of them. “I expect I am silly. My tits hurt something awful. I don’t even know what I’m trying to prove…” She tossed her head defiantly. “But, silly or not, I’m still going to prove it.”

Sarah felt a faint annoyance. But was still intrigued. “Well then, let’s do things right, Luv’. Would ’ee like to bend over and touch your toes?”

Persis quailed. But the die was cast. “Arn’t you going to strap me to your lovely table?” she asked nonchalantly.

“I ain’t doing anything unless you ask me nicely,” Sarah said firmly. “This is all your idea, y’know.”

The naked girl dried the last of her tears, smiled wanly, and stepped back into her chosen role. “I’ll bend over and

touch my toes, Darling. Then will you please cane my bare bottom?"

"Going to wear them clips on your tits while I do it?"

"Yes, please."

"I'll get the cane. You arrange yourself."

"How many strokes?" Persis inquired expectantly.

"That's for 'ee to decide, Luv," Sarah chuckled. "I'll just keep caning 'ee on that sweet little round bottom until 'ee tells me to stop."

Persis knew herself trapped by her own bravado. Now she would pay. But she would evoke her companion's admiration. She determined to bear more than the one first awful stroke before she clutched at herself and surrendered. Gracefully she bent all the way down, knees taut, her lovely spheres raised into inviting prominence. "I'm ready," she said demurely.

It was a game. Painful, but a game. The dreaded stroke surprised the tense recipient. It was awful, as all such strokes on the bare skin are awful, but it did not send her writhing to the floor as she had feared. Persis managed to hold her graceful pose and do no more than gasp and sway. The second stroke told her that Sarah was a shrewd opponent. It hurt bitterly. But was just barely within her tolerance. Thus she would be taxed to the utmost. Either she must succumb ignominiously after a few strokes, or

bear far more than she had ever intended to. The third stroke was hard enough to prompt decision. “I’m sorry, Sarah,” Persis said contritely. “I’m not as brave as I thought I was. Can we stop now, please?”

They stopped.

But, by mutual consent, her breasts continued to bear their little ornaments.

Wilbur Herman was in cheerful mood on his return in late afternoon. Sarah briefed him on the results of the day. His three slave girls had succumbed to emotion and physical weariness and were asleep. A fact that seemed to please him. Wakening they found their Master in a playful and expansive mood: there was to be a formal dinner and a formal presentation of a prize to the winner of the day’s race. If the girls found his inordinate enjoyment of what had been, for them, just one more odd and trying day of their slavery strange, they did not say so. A slave-girl does not question her Master’s moods. In any case, Wilbur Herman’s little-boy gaiety was infectious. If it was to be a gala evening they would enjoy it. Persis was puzzled and pleased. All three cheerfully obeyed his injunction to spend much time and care in looking their very best for the occasion. Miranda and Persis were to be confined by ankle chains only. At the sound of the gong they made their way to the lounge for cocktails, happily expectant. A beaming

Wilbur, glass in hand, waved an admiring welcome. However the three pairs of feminine eyes focused, not on him, but his companion.

It was Major Ballard.

Perhaps it was the cocktails. But, for Miranda, the evening had a fairytale effervescence. In the center of it the immaculate military figure first made her blushingly conscious of being naked, and then, before much time had passed, pleased by his obvious admiration. Since returning after the abduction she had resolutely banished from her mind romantic notions about Dick Ballard. She was a slave owned by Wilbur Herman, a slavery understood and condoned by those powers in the background of the handsome soldier. In any case, he had clearly shown his feelings for Persis. Nothing could come of them, for Persis too was a slave. Miranda felt a pleasantly romantic sense of the tragic. A nostalgic toying with a delightful 'What might have been'.

In between conversation and during Herman's monologues Miranda vaguely considered the strangeness of her love for Persis when coupled with her desire to be possessed by the intense maleness of this man. She had long recognized the power of Wilbur Herman's virility to transport her to another world away from breasts and soft white thighs. What would it be like to be made a woman by Dick Ballard! She wondered if all girls were thus divided in their sexual loyalties. Was there a Persis in the life of every female!

Obviously not. But was the lack due only to chance. Probably!

Her reveries came to an end when Wilbur Herman rapped for attention. She sat straight and attentive, aware of some portent behind the words by which he spoke humorously of the day's 'Sporting event' and the award he was about to bestow. Obedient to her Master's beckoning finger, Persis went and stood beside him, as he positioned her, at the head of the table for all to see. With a fine sense of theater Wilbur produced an ornate and expensive case which he purposely took time to open. From it he lifted a thing of gleaming beauty that evoked gasps around the table. It was a silver collar set with stones that reflected a thousand lights. Giving Persis a few moments in which to drink in the loveliness he held, he then, gently and with great care, clasped it about the slenderness of her neck. Watching and silent, all present heard the final firm click that told clearly that it would not easily be removed. Wilbur then bent up and kissed her heartily on the lips. Her eyes shining, Persis reached up and pulled his head down again and kissed him back. She then stood again beside his chair. Proud. A slave girl decked in jewels.

Again the beckoning finger. Susan now entered the spotlight. She had left the room and returned with yet one more box. From it she lifted bright silver, there was the clink of chain. Deftly, and with the same sense of showmanship displayed by her Master, she clasped beautifully chased metal upon the wrists, the waist, the knees, the el-

bows, of the standing girl. When the box was empty Persis stood, not closely confined, but clothed in silver so that she could not move without the music of the chains. All freedom gone, replaced by pure beauty.

Miranda watched, almost in awe. Persis was incredibly lovely bearing Wilbur Herman's gifts: gifts that must have cost a fortune! But why? Their race that morning had been much as other races. Why the prize—and such a prize! Was Susan supposed to have won? But no, Wilbur was obviously delighted. Miranda found it hard to stifle a pang of envy. But the show was not yet done. Patting the chained girl benevolently on the shoulder, Wilbur Herman indicated his intention to make a speech. Everyone clapped except Persis who simply blushed.

"Well folks," said Herman, bestowing his best smile to each in turn around the table. "I'm real proud of this little lady here. She won her prize today fair and square. Right now she's about as purty a little trick as you and me is ever likely to see and I don't mind telling you I'm all-fired glad I put my brand on her." Again the roving smile, Persis' blush appeared permanent. "Yes folks," he continued, "I'm a damn lucky guy, and I know it. I got me three of the best girls there is anywheres and there ain't no amount of money would buy any one of 'em. I'm telling you straight. Now this is a pretty happy celebration here tonight." He paused and his expression changed. "But I gotta tell you there's some sadness in it too. This here little girl of mine has gone and fallen in love with our gallant Major and he

with her. Wouldn't that frost your marbles?"

Miranda stifled a desire to laugh. Then angrily wondered why the quite hopeless love of Persis and the Major had to be aired in public. The chains upon her beloved loudly proclaimed whose property she was. But Wilbur was not done. He continued soberly.

"Now, you folks know what I think of marriage. But I ain't denying that men and women get a feeling for each other that's about the strongest thing there is. I suppose that if my little girl and Dick Ballard had met at a dance somewheres they'd damn soon be walking down the aisle and getting themselves into a heap of trouble. So maybe it's just as well I got her roped and hog-tied. I just said, didn't I, that there ain't no amount of money would buy her, and there ain't! I'm atelling you! But there's other things besides money. Maybe I got me a soft heart, or maybe I got holes in my head. But I'm damned if I haven't let this good-looking military type soft talk me into selling him what's close to being the sweetest little girl in the world…"

There was a stunned silence. Persis' blush vanished. She was white with shock. Eyes wide staring at the man she loved… Wilbur used the pause to signal Susan who now placed in his hand the smallest case of all. At a nod from his host Major Ballard rose from the table and took his place beside the girl in silver chains. Wilbur, beaming once more, resumed his speech.

“This ain’t no ordinary little gathering. None of us is ordinary. This house ain’t ordinary. So I’m hoping this young couple here won’t be ordinary either. Now what they do with themselves is their business. But I’m going to set ’em off on the right foot. In this here little case which you see me handing to the Major there are the keys to all them chains that’s stopping young Persis from making a fool of herself huggin’ and kissing and all that. And there’s the key to that pretty collar she wears round her neck. It’s my wedding present to ’em both. She don’t know it yet, but inside it’s engraved: ‘Property of Dick Ballard’.”

To Miranda the rest of the evening was a kaleidoscope of embraces, tears, warm lips, laughter and much happiness. Persis was radiant. It did not occur to her or to anyone else, even the Major, to release her from her chains. To have done so would have been a desecration. They inhibited nothing that mattered. They did not stop Persis and Miranda from clinging together with a mingling of kisses and tears. When the party was over Dick Ballard picked up his new possession, chains and all, and carried her triumphantly to his car.

That night Miranda cried herself to sleep. Somewhere in the darkest hours Susan flitted silently into the room, lifted the covers, and lying beside her held the lonely girl fiercely in her arms.

* * *

It could not be said that the absence of Persis dramatically touched the lives of those she had left behind. To Susan she had been an amusement, a diverting companion. Wilbur Herman's role had been largely that of an indulgent uncle. That Miranda should know moments of desolation was inevitable. But they were tempered by a shared joy in what the younger girl had found, and by a Susan determined that her sole remaining charge should not be allowed to mope. At the first signs of despondency Miranda was ordered to fetch the whip or the cane. She was then punished by a watchful Susan who withheld her strokes only when she believed their purpose served. Oddly enough, these inflictions worked. After them the girls unfailingly found joy in each other. Often playfully, but with an intent enjoyment, Susan locked the handcuffs on her captive who wore them happily enough as she might have worn a friendship ring.

Wilbur Herman, too, played his part in bridging the gap. For the first several days he chose Miranda repeatedly, night after night. He produced small gifts, some of which touched his slave girl's heart by their impractical extravagance: A chained woman has little need of bracelets, necklaces or bits of silk. But she treasured them and used them by special arrangement with Susan who happily freed some specific area so that it might be embellished by some

jeweled band or chain that was not a shackle. The days passed happily enough. But there was about them some unspoken portent of impermanence.

To a slave girl change is always vivid, sometimes incongruous. It is never by her own volition but emanates from the authority that subjects her. Thus it was while a naked Wilbur Herman was tugging on his socks after a night in which he and Miranda had found much fulfillment in each other that he told her of her task. Deliberately intent on the process of dressing he obviously found it difficult to voice the words.

“If it was anyone but Benson asking the favor I’d have refused,” he said awkwardly. “But I owe him, the way he owes me. And he don’t see it as no big thing.”

“But he has his own girls!” Miranda protested unhappily.

Wilbur shrugged resignedly. “Seems like you’re only half right there. Pat’s got the usual crop gettin’ their little asses striped, but business has been so all fired good they plumb sold out of finished product. So he wants to borrow you, Honey.”

Miranda knew the familiar sense of unreality. In the whole luxurious bedroom the only sign of her condition was Mrs. Crosbie’s handcuffs that Susan had imposed on her and for which Wilbur had not bothered to find the key when he had unlocked the ankle chains the night before. Handcuffs do not inhibit a girl making love. Quite soon now he would

place the ankle fetters back on her. Or perhaps tell her to clasp them on herself. She wore shackles with such grace that on onlooker might not, at first, have noticed them. Now, a few words introduced into this almost connubial setting told her that she was to be given to an unknown man who would subject her body to indignity and torture. If, during the night, she had forgotten she was slave she must now acknowledge her bondage.

“Is he so very much a V.I.P.?” she asked.

“Guess so, Sweetheart. Leastwise he is to Benson.”

“I suppose it’s the usual… He can do whatever he wants?”

Wilbur grimaced. “It’s for one night, Honey. I told ’em that. And none of this needle stuff under the nails…! No horsin’ around outside what you’ve been trained for.”

Miranda sat quietly, enacting in her mind the scenes she would be required to play and the pain she would be required to bear. Resolutely she faced her servitude. She would not complain. Wilbur was obviously unhappy with what he saw as his obligation. But should she quibble his unhappiness might be pushed beyond the border into irritation that would send her downstairs to Sarah’s untender mercies.

“I sorta’ feel lower ’n a snake ’bout this, Honey. But I’d take it as a favor if you’d do the best you can with it.” His voice died slowly as though he wished to say more but found no

words.

He turned and faced her. Miranda saw in his features the conflicting emotions that left him nothing to say. Smiling some small feminine secret of her own she reached to the rug and found her fetters where he had dropped them the night before. Carefully and with deliberate emphasis on the final snap of the lock she fastened them on her ankles. Kneeling before her Master her joined hands found his caressing it with her lips and then her cheek. Letting it fall finally she sat back on her heels, head bowed in total submission.

“They don’t come no better ’n you,” said Wilbur Herman.

Her returns to the House in the Park quaintly evoked in Miranda’s mind the simile of a young bride visiting the home of her parents. Familiar things were there. Even those that were terrifying held the nostalgia of something shared. Her welcome she knew was genuine as was even Blessing’s smile and greeting: “Nice to have you with us again, Miss.” It seemed quite unthinkable that this impassive man had once violated her daily. Fred Bates provided a knowing and cheerful grin and Rhoda a warm intertwining of hands. But it was Patricia into whose arms she fell as though she was indeed coming home. Even the handcuffs which Susan had refused to remove did little to hinder their embrace.

“Herewith one live body.” Susan had delivered her with

amusement. “Treat it with tenderness. But if she gives you any static whip the daylights out of her.” Later, over tea, after Susan had returned home, Miranda learned what was required of her.

“Remember Daphne Morris?” Pat asked cheerfully. “That’s about what’s expected of you this evening. We have some girls we want to watch you at work just as you watched her that day. It will be the same room and the same mirror. Bit of a novelty for you, Ducky, to work and be on stage at the same time.”

Miranda grimaced. “Be silly of me to say: ‘Must I?’ wouldn’t it!” She held up her cuffed hands significantly. “I must, and that’s that!”

“Wilbur’s sweet to let us have you. I’ll bet he’s sweet to you too, isn’t he, Pet?”

“He’s more than that.” Miranda confirmed musingly, “But I do wonder how it’s going to be… you know, us two girls! Oh Pat, do you think it can go on and on?”

“Of course, Ducky. Wilbur’s shrewd. The reason it’s working is that he keeps you very much a slave. You are always chained. Susan is number one and is mostly free. That way he plays no favorites. He doesn’t have to treat you both alike.”

“Do you think he is in love with Susan?”

“You ought to be able to sense that better than me. You get

a lot closer to him." Pat laughed, then eyed Miranda intently, "I say, Pet, you arn't falling for the old boy, are you?"

"Of course not. But he is sweet. You used the right word. But he's full of surprises, like today. Darling, what am I in for this evening?"

"I don't even know his name." Patricia admitted. "I'm supposed to call him Mr. Smith. You know what you have to call him. I asked about his preferences. Seems he wants a bit of everything, but nothing in excess, so it might not be too bad for you, Ducky."

"He'll want to whip me though, won't he?"

"'Fraid so. This whipping a girl seems almost universal. Can't get away from it. I sometimes think Herman has a point in his theories about women. Maybe men do subconsciously resent us." Pat laughed self consciously, "Mr. Benson still whips me sometimes…"

"Because of something you've done?"

"Not really. That would make our business association difficult to maintain. A whipping might then be implicit in anything said or done. No. He whips me with great artistry and sometimes with great cruelty as what he calls an aesthetic exercise. While he's doing it the aesthetic bit escapes me. But afterwards I have to admit the effect is damned erotic and quite lovely. I'm striped better than a tiger." Pat chuckled gleefully, "The Hell of it is I become

randy as can be. I can't wait for him to get at me. Sort of makes Women's Lib a lot of nonsense."

Miranda was curious. "Have you ever truly wanted to be whipped… I mean sexually aroused to where you longed to feel the cane curling round your bottom. Have you ever actually asked for it?"

"Yes I have." Patricia vouchsafed seriously. "But it's something a girl has to be careful about. You have to catch the male in the right mood. Not that I think he would ever fail to respond: the whip has a shockingly erotic impact on them all. But I think their regard for you can be affected by a clumsy approach." She laughed, "Don't tell me you have never asked Wilbur to thrash you?"

Miranda made a gesture of embarrassment. "I have wanted to once or twice," she admitted. "But there's been so much happen, and I have been whipped so much so often that it's taken the edge off desire. I'm sure though it has to be someone you are fond of if you are to get that good feeling afterwards. It works like that with me and Susan… But I'm scared that if I asked Wilbur he'd just send me downstairs."

"What effect does Sarah have on you?"

"When I get over being half dead from the awful ways she whips me I want her to eat me alive." Miranda grinned wryly. "There isn't any hope for us, is there… for women, I mean, when we react like this. Whether with a girl or a man we want to be mastered. I'm like you now. I don't ana-

lyze too much. That's the way we are, or the way I am! So I just accept it. Silly to say that, isn't it! I have no choice."

"Come a long way, haven't you, Darling." Patricia stepped over and kissed the naked girl. "You have learned things about yourself you would never have known if you hadn't stepped into The Park that day." Resting her hands on her captive's shoulders she said seriously, "Don't worry about tonight. It will probably be a triumph for you."

Mr. Smith was another of Miranda's "Faceless men". Bland, serious, deep intelligent eyes, anonymous. Kneeling submissively before him she sensed a grave examination of her person. She was blushingly aware, too, of the watching eyes behind the huge mirror. Were they as incredulous of her now as she and Persis had been that day of Daphne Morris! That she might make them so might be her only reward for her evening's travail. Deftly and without distaste her fingers flew to their task of revealing her Master's rigid sex. Her tongue lingeringly curled and lapped. When her lips closed upon him with their own moist warm magic he said, quite simply, "You are an exquisitely beautiful girl, Miranda."

It was different from her premise. He was a grave and gracious man who enjoyed her to the full. There radiated from him a calm and possession almost tangible. Miranda sensed it. She had a feeling that here was a connoisseur of women. Almost against her will she felt a desire to excel. Here was her opening movement of a sexual symphony

she would conduct with splendor. She remembered with amusement those eyes that would pity her or envy her behind the screen of glass. Tonight they should witness a pleasure slave glorying in her task.

She took much time, playing with his sex as upon some delicate instrument. In the final moment she ensured that her audience should be aware of her total service to her Master by the ecstasy of her features as she swallowed his semen as though it was ambrosia indeed and by the nimble manipulation of her fingers enabling her waiting tongue to visibly collect each drop as it appeared and then to cleanse with both tongue and lips the male symbol to which she paid homage.

Then, as by some holy ritual long ordained, Miranda both guided and served Mr. Smith through each successive step to the moment, always dreaded, when she must ask: “You would like to whip me, Master?”

“I think the cane, my dear. I am sure you have something supple and pliant.”

She fetched it: a cruel thing! But in its way beautiful. The caress of her lips upon it was a kiss of love as though it had the power of response: as indeed in its own way it did! Deliberately she created a tableau as she knelt with bowed head in supplication, her raised hands offering the wicked thing with which she would be thrashed.

“In what position do you wish your slave, Master?”

“For your first six, my dear, you will stand erect with your hands clasped behind your neck.”

“Thank you, Master.” Obediently she struck the pose. She felt pride in her knowledge that it displayed a girl’s figure to utmost advantage. If it was her bottom he intended to cane it would also hurt less than if she was bent over.

“I will say again, my dear, that you have a most beautiful body.”

His last word was punctuated by his first stroke. Miranda’s flesh absorbed it with a knowledge that she was indeed in the hands of a master. Each of the successive blows was competent, spaced, and hurt excruciatingly. As they sliced into her the naked girl rose to the greatest challenge of all. Her eyes shone. A lingering smile betrayed only joy. Once she looked back over one shoulder to bestow a warm gratitude upon he who held the cane. When the six were done she did not move. But awaited his instruction.

“I think now it would be pleasant if you touched your toes, Miranda. Keep your knees stiff and straight and arch your back as much as possible.”

Miranda quailed. So soon! And on the same portion of her person! Bent as he had directed the cane would hurt far more. Inevitably it must lap upon or across wounds she now bore. She longed to acquit herself with honor under the whip so that those who saw it bite her flesh must wonder at her mastery of pain. Gracefully and with obvious

care she positioned herself knowing that the twin rounds, already striped, thus became now a focal point within the whole room. Bravely she managed to look back and share an erotic invitation. Mr. Smith's eyes glowed. The cane sang its whining song.

Again it was six. Bent as she was she found it possible to control her features sufficiently that her role was not impaired. She was thankful that Mr. Smith lacked Sarah's knowledge of female weaknesses, he did not order her to spread her legs or seek to wound her more secret recesses with the tip of the supple wand he flayed her with. Again, when it was done she did not move until he said:

"I think, my dear, a drink would be nice for both of us, don't you."

Thankfully Miranda obeyed her movements about the room as graceful and dainty as though pain did not exist. Her bottom was on fire. Carefully she refrained from touching her wounds, but she knew her flesh was ridged with purple weals. Mr. Smith had caned her competently and without mercy. She hoped there would be no more.

Her Master accepted the drink she tendered on bowed knee. He had ensconced himself comfortably in an arm chair. "Drink it up, my dear," he advised benignly. "Make yourself another. Then kneel on the rug before my chair. You may rest back on your heels. We will sip and we will talk."

Miranda reflected on the strangeness of men. How omnipotent this type could be. He had just thrashed her cruelly yet saw nothing amiss with a friendly chat during which she must be brightly attentive to every word.

“Do you enjoy being whipped?”

His direct question almost caused her to lose poise. But she caught herself in time and parried with: “You mean because I am trained to accept pain and adore the one who inflicts it, Master?”

“No, not really that.” It was evident that Mr. Smith was giving serious consideration to his own question and to his choice of words. “There are females for whom a sound caning provides an immense erotic stimulus. Are you one of them?”

“I am ready to serve you, Master. My body does not need pain as a prelude to making love.”

Mr. Smith chuckled. “I think you are evading the issue, young lady. You know perfectly well what I am asking you.”

Miranda did know. But did not wish to speak of something so intimate and so feminine to a strange man. But she knew she was his chattel for the evening so said diffidently: “I’m not really one of those girls… the ones you mean. But, but since I have become a slave I have learned that to be whipped by someone you love or are fond of can have the effect you speak of. Not while you are being whipped, but

after."

"Has my whipping had that effect?"

"No Master. It hurt very much so that I was concerned only to bear your punishment as a pleasure slave should."

Mr. Smith nodded. "You are quite incredible! I wouldn't have missed this for the world. By the way, I should tell you that you will be whipped again."

"Thank you, Master." Inwardly Miranda cursed. Were these men never satisfied! She gulped her drink.

Mr. Smith laughed. "A drink does help, doesn't it! Want another?"

"May I?"

"Of course. But don't get tipsy. Here, fill mine too."

His eyes never left the naked girl. When she was once more kneeling before him holding her filled glass in one hand he asked another abrupt question: "Well then, do you enjoy being a slave?"

"It is a question other girls and I have asked, Master. We even ask it of ourselves. I do not have the answer. The way to freedom was left open to us once. But we did not take it."

"Isn't that an answer in itself?"

"No Master. We were filled with guilt at coming back to our

chains."

He leaned forward, interested. "Continue. Why did you come back then?"

Miranda had often enough asked herself that same question. She did the best she could with it. "I think it was because we really are slaves… I don't mean just girls who are kept naked and whipped and chained—that kind would have run. But you see," She looked up at him engagingly. "We have been trained. Oh I know it's a strange sort of training! For the first couple of months all we thought about was escape. But we were never alone. We became fond of each other. A slave girl can even become fond of one of her jailers. When the day comes that you cease to think of escape as even a faint possibility then you begin to truly become a slave. You think and act like one. I suppose it's the thinking that's the most important… what takes place in your mind. It's the training, the way they do it. It's so gradual. Then one day you know you can never again be what you once were… You don't even want to."

Mr. Smith seemed entranced. "Amazing! Benson told me, but I didn't really believe him. Are you for sale?"

Miranda blushed. She was surprised at the impact of his question. It was at once a compliment yet an affirmation of the totality of her enslavement. "I have already been purchased," she told him simply. "My Master has loaned me so that I may give you pleasure."

“You don’t mind?”

“I am a slave, Master. It is not for me to mind.”

Mr. Smith grunted amusedly. “You are a woman! I’m not sure you aren’t even a clever woman. But that makes the next question more worth while. How’s your ego?”

“A slave does not have one, Master.”

“Nonsense! What made you stand there smiling while I caned that saucy little bottom of yours?”

“If we do not behave properly we are terribly punished.”

“That the only reason?”

Miranda blushed again. “I suppose it wasn’t,” she admitted. “Is it possible that they could take away my ego and yet leave my pride? That’s as close as I can come…”

Mr. Smith surveyed the kneeling girl, assessing her. “There is one thing about your slave state that’s worth examining. You never have to make a decision, do you?”

“Not now, Master.”

“What do you mean, not now?”

“When we were first… taken, I suppose our days were just one decision after another: to obey or disobey. Mostly we disobeyed. But that passed.” Miranda smiled up at him appealingly. “I don’t think I have thought of disobedience

now for a very long time."

"Do you recognize why?"

"It would be foolish, and pointless… Master."

Mr. Smith nodded sagely, his deep eyes absorbing the loveliness of the naked girl. He noted that her glass was less than half full. That meant she was afraid of the whip. He leaned forward intently.

"My dear," he said softly, "I will tell you why you did not run away. It was because you had discovered a happy land without decision and without responsibility. For those, like you, with the intelligence to accept it is a Lotus Land."

Miranda had glimpsed something of this thesis herself. "But Master," she pointed out, "I am still whipped and punished… in other ways."

"How else could you remain a slave? Isn't the whip easier to bear than the burden of decision?" He smiled sympathetically. "Isn't it true your first day as a genuine slave girl was the same day in which you renounced decision?"

A philosophical discussion is not easy for a girl whose thoughts are dominated by the knowledge that she is soon to be painfully whipped. Miranda did her best. "I expect you are right," she conceded thoughtfully. Then, anxious to avoid analytical conundrums, she innocently asked: "Who do men enjoy whipping girls?"

He laughed. “I’m not going to answer that, young lady. I’m quite sure you figured it out for yourself long ago. It’s as basic as the sex act itself. But that reminds me! Would you like to bring me any whip you would like me to use on you? We have done with the cane. I am now going to curl a whip round that exquisite waist. You can choose the one you think most suitable.”

Miranda managed a demure, “Thank you, Master,” and composed her features into a glow of happy expectation. For the first time she regretted her audience in the next room. She ardently wished to make her performance superlative. Pat would be there, and possibly Rhoda. She wished to enable them to make their point with the awestruck novices just as Daphne Morris had done long ago. But Mr. Smith used the whip viciously. If he continued to mark her with it she was unsure how long she could remain nonchalant. Without the watching eyes she could writhe and cry out under the lash. Perhaps this was what Mr. Smith desired of her.

“I think perhaps the first pose again, my dear.” Mr. Smith examined with satisfaction the lovely cruel thing she had kissed and placed in his hands. “Contract your waist as much as you can. The stripes will look very beautiful circling you there.”

“Do you wish to tie me, Master?” Miranda hoped he would. It would ease her burden.

“Of course not, child! You are far too beautiful as you are. That’s it. Tummy in, chest out.”

He had been right. The lash circled her concave middle. Had she not been whipped so often in the past the one stroke might have broken her. But she had gauged the depth of agony from this whip before. She met it with half closed eyes, her head well back as though looking toward some distant vista of happiness. She did not move or flinch. No muscle of her face changed. A deep indrawn breath was her only concession to the vivid brand implanted by the thong.

Miranda used every recourse she had learned. She set her mind to invite the pain, to seek its deepest nadir so that the stroke, when it enveloped her, might be less. Through her veiled eyes she sought a vision far away. Her will was compelling her body to relax. All her knowledge of herself and of the whip was brought to bear. Perhaps she could endure, if only there were not too many strokes… Mr. Smith had not named a number this time. But this, she knew, might be no more than his wish to make a psychological test of her control.

He stopped at the seventh. She would expect six. To add one more might break her. It did not. Miranda stood as he had desired. Flaming scarlet bands met around her waist. She waited still seeing her ineffable vision in the distance.

For moments Mr. Smith also stood. But his vision was the

naked girl who bore the vivid stripes he had placed upon her. Then, almost with reverence, he unclasped her hands from behind her neck and kissed each in tribute. “You are a remarkable young woman,” he said. Somehow his utterance of the simple words made Miranda feel the ordeal had been worthwhile. Mr. Smith had that quality about him.

The diverse natures of these men she was compelled to please always left Miranda puzzled. Were all men as devious and as complex! Had the young men she had known in her former life hidden beneath their prosaic well-scrubbed exteriors these same dark desires! Or were these yearnings the prerogative of a select few whose common denominator was the acquisition of wealth and the sight of purple ridges on a girl’s flesh. Was it to men like these that most of the trainees were sold. She would ask Pat if an opportunity prevented itself before she was taken home.

The opportunity did come. But she did not use it. The hour was late by the time Mr. Smith relinquished her. Thankfully she sat with Patricia and wolfed coffee and sandwiches. Her guest had left her exhausted. Once more her feet were chained and the familiar handcuffs were on her wrists. Susan would approve the return of her property in the same condition she had delivered it.

“That was a damn good show!” Patricia told her. “But he really did lace into you! You should have seen the girl’s faces. A look at a performance such as you put on tonight

takes the little dears a couple of months forward in their thinking. I don't think I could have done as well as you did."

Miranda grinned wryly. "This isn't likely to be a regular thing, is it?" She munched happily. "Wait 'til Wilbur sees these marks."

Patricia allowed a silence to lengthen. Then in a toneless voice said, "He won't be seeing them, Ducky. You are going to stay here. Wilbur has sold you back to us."

Miranda's world was shattered. She paused with a cup halfway to her lips. Then set it back upon the table. Questions surged. She suppressed them, examining in her mind the demanding why, why, why! Turning a stricken face she asked simply: "Wilbur has tired of me…?"

Patricia was angry with this task thrust at her. "These damn men!" she exclaimed. "Sometimes I could scream! You were happy there, weren't you?"

Miranda nodded miserably. Suddenly she realized as never before just how happy she had been with the pseudo cowboy and the warmth of his house and those she had shared it with. It was her home. She longed to go back to it. Longed with an intensity that surprised her.

"Wilbur ought to have told you this. But it seems I have to," Patricia explained. "All very simple really. The big oaf's conscience bothers him with two women in the house. He

was alright with three, sort of spread the risk around. But after Persis left he found himself with two women he was getting too fond of, and since Susan was his number one he decided you would have to be the casualty. If you're wondering about money and who pays who and how much, forget it. No one paid any money for you and Persis, not even Dick Ballard. It's all this favor business they live by. You scratch my back and I'll scratch yours…"

Miranda raised her handcuffed wrists. "That's the reason for these, I suppose? In case I panic…"

Pat was embarrassed. "Yes. The whole thing's a rotten beastly trick to do to you."

A sudden terrifying chasm opened up before the captive girl. She looked at her companion bleakly. "Pat, have I been brought back here to be a slave again? Are you going to make me serve a hundred Mr. Smiths?"

"No, Ducky, not that… honest!"

"Then you are going to sell me! That's what you'll do! What else can you do with me?"

"Hush, darling." Patricia took the chained girl in her arms and kissed the tears from Miranda's cheeks. "Everything happened in a great rush. I suspect the need of someone like you to look after Mr. Smith tonight precipitated the whole thing. Probably seemed like the psychological moment. I have been told to keep you a comfortable prisoner

and that I'd get some further advice about you."

"That means I'll be chained and locked up," said Miranda morosely.

"Well you always are chained," Pat pointed out reasonably, "but if you are locked up it will be with me. You and I are sharing a bed tonight. I'd be crazy not to accept this little gift from fortune. So just forget everything but you and me. Things will happen. I know they will. In the meantime I'll have a job for you tomorrow. You might even enjoy it. At least I'm damn sure it will be a pleasant surprise..."

Had it not been for Patricia and the love shared between them the night would indeed have been long and dark for Miranda. But it was long enough. She could not shake off a terrible desolation. First Persis, now Wilbur Herman. She had loved Persis. Had she loved this strange and contradictory man who had traded her as a farmer might a cow. She supposed she must. A girl could not feel as she felt without loving. Small cameos of memory pursued her. The absurd hunts that she had come to enjoy. Wilbur's quaint philosophy about women. The small gifts and the nights when he had chosen her and she had lain in his arms. Why had she not understood then what she understood now! Always you valued something after you had lost it.

Strive as she would she could not close her mind to the future. What could it offer her now! She had again become merchandise. Delectable female flesh for the highest bid-

der. For a few days or a few weeks Pat would keep her chained in luxury. Then she would be bound in the back of a car and taken… to what! Her despondency pictured the unutterable. There would never be another Wilbur Herman. More likely a Shankalin or a Bhuratta who would truly teach her slavery.

It was in keeping with her mood that on the following morning it was Rhoda who led her to the punishment room. Miranda was too dispirited to ask questions even when her handcuffs were removed and the irons taken from her ankles. Evidently they would have impeded whatever was to be done to her. At the awful door Rhoda nodded encouragingly, opened it and thrust her within. It closed with its usual ominous thud. For a moment she stood alone, bewildered. Then saw that she was by no means the only occupant of the big room. Two naked girls hung suspended by their wrists, their searching toes inches from the floor. Each was staring at her with the same wide-eyed amazement with which she was surveying them.

It was Hester and Keturah.

The three naked girls studied each other in a prolonged silence as though there were no words by which to cope with so startling a confrontation. Finally it was Keturah who ended the hiatus. “Damn and blast!” she said resentfully. “Who the Hell needs you…?”

“How’d you like to let us down?” suggested Hester somewhat more politely.

Miranda had the feeling of too much happening too quickly. Her first reaction was pure apprehension: was she to join these appalling children in captivity! How had they got here! As though in answer she became aware of a slip of paper Rhoda had pressed into her hand as she entered the room. It was Pat’s handwriting: ‘Quite simple, darling! The Department found itself with two political orphans that might prove a hot potato so they passed them on to us. They are two absolute fiends. We can do nothing with them! They are entirely yours. Have fun!’

“I hope they hang you up beside us,” said Keturah amiably.

Miranda adjusted slowly. The strangest sensation was to be totally free of chains. The import of the note left her first dismayed then amused. Pat’s intent was clear. Here was revenge. Here was her chance to invoke a retribution never more richly deserved! She eyed the hostile young captives with mixed emotions. Once she would cheerfully have flayed them alive. But did it matter now… Would inflicting pain ease the ache within her! She knew it would not. On the other hand the door at her back was locked. She shrewdly suspected it would remain so for a long time. No doubt Pat had contrived this situation as a means of diverting her mind. Miranda could not fail to recognize that the day might indeed be passed with some satisfaction.

“Don’t just stand there you silly bitch,” Hester admonished. “Are you going to let us down or aren’t you?”

“No, I’m not,” Miranda assured her cheerfully.

The day had commenced.

It was fun to watch the dawning of comprehension on Keturah’s face. “You mean you are one of that lot of bastards?” she demanded incredulously.

“Can’t be,” said Hester complacently. “Not bare naked with her cunt hanging out. You aren’t, are you?” she inquired with genuine concern.

“I’m afraid I am,” Miranda relished every word.

“Don’t you wear clothes?”

“No. Haven’t worn clothes for ages. I like being naked.”

“But look at all those whip marks!” Keturah exclaimed triumphantly. “If you are one of those friggin’ pricks how come you are all marked up like us?”

Miranda considered explanation impractical. It would give them something to wonder about: part of the fun. Ignoring the question she went to the rack and selected the wickedest cane she could find. Both girls wriggled themselves round to watch. “You’re not going to use that on us, are you?” she demanded in a tone that clearly indicated indignation at the lowly status of the girl who would inflict

the pain, rather than distaste for the pain Itself.

“Yes, I am going to use it on you, hard,” Miranda said pleasantly.

“I’ll suck you off,” Keturah bargained with brash assurance.

“Let us both down and we’ll give you a trip around the world,” Hester wheedled. “You can keep us tied if you’re scared. All we need is our mouth.”

If she had not known them for what they were Miranda might have been amused by their enterprise. There was about them a tremendous vitality. Every area of their slender youthfulness bore evidence of the whip or the cane. From her own experience she knew that hanging as they were was painful and wearying yet they were bright-eyed and eager. It would be well to remember their vigor as dangerous.

Miranda addressed her cane to Keturah’s well designed posterior, only to have the suspended girl writhe this way and that to evade the impending infliction. “I really don’t mind a bit,” she assured the struggling child equably, “I’m going to cane you, front or behind. It’s your choice.”

For answer Keturah lashed out savagely with an unbound foot that came within inches of Miranda’s face. Swiftly the cane rose and fell on the shinbone of the offending member. Keturah howled in anger, but ceased her contortions

except for a jerking of her hurt leg. “Alright, go ahead and beat my arse,” she conceded savagely. “I’ll just hang still if that’s what you want. Damn you…!” The expletive was vicious.

Had it not been for the viciousness Miranda could have admired the two girls’ fortitude under pain. She did not use all her strength on the strokes she gave them. But made them hard enough to hurt severely. Yet after each one Keturah reiterated her passionate “Damn you!” as she hung limp as promised. When it came Hester’s turn the nymphet unblushingly offered: “If you don’t cane me I’ll eat your pussy as long as you want. That’s better than caning me, isn’t it?”

“No,” said Miranda with conviction, and slashed as hard as she could. Like her sister, Hester spat out abuse after each stroke. Her choice of a word was somewhat less agreeable. As the strokes fell she writhed at the end of her rope like a child’s toy.

Miranda had no intention of taking revenge or any serious approach to dealing with the two girls over whom Pat had given her authority. Yet she welcomed an activity to occupy her mind. It was also impossible to be near Hester and Keturah without curiosity as to their background and the working of their mentalities. When she was done with the cane she pulled up a chair and sat eyeing her captives. They would provide her with a day’s entertainment.

“I wish I had you hanging like this,” Keturah said conversationally. “I’d bite your tits off.”

“And I’d shove a nice thorny rose stem up your cunt,” Hester contributed.

It has been said that words cannot hurt. But from those just uttered Miranda felt herself flinch. These youthful witches meant what they declared. Sickeningly she remembered them gleefully pushing the needles further and further up under her fingernails. Such creatures were capable of anything. They belonged in some chamber of horrors as an exhibit. Thoughtfully she went to the wall and allowed enough slack on the ropes that suspended them so they were now able to stand on their toes. Relieved of much of their pain they might indulge in even more colorful disclosures.

“I bet she thinks we’ll respond to kindness, Ket’. Silly bitch!” Hester vouchsafed by way of thanks.

“We had a cousin once,” Keturah said to Miranda, “bit older than us. Daddy sometimes got her to come and look after us when he was away. She was fun! Whenever she had help she gave us the whole punishment bit. But she couldn’t handle us alone, so when we got the chance we hung her up the way we are now. She howled and threatened. I thought she was going to raise the roof when we undressed her. Said no-one had ever seen her naked. We enjoyed that and told her she wasn’t really naked at all

with all that hair. She had the thickest bush you ever saw. It was really something to see her face when we struck the first match and stuck it under her cunt. She went wild, of course, and kicked it out of our hands. But we had lots of time and there wasn't anything else doing so we let her kick and swing and then tied her ankles up to her waist at the back so she couldn't do anything at all. Her slit with all that lovely hair stuck out beautifully. Gosh, you should have seen her face."

Keturah paused in her reminiscence and said in an exaggeratedly British accent: "I say, I do hope I'm not boring you?"

Miranda was more nauseated than bored. She realized that all these girls might say was not necessarily true. But she was fascinated by their utterly amoral zest and invention. "I'll whip you when I get bored," she assured them pleasantly.

"Her name was Zunie." Keturah continued unabashed. "I can tell you Zunie really came up with some zingers of arguments when she saw us pick up the matchbox again. She couldn't do anything this time except keep her eyes glued on it while she babbled about telling Daddy, or not telling Daddy if only we'd be good and stop right now. She told us how wicked we were, then switched to how much she loved us. It was really fun: I bet you'd act just the same way. She went on and on, so just to change the subject we struck another match." Keturah paused and eyed her

listener appraisingly. “Want to hear the rest of it?”

“You might as well,” Miranda acknowledged.

“Let our feet all the way down then.”

“No bargains,” Miranda stated flatly. “I’ll lift you all the way up again if you arn’t careful. Besides, I don’t believe a word of what you are telling me.”

“You are listening though!” Keturah observed slyly. “Have you ever smelt burning hair? While it’s still growing on a girl, I mean! It’s really something! When Zunie smelt it and felt the heat she made the most amazing racket. We did think of gagging her. But it seemed a shame not to hear all she had to say. She promised just about everything. We burned her muff off slowly a bit at a time. I wanted to give her cunny a bit of a roasting too, but Hester was scared Daddy might cut up rough, so we singed all we could and then did her armpits. Arn’t you going to do something like that to us?”

Miranda realized that it must seem normal to these girls to expect revenge. They were probably testing her. She refused to be drawn.

“If I ever get you fixed like this,” Hester mused thoughtfully, “I’ll get two of those lovely big cigars Daddy used to smoke, and I’ll stick one up you in front and one up you in back, and then I’ll light ’em. I bet you’d do some tall talking.”

“We shouldn’t forget her tits though,” Keturah added. “She’s got nice ones. Remember that girl Daddy had for a time who had rings through her tits? She said they burned the hole for them with a red hot needle. I think that would be fun! You’d like rings in your tits, wouldn’t you?” Her question to Miranda was pure provocation.

“That girl never gave us any trouble at all,” Hester joined in. “All you had to do was get hold of one of her rings and she’d do anything—anything at all. Or promise anything. Took a bit of the fun out though. This lot here that’s trying to train us haven’t got a clue. If the first thing they did with a girl was put rings through her nipples they’d save themselves a lot of bother.”

Miranda reserved this choice bit of insight. Perhaps Pat might make such an experiment with these two hoydens. Surely there had to be a chink somewhere in their armor of insolence.

“There’s several packets of needles in the house,” she suggested casually. “Wouldn’t they be more appropriate?”

She could tell she had scored. Their instinctive exchange of glances gave them away. She pressed the advantage: “There are quite a lot in a packet, and of course you each have ten toes, don’t you!”

“You don’t have the chair,” Keturah responded sullenly. “You can’t stick them into us properly unless you have that chair with the proper arms that we fastened you in.”

“I can easily get help. I’m sure we can think of something.”

“You’re too squeamish,” Hester affirmed uncertainly.

“Of course she is!” Keturah agreed. She glared at Miranda scornfully. “Go ahead! Stick all the damn needles in us you can find. You can’t scare us!”

“You are both scared to death right now.”

“Alright then! So we’re afraid! Weren’t you? Anyway, you won’t make us squeal.”

Miranda recognized courage: or some strange insensibility. Both girls were well striated with whip marks. “Haven’t you been punished enough here?” she inquired with genuine curiosity.

“Oh, they whip us a lot.” Hester conceded in about the same voice by which an employee might admit to receiving a shamefully low wage. “But Daddy used to whip us a lot.” She giggled, “’Specially that time over Zunie, so we are sort of used to it.”

“These girls they are training here haven’t any guts,” Keturah said. “A lot of ’fraidy cats. Whip ’em just a little and there’s tears all over the place; and you ought to hear ’em plead and beg, and scream! Silly bitches don’t know how lucky they are…”

“Lucky?” Miranda echoed, astounded.

The captives exchanged lewd grins. “Daddy never allowed us to get fucked,” Hester pointed out reasonably. “All we had was the good old sixty-nine. But here we get fucked several times a day. It’s gorgeous! They stick it in front and back and we have to suck ’em off too. We never had such fun! Everybody seems quite surprised that we like it.”

“They shove a plug up our arse, too. It’s super!” Keturah added. “We are getting so we can take the very biggest prick.” She looked at Miranda confidingly, “Have you tried out any of the pricks in this place? There’s a couple of ’em right out of this world! The fellows know how to use ’em, too. Gosh, we never knew what we’d been missing until they brought us here.”

“They can whip me all they like just so long as they let those fellows get at me every day,” Hester enthused.

“Haven’t they ever tossed you in the dungeon?” Miranda asked hopelessly.

“Oh that!” Hester was contemptuous. “Sure! We get in and out of there a lot. But there’s no rats in there: and who’s afraid of the dark! We just eat each other’s pussy all the time and wait for the boys to show up. We don’t mind being chained when we arn’t going anywhere.”

Miranda understood Patricia’s problem with these intractable vixens. Perhaps Pat had shrewdly placed her here with them in the belief that, not knowing her status, they might reveal the nature of their intransigence.

An amusing possibility occurred to her. It was easy to find what she wanted. The shackles she locked on Keturah's ankles were joined by only a single link. Loosed from the suspending rope the younger girl could only hop. Even with her hands free she could be easily controlled. Offering the cane, Miranda suggested pleasantly, "Give your sister ten good hard strokes."

"Drop dead!"

"Then I'll make it a hundred for you, if you prefer."

Keturah stood, testing her balance with her ankles so closely confined. "Go ahead and whip me all you want," she said defiantly. "I'm not going to do anything you tell me."

"Oh, it's not you I'm going to whip," Miranda explained. "It's poor Hester. I'll give her ten that you won't, then I'll keep right on until you decide to be sensible and give her ten yourself. She could get a couple of hundred if you want to be obstinate."

Once again Miranda sensed that she had scored. There was a tense silence. The sisters eyed each other awkwardly. It was Hester finally who said: "Don't do it, Ket. Tell her where she can put her rotten whip."

In rapid succession Miranda delivered ten of the cruelest strokes she could contrive. She could feel no sympathy for the merciless pair. In spite of her fortitude Hester evi-

denced signs of distress. Turning to Keturah Miranda asked: “You wish me to continue?”

“Damn you, you bloody bitch!” Keturah spat viciously. “Give me the blasted cane!”

Miranda concealed her inward amusement that Hester did not complain as the implement of her punishment changed hands. “You’ll have to repeat any stroke that I think isn’t hard as you can make it.” She blandly told the glowering sister who was testing her stance on her hobbled feet. “Take your time and make each one hurt.”

It was hard to believe that such insensitive creatures could have compunction about inflicting pain, even on each other.

But some innate loyalty or rebellion was obviously at work. Keturah found no joy in her task. It was easy to sense her gauging of the risk in attacking her captor and her rejection of the wish as impractical. Giving the tethered victim a grimace of frustration she hopped this way and that to find her place. Then, with suppressed fury evident in every move and expression, measured the cane across her sister’s striped buttocks.

Whatever else might be said of them it was certain that an active intelligence worked in their perverted minds. Each now assessed their situation and accepted its inevitability.

The first stroke of the cane made even Miranda wince.

True to her nature Hester, after her first gasp of agony, said innocently: “Better do better than that, Ket’. It only tickles.” But thereafter held her peace as blow after blow extracted from her only small animal sounds of pain. Watching, Miranda found it hard to be sure whether the girl with the cane was doing her best because she must or because she was finding an unexpected pleasure in whipping her sister.

When the ten strokes had left their imprint on the tawny skin Miranda handcuffed Keturah’s hands behind her back, loosed her ankles and, to the tune of a good deal of foul invective, fastened her astride the hated “Horse”. Next she lowered Hester and cuffed her hands similarly. Then, resuming her seat, smiled invitingly at the girl who was ineffectually striving to soothe her caned bottom with her chained hands, and told her firmly: “If you kneel before me, bow your head, call me Mistress and tell me in a proper tone of voice that you are my slave I will take Keturah down from where she is sitting. You can see she doesn’t like it there.”

Keturah looked at her sister. Perhaps some message passed between them. The girl on the horse was making no pretense of bravado. She sat motionless, eyes half closed. Her whole being absorbed with pain. For some moments the handcuffed sister stood silent twisting her prisoned arms, her eyes roving from the figure on the horse to Miranda and back. Then, decisively, she spat at Miranda’s face, turning she went to the structure on which her sister was suffering, kicked a stool in place, mounted it and, with

a look of bitter hatred at Miranda, threw her leg over the bar, kicked away the stool and embraced with a precarious balance the same agony her sister was enduring.

It was a magnificent gesture. Miranda knew that to counter it would require careful handling. Casually without a word and without expression she completed Keturah's impalement on the horse. She made very sure that each leg was stretched wide and cinched down tightly so as to render their owner's self immolation as distressing as possible. Impassively she wiped away whatever of Keturah's spittle found its mark as she completed the fastenings of the spitting and infuriated martyr.

No one spoke. Resuming her chair Miranda idly surveyed her work. She was careful to allow no hint of her admiration to be mirrored on her face. Wondering, she found herself unsure that she could have managed the same feat. The bar here was wicked. Far worse than that employed by Susan and her Master. It was the narrow edge of a plank whose sharp edges were in no way modified to ease their indentation of their victim's privacy. Having been fastened upon it herself often enough she was aware of its demoralizing power. Always, when bound upon it, she had pleaded and wept. But these girls did neither. Their faces were drawn with suffering. But they made no plea. The absence of vituperation was their only betrayal of weakness.

It took much time. The watcher was surprised how long it

was before Hester turned toward her the first imploring gaze. Casually, without speech, Miranda freed the straddling legs and helped their owner to the floor. She had to support the younger girl, remembering herself the agonies of those first steps after liberation. She held a glass of water to the pouting lips. Then once more hobbled the feet and loosed the hands. Leaving Hester teetering experimentally she sat down and explained: “You have a job to do. Take your sister down from her perch, stretch her back over that hurdle there, fasten her tight so she can’t move and then whip her breasts with the special whip hanging on the post until I tell you to stop. I know it’s difficult. But you can do it. She will help you or you both go back up where she is now.”

Once again it was possible to watch a girl’s mind at work. The computation of chances and possibilities. The result was surprising. Carefully Hester lowered herself to the floor, edged forward, then knelt submissively with bowed head and in a quietly modulated voice said: “Please forgive us, Mistress. I am your slave.”

The kneeling child made a lovely and appealing picture that touched Miranda’s heart. Her act was faultless. Yet it was an act. It had to be!

“That is not what I ordered you to do,” Miranda told her icily.

The young face looked up falteringly. “It was what you

wanted of Ket',” she said plaintively. “And she refused. There will be time enough for this later. For now you have work to do.”

Again the pause reflecting an inward turmoil. Then Hester wriggled her way to the horse and loosening her sister's feet helped her from the agonizing bar. Turning back to her Mistress she asked innocently, “Can I have the key to her handcuffs?”

“Oh, come now. I wasn't born yesterday!” Miranda laughed. “You can fasten her as she is. The handcuffs will help not hinder.”

“I won't help. I'll fight!” Keturah sounded both angry and afraid.

“I really don't mind if you do.” Miranda laughed. “It's your sister's problem, not mine. You can't fight effectively with your hands behind you. If you want to kick her go right ahead.”

The two girls communed silently with their eyes. Miranda watched, enjoying their dilemma. Their inborn cunning would weigh the odds and seek the best advantage. They were, without doubt, considering the chances of an attack upon her. But, she knew from being chained herself so often in the past that they were impotent.

“You absolute bitch!” Keturah bit off the words as though they were blows she was driving home. “If I ever get you

helpless again I'll make you howl." Then, turning to her sister, said angrily: "O.K. Hester. Do what she says and get it over with. When it's done I'll spit in her eye again." Fuming, she strode to the hurdle and placed the small of her back against its horizontal bar allowing her cuffed hands to fall behind it. "That what you want…?"

Miranda was gratified that her victims must be taking her very seriously indeed, probably motivated by knowledge of their own reactions in her place. They used obedience with the same viciousness they employed in most things. The kneeling Hester used the freedom of her hands to make a thorough job of tying her sister's ankles to the lower bar. Her competence indicated a probable prior experience. She separated them well apart and made the cords bite deep. Shuffling on her knees she went to the rear, attached a cord to the link between the tethered girl's handcuffs and cinched it back and down through the ring provided. Thus Keturah's nakedness was bent back in a taut bow.

It was obvious to the watcher that the kneeling girl was debating the degree in which she should pull the bound girl's arms back and back. How lenient could she be without provoking wrath. A considerable latitude was possible. Unhappily her eyes sought Miranda's. What she saw there caused her to determinedly give the cord another long hard pull before she knotted it.

Mechanically it was a simple punishment. Miranda had suffered it once and remembered it with horror. The naked

girl was bent back so that the bar above her loins was her only support. The distress was cumulative. It could be varied by the tension of the traction. It took only a few minutes to convince the victim that she was being broken in two.

Keturah's youth had made possible a quite remarkable effect. She was pulled well back over the punishing wood. Her nudity a perfect bow revealing the lips of her sex and thrusting her stretched and tautened breasts into an unobstructed prominence perfectly designed for what was about to be done to them. Save for the head, motion was impossible.

Hester pulled herself erect. Standing on her closely hobbled feet she looked beseechingly at the unrelenting Mistress, then at the helpless girl's nipples, then again back to Miranda as though striving to convey some message without words. "No one ever whipped our breasts," she complained with faint accusation.

"It's time someone did," Miranda assured her cheerfully.

"I'm scared to do it. That's an awful place to whip a girl."

"It's quite safe with that whip you have there. It was specially made."

Hester wriggled with indecision. "Couldn't you do something simply awful to me instead?" she conceded. "But, of course, I'd have to do it to Keturah too. You can see that,

can't you? After her breasts have been well whipped, that is."

"I hate you!" Hester tried ineffectually to stamp her foot. Then turned shamefacedly to her sister. "Sorry, Ket'. I'll have to do it." Once more she faced their captor and asked, almost pitifully so that Miranda's heart was almost touched by compassion: "Please do the first one so I'll know just how you want it…"

Miranda took the silky whip. "You whip one at a time," she explained. "You can't get at them properly if you try to stroke both at once. You stand on whatever side you are using. I suggest you give her five on one and then hop around and give her five on the other. The exercise will do you good." Tantalizingly she dangled the thongs so that their tips caressed the tight skin and pink nipples. Smiling engagingly at Keturah's baleful glare she said: "You can't move at all, can you! I'm sure this is going to be a really wonderful experience." With care and precision she flashed the whip through its wicked half circle so that the lashes neatly cut and clung upon the soft mound of the helpless girl's right breast and left thereon the red striations of its kiss.

Passing the whip across the bowed nakedness Miranda said: "There! Quite simple. Take time and be sure you are accurate. We won't count the first one."

It was evident that had Keturah been able to struggle she

would have done so. She did not scream or plead, but her head tossed from side to side and she breathed in uneven gasps. Miranda knew the condition well. A female could be under no greater subjection than this. The psychic shock was perhaps more insidious than the biting thongs. All her life a girl's breasts had been inviolate, then suddenly to have them whipped, to be bound immovably so that you must watch…

As Hester whipped her sister's breasts the gaze of she who held the whip and the girl who endured its lashes often locked in mute understanding. But no word passed between them. Hester spaced the strokes as slowly as she dared thus giving her sibling moments in which to gather her resources for the one that inevitably followed. Watching the erotic tableau Miranda wondered at the bond between them. Was it love! Or loyalty! Or a shared perversity. Might it be possible with the right approach to make them humane.

On the twenty-first stroke Keturah's fortitude wilted. "Alright!" she said in a choked voice. "I can't stand any more. I'll do anything you want me to."

"So will I," Hester affirmed in support, but without pause in the rhythm of her blows. "Please, Mistress, may I stop now?"

The plaintive word, Mistress, softened Miranda's resolve. "Very well," she conceded. "You may untie her. You both

know what to do."

They did it well. There was an active intelligence within these girls that made Miranda wonder if they might not be redeemed. Perhaps they would do only what they must. But they would do it totally so as to ensure whatever benefit they could glean. As the last cord fell away Hester aided the hurt girl to stand erect. Agonizing moments as Miranda remembered them! Again the exchange of knowledge in the eyes. Without hesitation Keturah advanced and fell to her knees before Miranda's chair. In a quiet unfaltering voice she said: "You are my Mistress. I am a slave. I will obey you." Raising her bowed head she stared Miranda directly in the eye. Her face inscrutable. Hester gave an equally subdued and equally perfect submission. They knelt there side by side, heads bowed.

Miranda realized that with these girls it would be hard ever to claim victory. She considered it likely they were employing their arts now simply to use her. They made an appealingly lovely picture kneeling in wait for her pleasure.

It was at that moment the door opened and Patricia entered.

Later, over the tea things, Miranda offered the only explanation she could think of. "It must be a psychological thing with them. Because they tortured me they were quite certain I would torture them. I expect they know more

about torture than you and I ever dreamed, so their own imaginations must have imposed quite a tax on them."

"But Ducky, to be kneeling before you like that…!"

Miranda laughed. "I'll admit it was a good feeling. When I started with them I never even dreamed…" She looked at Pat keenly, "Darling, did you put me in with them as an experiment or as a little gift of revenge?"

"Actually neither, Pet. I knew you were feeling down. I figured a few hours with those young monsters couldn't fail to be a tonic. You did pretty well y'know. Maybe you have a gift."

Miranda shook her head. "No. That's all it was. Maybe even a bit of a guilty conscience with them, though that's unlikely. What on Earth are you going to do with them?"

"First off I'm going to follow their own tip and put rings through their nipples. I can see that with them it might represent some sort of badge or caste emblem. I've often wondered if it might be a good idea with the girls in general. I'm sure it would have a subduing effect. But it's a sort of Eastern flavor that not all the customers might relish. With them though it's a natural."

"Can you ever find a buyer for them?"

"I think so. They are clever little monkeys so it's going to be hard to tell if they are ever truly trained and docile. They can act. But the right man, or woman, would enjoy them.

We'd be honest about them, of course, so they knew what they were getting. I should have separated them long ago. I will now. There's no doubt that, like you and Persis, two girls bolster up each other's devilment." Pat laughed delightedly. "That's really something about the sex bit! I should have guessed. We will make them wear the harness for a week and cut off the attention in the front. That should sober them."

Suddenly, in a meeting of the eyes, the talk dried up. The incorrigible sisters ceased to matter. Pat glimpsed the bleakness beneath her companion's sparkle. Since the first cut and dried statement of fact neither girl had spoken Wilbur Herman's name, or Susan's, or Sarah's. It was best to let the past swallow them. The bereft girl did not break the taboo now. But irrelevantly and almost without volition she asked miserably.

"Pat, oh darling, what's going to become of me?"

"Y'know Ducky, whilst you are something special, and admitting that what has happened to you never happened to any other girl we ever had, you'll have to understand that the spot you are in this moment is pretty much the situation of any of our girls who have, so to speak, graduated. If it wasn't for the emotional tangle behind you there'd be a sort of pleasurable excitement right now." Pat's voice was concerned.

"You mean I might be purchased by Mr. Right?" Miranda's

voice lacked enthusiasm even though she remembered her own determination to reach marketability. It seemed so long ago. “Don’t you have a buyer for me?”

“Not just at the moment.” It seemed a topic Pat was reluctant to discuss.

“How much are you asking for me?”

“Sounds awful the way you put it, Ducky. You should be flattered though. Top price one hundred thousand pounds with a minimum of fifty. We have to consider a good deal of latitude according to the circumstances of the customer. You know: the back scratching bit.”

“So one of these weird rich creatures buys me and whips me every night and twice on Sundays?”

Pat leaned forward, eyes troubled. “Darling, forget that! We could have sold you twice yesterday and twice today if that’s what we wanted for you. Mr. Benson is adamant about it, and of course there’s a strong influence that is making quite sure you are well looked after. You can believe that, can’t you?”

Miranda felt the tears start. “Wilbur?” She did not need to ask.

“Here’s a hankie, Darling. That’s one of the things I remember about always being naked, you never had one when you needed it. Go ahead and cry.”

Patricia allowed the storm to exhaust itself. She was disturbed by her slave girl's desolation. Yet it was understandable. She herself would have been desolate… Driven by an impulse of sympathy she might regret she dropped another small bomb into Miranda's world.

"What would you do, Sweetheart, if they set you free?"

The silence was peopled by a chaos of visions. Miranda sat stricken, handkerchief half way to her cheek. "That's just hypothetical, I suppose?" Her voice was tired.

"Best call it that. But just the same, Ducky, tell me."

It was incredible. Miranda found herself with nothing to tell. What would she do! Indeed what could she do! Never in her life had her emotions been so jumbled.

"Try and face it, Ducky. Suppose we go up to my room. I unlock the chains on your ankles, they are all you are wearing right now. I dress you in my very best. I give you a purse full of money and the things girls need. I send for the car and kiss you good-bye. The car drops you off at Trafalgar Square. Now you carry on from there…"

"You'd do this for me! Oh Pat…!" Miranda was aghast.

"Don't be silly, Pet I'm not that much of a little heroine. No, it wouldn't be me that would do it for you. In fact I don't suppose it will be done. I ought to keep my mouth shut. I don't know everything. But I can tell there's something in the wind. It will probably take long enough to surface. In

the meantime I don't see why I should keep mum and watch you worry yourself to a frazzle. Now! Pull yourself together and answer my question."

Miranda decided to treat the question as a game. No doubt Patricia had something up her sleeve. But of what consequence was that to a girl in chains?

"I've thought about it," she admitted. Then laughed, "'Specially about the time I know I'm going to be whipped. First off I ought to go to the police. But I wouldn't! I know that would be wrong—not to go, I mean. But I couldn't possibly…"

"Why?"

"Because, oh because there's too many of you I'm fond of. You know that. So then I have to consider going back to my parents and my home. That ought to be an easy decision. But it isn't! I'm dead! How can I just walk in on them, and if I did what would I tell them? I'd have to tell them something. It might be kinder to them not to go. So what's next! I rent a room and get a job. But who am I? I'd be tripped up in a dozen different ways. Oh, I've gone over and over it in a hundred different ways." She grinned wryly, "You know what I'd do, don't you…?"

"What?"

"Come back here, of course. I don't belong anywhere else."

"Because you are a slave?"

“No! Not really. I suppose I am a slave. Perhaps far more than I have realized. But I’ve lived so vividly since you… took me. I suppose someone else might say I was odd or perverted to say this, but I have lived more, known deeper sensations, savored emotions more here than I probably would have done in my whole life as a suburban housewife. I don’t believe I could go back.”

Patricia kissed her charge’s damp cheek. “You are a quite remarkable girl,” she said soberly. “It’s sane reasoning and it’s answered my question. But it leaves you high and dry, doesn’t it! You willing to trust me, Sweetheart?”

Miranda nodded and managed a smile.

“Good! We were talking about Graduates, weren’t we? You find yourself in a sort of hiatus: we have always overcome this period for them by simply keeping them in training, a modified daily routine. I always considered it unwise to simply lock them in a cell to await a purchaser. I know that would drive me up the wall. So we never tell them anything about graduation at all. They just carry on until the day someone comes and takes a fancy to them.”

“But the customer must see them?”

“Well, yes. But we usually do that by having them entertain them as a guest without knowing who they really are.”

Miranda was startled. “Have I…?”

“No Ducky. Not to worry. Anyone who ever had anything to

do with you would have bought you like a shot. You were never for sale."

"So what are you going to do with me?"

"I've been considering." Pat said seriously. "I think we can only go from day to day. We managed today entertainingly enough, and the two of us have another lovely night ahead. Tomorrow I'm going to do something to you that you may hate me for." She smiled at some hidden knowledge. "I'm going to call it an act of charity. Just to keep you guessing. So tomorrow after breakfast Rhoda will introduce you to it."

"Chains and slavery I suppose!" Miranda laughed.

"Darling, I love you."

It was never possible to deduce much from Rhoda's Mona Lisa smiles, neither would she vouchsafe information verbally. It was usually possible to draw either the most optimistic or the most horrendous conclusions according to one's hopes or fears. Being led through the familiar corridors and stairways, a firm hand gripping her arm, her wrists once more handcuffed together, Miranda's optimism wilted. When they reached a doorway through which she had only frightening memories it vanished altogether. But when she was thrust into the dungeon and stood with the thud of bolts at her back she perceived that in whatever trial awaited her she would not be alone.

Miranda had almost forgotten Julia through the welter of events since the day she had last glimpsed her naked and shorn and heavily chained in this same dreary place. When she had remembered it had been with a great compassion coupled with a cold fear in the knowledge of how easily it could have been herself whose rebellion earned so awful a retribution.

Their embrace was warm but difficult. Julia dragged the great weight of the irons by which she was secured and stood with hands held out as best she could in greeting. Her first words sent a chill through her visitor's consciousness: "You poor Darling! What have you done? Rhoda said that when they cut these chains off me they would have another girl to rivet them on… "

Miranda's laugh was not as spontaneous as she would have wished. "Nothing like that," she said as cheerfully as she could. "I think actually I'm a sort of a visitor."

The prisoner's expression was cynical. "Don't kid yourself. The only visitors I get are the men, though them coming every day is about the only thing that's stopped me going bonkers."

"They are going to let you out of here?"

"Yes. One of the boys told me. Soon! But he said they had someone else to wear these chains. You poor kid! I wouldn't wish this on anyone."

Despite such knowledge as she possessed of her situation, and despite Patricia's assurances, Miranda could not throw off apprehension. The dungeon gloom did not help. The sight of the ugly metal riveted on the slender girl was frightening. It made the chains she herself bore seem nothing but trinkets. Was it possible that Rhoda…? Determinedly she fought off such thoughts. "But your hair," she exclaimed. "It's grown. Let me see."

"Not all that much," Julia admitted. "But there is a bit in all the spots where it ought to be. I'm feeling myself all the time. It's my main occupation. They untied my hands after the first month. I don't think it's so much the length of my hair that's getting me out of here. It's simply that I think I have managed to make them understand I'll be a good girl… or a bad one. Whichever they want. A girl's a fool to fight them. The day after they put me in here I'd have done anything at all to get out. All this time the only thing I've wanted is to be whatever they want me to be. From their point of view I have been cured. I really have."

Miranda was at a loss. She had nothing to say to this girl who had remained chained in the dismal atmosphere of a dungeon throughout the weeks and weeks that had opened up, for herself, a new life. How could she tell of her adventures to this prisoned girl she scarcely knew. It was too evident that Julia saw her as the new captive within these walls. Whatever the girl had heard or been told seemed to have convinced her that the heavy fetters she bore would soon weigh down the hands and feet of her

visitor. Miranda shuddered. She did not really believe this was so. But in this place…

Throughout the day she talked. Nothing she could say changed Julia's belief. But it did not matter. Miranda made light of it. But when night came without release she could not keep fear entirely at bay. Huddled together the chained girls slept as best they could. Julia deeply. Miranda plagued by nightmares. Resentful, for the first time, of the handcuffs which prevented her arms finding comfort around her companion. Morning, when it came, was not reassuring.

A beaming Rhoda was accompanied by two cheerful men bearing anvil and tools. Competently they went about the task of cutting through the rivets that had held Julia a hopeless prisoner for so long. Watching their skilled work Miranda knew a thrill of fear that any girl could be secured so harshly as to require such drastic labor to free her. But as the shackles fell away from the slender limbs they had so long clasped it was easy to share the joy of the freed prisoner who did a small caper of abandoned ecstasy, arms stretched wide, face glowing. At the end of it she knelt before Rhoda and bowed her head.

"Well, that's a lot better, I must say," Rhoda acknowledged. "Here, I can give you something more comfortable now."

Kneeling she unlocked Miranda's leg irons and transferred them to the ankles of the submissive Julia. "Run around,

love. Notice any difference?"

Julia could no longer do her little dance. But she happily circled the shadowed room. "They are like feathers. I could float," she declaimed rapturously. "Oh thank you, thank you, thank you!"

Rhoda turned casually to the watching girl. "Your turn now." Her voice had been scrubbed of feeling.

It had come! Julia had been right after all. The heavy metal, still warm from its previous captive, would now be welded on her own flesh. But why! Even some grim joke of Rhoda's could not be without Patricia's consent. Why would Patricia who loved her load her with chains in this frightening place! It made no sense. Tentatively she took a dragging step toward the anvil and the waiting men, then held out her hands to Rhoda. "Do you want me to wear these too, or should you take them off?" Even in that dark place her handcuffs gleamed.

Rhoda chuckled. "Think of everything, don't you love. Come here, I'll take 'em off. Be a bit surplus to the occasion I'd say."

Totally, if only momentarily, free of all constraint Miranda was human enough to consider flight or a struggle. It felt good to be without irons. With luck she might reach Patricia before someone grabbed her. Perhaps then she would know the why of this horror with which she was confronted. But before she could convert thought into action

her attention was diverted by sounds in the corridor. The scuffling of heavy feet and a tirade of feminine indignation. A moment later Fred Bates deposited a writhing burden beside the anvil.

It was Keturah.

The newcomer's hands and feet were bound. But in spite of this she contrived a surprising amount of motion. "You aren't going to bury me in this stinking hole," she asserted by way of greeting.

No time was lost. Miranda and Julia watched fascinated as a jumble of arms and legs finally placed a slim ankle on the anvil and held it firm as the shackle was placed and the hammer did its work. Keturah maintained a constant stream of abuse. But the struggle was repeated again and again, the hammer rose and fell smashing flat the soft metal that no key could touch, until finally the melee ended, the workers withdrew, and the slight figure of the naked girl who was little more than a child stood, pathetic but defiant, tensely bearing up against the great weight of the chains in which she was now closely confined.

"I'd like to shove these damn things up your arse!" Her statement and the glare that accompanied it included all present.

"Go ahead, Ducky," Rhoda encouraged.

"You bastards! You rotten bastards!" An effort to stamp one

small foot failed dismally. Turning her full fury on the delighted men she demanded: “Why don’t you take that idiot grin off your silly faces and fuck me while you’re at it. Save you coming back later.”

“We thought of that one too, love. Or hadn’t you noticed?” Rhoda sounded amused.

In the tussle it had been easy to overlook. Even the wearer had failed initially to grasp its significance. But Miranda now saw that Keturah’s knees were closely joined by a chain that had not been a part of Julia’s burden. Its few links allowed no latitude for the function its wearer invited. Looking down at herself the youthful prisoner irately insisted: “Alright! So you can’t do it in front! So do it up the back then.” She glared at all three men furiously, “It’s big enough, and you’ve all been up there.”

“Something else we thought of too, Ducks. ’Specially for you. The large size.” Rhoda produced the harness Miranda had learned to hate. Surprisingly Keturah did not fight. She was still panting from the previous battle. But stood glowering as the straps and buckles were fitted and tightened upon her loins. “I still have a mouth,” she taunted.

“And if you keep using it you’ll have a gag,” Rhoda warned.

“What have you done with Hester?”

“You won’t be seeing Hester anymore,” Rhoda assured her. “We have another nice dark stone room and another set of

ornaments for her. It's going to be a nice quiet time for you both: No men, no plotting against the whites, and no sex with each other. A real holiday…"

The slight figure visibly sagged in its chains. "Oh, Rhoda! Oh no! Please…"

Rhoda kept silent.

Keturah looked from one face to the other as though seeking help. But once more it was to Rhoda that she pleaded: "Alright! I know I'm a little bitch and you hate me. But don't separate us, please! Let us be together and I'll do anything you want… I'll behave." She made the offer as though promising the earth.

"We'll let you settle down now." Rhoda ignored the plea. "Take the gear to the next room, boys. We can deal with Hester next."

The men departed. Rhoda transferred her attention to the neglected Miranda who had quite forgotten her intention to flee the scene. "I'm going to be busy, love. Julia will stay with me. But I want you to run up to Miss Patricia's study. You'll find her there. She wants to see you."

Miranda had a feeling of something not quite in order. "I'm not chained," she pointed out. Then felt foolish for having done so.

"No you aren't, are you!" Rhoda grinned. "Here, you can take these. If you feel naked you can put 'em on yourself."

Amusedly she handed over the handcuffs and their key. “Or maybe Miss Pat ’ud like to wear ’em awhile.” She chuckled as at some private joke. Then, taking Julia by the arm, said: “Come along m’girl, there’s work to do.”

Looking back at the chained girl in the dungeon Miranda incredulously saw her cheeks wet with tears.

Feeling as though her feet had wings she sped upstairs.

* * *

When the girl with whom you share love is also your jailer, your Mistress and a friend the relationship can at times be difficult. Miranda always tried to match her own attitude to whatever role the situation demanded of Pat. She sat respectful and attentive.

“Sorry about the dungeon bit. Not sure it was a good idea.”

“I didn’t mind, darling,” Miranda said happily and untruthfully.

Patricia surveyed her slave girl speculatively. “You are quite a girl. You come through the damndest situations. It’s nice to tease you. But I shouldn’t. You’ve been kicked around more than you deserve.”

“Thank you dear Mistress.” Miranda’s humility was almost

mocking. She sensed a holiday atmosphere. She was unchained and the miasma of the dungeon was gone.

“Five strokes for impertinence,” Patricia declared equably. “Will you have them now or later?”

“Perhaps after lunch,” Miranda suggested, falling in with the spirit of the morning. “I’m sure I will collect a few more the way I feel.”

“How do you feel?” Pat was suddenly serious.

“Well, I’ve just been let out of jail. That’s how I feel. I could fly.”

“How far did Rhoda pull your leg?”

“I think if Fred Bates hadn’t shown up with that awful girl they would have hammered about twenty pounds of metal on my left ankle.”

Patricia laughed. “Sorry about that. But I wanted to create a contrast for you.”

“Why?”

“How’d you like to be a bridesmaid?”

Miranda blinked. She knew she had heard aright. But it didn’t make much sense. “Rhoda getting married?” she essayed brightly. It seemed as likely a possibility as any.

“No, Sweetheart. I am.”

The silence was long. Each girl assessing the other.

“What will Mr. Benson say?” Miranda felt her question absurd. But it was all she could think of.

“It’s Mr. Benson I’m getting married to.”

This time the silence was longer. Miranda considered and rejected a number of trite remarks. “Should I hug and kiss you?” she asked uncertainly.

Patricia laughed delightedly. “Mr. Benson has you floored, doesn’t he! If I’d said Tom or Dick somebody or other you’d have known what to do.”

“But why would he want to get married?” Miranda asked without tact. “I mean, he’s got you, and if he’s got a taste for girls I suppose he could use any one of us.”

Pat refused offense. “He and I have had a thing going for a long time. I told you this. I’ve always admired him. I don’t know where love started. But it got in there somehow.”

“I’m sorry,” Miranda colored. “I’ve got so used to the whip and that… that other, that I forget about the real thing.”

“Forgotten Wilbur, Sweetheart?”

Miranda squirmed. “You know I haven’t.”

“Sorry love. Shouldn’t have brought that up. But to return to the main topic the fact is Mr. Benson, his name is Cedric, by the way… Suppose that’s the reason I always call him

Mr. Benson, isn't getting any younger. He wants a home and a wife and a place in society. It's funny. Men want these things more than we think they do."

"You'll be rich."

"I've been pretty well off for a long time. This place does fairly well."

"Of course!" Miranda laughed happily. "I suppose you own a sort of half share in me?"

There can be a communion between women in which self-interest has no part, a sharing of a mutual happiness. Miranda and her Mistress found it now. Without a single chain to inhibit spontaneity the slave girl embraced and mingled tears with she who was, in part, her owner. Inevitably they drifted upstairs and discovered each other again as though the one night in the dungeon had been the sundering of years. It was quite a long time before they returned to the study and Miranda's question.

"But, Darling, who will take your place here?"

"You will."

This time truly Miranda did not believe her ears. She sat tense, silent, looking expectantly at the girl across the desk, waiting for the joke to manifest itself.

"Don't look so shocked, Ducky." Pat laughed with pure enjoyment. "You are the new Directress."

“But, but… How?”

“Mr. Benson has appointed you.”

“But Mr. Benson and I have never seen each other.”

“Oh yes you have, Ducky! Remember a gentleman guest named Smith?” Pat could not contain her amusement.

“You mean that was…?”

“That’s right. He thought you were wonderful. I thought so too.”

Miranda mulled it over. “It was a sort of a test?”

“Yes.”

“But, Darling, a Directress doesn’t get whipped!” The with a sudden arch look, “or does she?”

“It has been known to happen,” Pat admitted with embarrassment. “But that was always part of our ‘thing’. I expect it always will be. I can’t see how it would happen you in this position: unless you wanted it to. You might y’know…”

Miranda tossed her head as though sorting into place fragments of this new miracle. Slowly she asked: “I’d where you sit. Make the decisions you make. Manage punish the girls. Manage and direct Rhoda and the rest of staff?”

“Of course! That’s what a Directress does. It’s a real position.” Pat looked at the puzzled girl intently. “It will also

make you a quite wealthy woman."

Miranda did not pause to analyze her decision. It came instinctively, leaving no room for dubiety. "I can't take it, Pat."

"Why?"

Miranda made a gesture of frustration. "I just can't! It isn't me. I wouldn't be good at it."

"Scared?"

"Of course I am! One minute I'm a slave. I spent last night chained in a dungeon. Now I'm in charge of the whole place. Oh, Darling, can't you understand!"

"I agree, Ducky. It's been a bit much. You need time."

"No I don't!" Miranda felt quite certain of what she was saying. "It's Rhoda you should give the job to, not me."

"Rhoda is just Rhoda. She is not managerial stuff. If she was in charge the girls would never have a bit of skin on the bottoms."

"I'd be the other extreme," Miranda confessed uncomfortably. "I don't mean that you're cruel, you are not really. But I'd never feel your authority in that. The girls would twist me. They wouldn't get whipped much at all, and the training would go to pot."

A silence lengthened. Patricia eyed a disturbed Miranda

with wry amusement tempered by an obvious disappointment. “I really thought you’d be overjoyed.” Her voice betrayed a troubled regret. “It’s one of those chance of a lifetime things, you have the intelligence. What you are really trying to say is that you’re a softie. That right?”

“Yes, I suppose that’s it. I don’t see myself as a softie, I’m not sure I am.” Miranda grimaced appealingly. “But look at me since I first came here. You changed me. But it’s more than that. I changed myself. Somewhere along the line I wanted to change and be a good slave just so I wouldn’t get whipped and punished. Then all those things happened. When they were over I had become a slave, a real one. That’s all I can be now.”

“You mean there was some element of the slave in you always. What happened here enabled it to take over?”

“I suppose that might be it. I think it’s probably true of a lot of girls. Isn’t it sort of implicit in Mr. Benson’s theory?”

“Bend over and touch your toes.”

Without surprise, Miranda obeyed. She had been impertinent. These would be the five strokes. She bore them with no more than small gasps of shock. They were five of the hardest cuts she had ever received.

“Unhappy, Pet?”

A look passed between them. Each knew. Miranda rubbed her scored bottom. “No I’m not. I’m happy.”

“Why?”

“You know why. Because I love you. If it had been ten or twenty or a hundred it would be the same. I can’t understand it. But it’s a sharing. I became a part of you. If you whipped me enough I expect I’d break down, but that wouldn’t make it any different…”

“How about you giving me ten real hard ones?”

Miranda winced. “I’d rather not.”

“But if I ordered you?”

“Then I’d do it.” Miranda conceded. “But I wouldn’t want to.”

“I love whipping you.” Pat said unashamedly. “Doesn’t that bother you?”

“I want you to love whipping me. I’ll bend over again now, if you want.”

Pat sighed. “Stick your hands out, Pet.”

Miranda was almost annoyed with herself by the glow of wellbeing as the handcuffs locked snug around her wrists.

“Takes us back to square one, Ducky.”

“I guess it’s my cue to say again: What’s to become of me!” Miranda said doubtfully. “Oh, Darling! I feel so guilty. I’ve let you down.”

“Yes you have.” Patricia agreed. “But don’t let’s get tragic about it. You are probably right, and I should have known better than to shove this at you. If there is any tragedy it’s about you. I have wanted so much for you.”

“Will Mr. Benson be angry?”

“If you are thinking of whips and dungeons, no. He’ll just be disappointed as I am.” Patricia paused, then continued soberly. “I don’t think we have indefinite time in which to make up our minds. But I can’t help thinking, maybe hoping, that time might cause you to see it differently. I don’t think I can do it by talking: the things we have just said and done are pretty conclusive. You have become a slave. If you belonged to me or to Wilbur you’d be a happy slave. But the way things are…” Pat leaned forward earnestly. “Sweetheart, suppose I have you chained back in the dungeon, not as coercion, but as time to think and feel. Would it help?”

“The dungeon just makes me afraid. I don’t reason in there. I panic. So I don’t suppose it would help. I do see your point though, Darling. I know now why you left me down there last night.”

“Alright. Maybe that wasn’t such a good idea. How about putting you back in training and telling Rhoda to give you a real bad time. I’m sure Rhoda could make being a Directress seem most attractive.”

“Do I have any choice?” Miranda’s voice was as pale as

Winter sunlight.

“Of course you do, Sweetheart! I expect I sound terrible. But it seems to me you need some sort of prodding.”

Miranda shrugged in bafflement. “I’m willing to try. I know your thought is not the way it sounds. I deserve something for being so damn foolish. But if Rhoda really goes to town on me I might agree to anything.”

“No. That’s no good either. Look, Darling, you have time on your hands while I find the right sort of buyer for you. How would you like to just roam around the house and amuse yourself? I’ll be busy on and off. But we’ll spend what time we can together.”

“You mean just be free. The way you are?”

“Why not?”

“But won’t it seem strange to the staff? Will Rhoda approve? And wouldn’t Mr. Benson think you were being too kind…?”

“Damn the staff! Cedric’s told me to do anything I like with you. You are mine. If I wasn’t getting married I’d keep you always. Or I’d set you free. I still will. Do you want me to?”

“We went over that before,” Miranda said decisively. “Nothing’s changed.”

“Alright then. You have the run of the house. Do you want

to wear clothes?"

"No. I'd feel awkward."

"Probably you are right in that too. But here, let me take those handcuffs off. It was just a quaint notion that made me put them on you."

Miranda's instinctive reaction was so delightfully defensive that they both laughed. "No," she said with a little moue of disparagement. "Please leave them on. I want to wear them. I don't know why, and I don't care. They're sort of a part of me now."

In spite of the cloud of uncertainty and change that hung above her head Miranda was happy. She found much to do. The days passed rapidly. That part of each which she spent with Pat was filled by the delights of wedding plans or the physical raptures of their love. She had almost fallen into a comfortable routine when the summons came.

"Tonight is the night." Pat told her without preamble. "You entertain a guest. Except he isn't a guest. He's a prospective purchaser. Don't ask me any questions, because I don't know. Mr. Benson arranged it. He told me over the phone. He seemed to think the guy is made to order for you. We must call him Mr. Hansard. It could even be his name."

Miranda felt hollow with apprehension. Here was the moment she had once longed for. Now she did not want it. Once it had meant escape. Now it meant nothing meaning-

ful to her at all. Yet, of her own choice, she was pledged. If this man did not buy her another would.

The two girls clung together. Patricia sensing in full her charge's fear.

"How should I prepare?" Miranda asked.

"Naked, of course!" Pat laughed. "He wants to see what he's getting. But get Rhoda to help with the rest. The whole bit. Get your hair perfect. Your nails, feet and hands. Make your tits any vivid color you like. But don't forget them. You'll wait for him in the usual room. But I'll make sure nobody, even me, is watching. It's all yours. I suggest you have a good long drink while you wait. No one will mind. I know I'd want one in your place."

Miranda obeyed to the full, including the drink. In fact two drinks. She was still handcuffed. It was by her own wish that her hands were so locked. She had long since ceased to find it a handicap. She could do easily and gracefully whatever she must. Pat had laughingly promised to send the key in with the visitor to use as he might wish. It would give him a nice sense of power. In the meantime the shining metal was, for the girl whose wrists it held, a symbol of a condition and a memory she wished to cherish.

The waiting girl had but one wish of the moment: not to think. To keep her mind blank. Responsive but without conscious thought. To look ahead was to get butterflies in her tummy. To look back meant tears. She was tempted to

get tipsy. But even there she must exercise control. She had little stomach for that which lay ahead. She must fight a wholly negative approach. She hoped her prospective owner would be as nervous as herself. What would he be! Oh, make him kind! She prayed…

When the door opened she was in the act of pouring a drink. Purely by the instincts of her training she left the bar and with all her grace and poise moved toward him to sink submissively to her knees. She knew she had done it well. She felt pleased.

She had seen him, of course, for brief moments before her head was bowed in submission. Recognition was instant.

She knew him not as a person. But she had seen him everywhere. London was full of him. That would be his City. He filled the busses and the trains. Often he owned a small old car and called it a crumpet catcher. He worked in a Bank or for one of the Departments of the Corporation. Definitely clerical. His name was Legion.

The silence was alive, electric. Miranda did not stir. She could see only his highly polished shoes. They were expensive. Finally one of them stirred and a London voice exclaimed: “I say y’know. You do that damn well.”

“Thank you, Master.” She gazed up at him adoringly.

He was a good specimen of his kind. She had assessed him correctly. How on Earth could he afford her!

“Do stand up please.” She was glad he was embarrassed.

Miranda rose with all the fluid grace at her command. “Yes Master.” She gave the correct smile into his eyes. “May I get you something?”

“Would you mind. I could use a gin & tonic.”

On bent knee she proffered the small tray with its single glass. Mr. Hansard looked grateful. He also looked warm. “Thanks. I say, aren’t you having one?”

“If my Master wishes.”

“Oh, I do indeed! And… that Master business: don’t bother.”

“I must, Master. I am a slave.”

“Oh! Very well then… Mustn’t break the rules, eh.” He was far at Sea. Miranda’s curiosity was piqued.

“Please sit down, Master.”

Folded into a deep arm chair, Mr. Hansard seemed more assured. Miranda knelt before him and sipped daintily. For the first time he seriously gazed at her. He instantly blushed.

“I will fill any wish you have, Master.”

He was not entirely ineffectual. Out of his depth, but trying hard. “Not sure I’m not dreaming,” he said slowy. “Whole thing’s damn hard to believe. Didn’t believe it, s’matter of

fact. Are you real? I mean, you're not just putting this on?"

"I am very real, Master. That is why I wear no clothes: that you may see how real I am." She rose and fetched the cruelest of the slender riding crops. A wicked beautiful creation. Laying it on the carpet with its handle towards the guest, she once more knelt and said demurely: "Should I not please you, Master, please whip me."

Miranda could sense his response. She sipped gently while he got his second wind.

"Have you any idea what that does to a man?" He demanded.

"Yes, Master. I have been trained to know."

"You mean they actually have whipped you?"

"Many times, Master. I do not think a girl could become a slave without the whip."

He digested the theory. "Suppose you wonder what a chap like me 's doing here?"

Miranda allowed herself a small twinkle in his direction. "I am female, Master. I am curious."

"Damn rummy go," Mr. Hansard admitted sheepishly. "It was that absurd Sweepstake. Suppose you read…?"

"Slave girls do not read newspapers, Master."

“I got the Jackpot prize. About a ten million to one chance. Came to four hundred and seven thousand pounds, four shillings and tuppence. Only happened a week last Tuesday. Still a bit groggy…”

He was very human. Miranda began to glow. “And you’ve always wanted your own private slave girl, Master?”

“About the size of it. Most chaps do, y’know. Bit of a bastard, I suppose.”

“Many females wish to be slave girls, Master.”

“Find that hard to believe. You’re hard to believe! You’re just too damn beautiful!” He held up a hand in warning. “And don’t say yes Master, or I’ll use that thing on you.”

Miranda smiled into his eyes. “Tell me the ways by which I can make this easy for you, Mr. Hansard,” she said simply. “But I am a slave. I am truly…”

“Let’s talk a bit then. I suppose you know why I’m here?”

“You are considering purchasing me?”

He nodded. “Sounds nuts. But, tell me, why are you handcuffed?”

She held up her hands and admired her own shackles. “Because I am a slave. I’ve come to like them. The chains on my ankles keep me from running away. I don’t want to run away. But it’s best I not be tempted.”

“You mean, if I bought you, you’d actually want to be chained, maybe the way you are now?” He asked incredulously.

“Of course, Master. Please consider. It would be mentally agonizing otherwise.”

“Suppose I don’t want to?”

Miranda gave him another level glance. “Mr. Hansard, if you did not want a chained girl, you would not be here.”

“True enough,” he acknowledged. “But supposing one day I forgot to chain you. Would you run?”

“I don’t know, Master.” Miranda admitted honestly. She looked up at him in appeal and gave a wry grin. “I suppose it might depend on how cruel or how kind you treated your slave. It’s the not knowing that makes the chains essential.”

“O.K. So you have to be chained. When do you get whipped?”

“When I am disobedient. When I am impudent. Or for the pleasure of my Master.”

“I would enjoy your impudence.”

“Then you would not need to whip me for it, Master.” She twinkled at him. “But slave girls easily take liberties.”

“And the pleasure thing. I know about it. I take it you do?”

“I have often been whipped for the pleasure of a man, Mr. Hansard. It hurts perhaps more, but at least I understand why it is being done.”

“My sister lives with me. We are twins. We are close. She shares my interest in you. She would probably use you shamefully. She’s fun.”

“I have been slave to girls, Master.”

“You don’t want to drop that Master bit, do you?”

“Believe me, Mr. Hansard, it is best that I do not. I am a slave. It is no kindness to allow me to think otherwise.”

“Is a title that important?” He was genuinely interested.

Miranda made a small moue of bafflement with her hands. “You could remove these handcuffs, Mr. Hansard. But I would then be less a slave. I might conspire to get you to remove my ankle chains. I would then scarcely be a slave at all. I would get ideas.”

“Ideas above your station, you mean?” He laughed at the cliche.

“Exactly, Master. Then there’s the relationship between the slave and her owner. It’s weakened by laxity.

“Suppose I buy you and set you free. You know, the Grand Gesture?”

“I would immediately return to Mr. Benson.”

He shook his head in doubt, then handed her his glass. “Could we? You have one too.”

“Thank you, Master.”

He sighed. “I said I’d whip you for that. But I’m not going to. Not that I wouldn’t enjoy it. I would! Too bloody lower middle class, I suppose.” He made a disparaging gesture. “That’s what I am, y’know.”

“That’s what I once was, Master.”

“Got to admit,” he said slowly. “Benson, this place here. Sort of throws me. Makes my little Sweepstake look silly. What I mean is: you’d be losing face. Going down in the world.”

Miranda felt sorry for him. He was lost. A captive of his money and his dream. They were his chains. She also felt impatience.

“Mr. Hansard,” she asked bitterly. “Are you trying to sell me on your social status, or lack of it? You forget mine.”

“Bloody silly, isn’t it!” He grinned deprecatingly. “Fact is you’re a bit of a shock. You’re beautiful beyond anything I dreamed. I ’spose I was expecting some little cockney trick who’d wiggle her bottom at me and be scared to death.”

“Is that what you want?”

“No.” He shifted uneasily.

“Mr. Hansard, I am a creation. I have been taken from the

world. I have been broken, changed, groomed, trained, taught. I am designed for a Prince, an Oil Sheik, a millionaire financier: something like that. I believe my price is very high."

"Telling me you're out of my class?" He asked resentfully. "Not that you have to tell me. I know."

"Are you sure, Master, that it is a slave girl you seek? Are you sure it is not simply a wife?"

"Applying for the job?" His voice was uncertain.

"I would take it if it was offered," Miranda said quietly. "It would solve a lot of problems for me."

He examined her with fresh shock. "You! Marry the likes of me!"

"Yet you are considering buying me." She grinned him companionably. "All you have told me of yourself has sounded more like the preliminary to an offer of marriage."

He nodded, understanding. "It's what I told you. Good old British middle class morality. It's incurable. I'm in the spot of one of these Socialist Johnnies, out of a coal mine who runs for Parliament, gets elected and finds himself the Minister of Public Works or something. Probably takes the poor bastard his first term of office before he stops wanting to call his chief clerk Sir."

“Am I that daunting?” Miranda was intrigued.

“Yes you are,” he said almost irritably. “But here’s the thing that matters: My bloody dream about owning a slave girl. I’ll never forget it. I can pay for it now. So I’ll have to do it. I have to! But tell me how this stacks up against what had been done to you…” He paused and gave her an apologetic grim.

“Perhaps we should have another drink,” Miranda ventured. She was interested. This man, little more than a boy, was not stupid.

“You are quite wonderful.” He said as she knelt with her tray. “Don’t know why I quibble. If I had any sense I’d grab you and run and damn whether you liked it or not.”

“You were telling me, Master?”

“I was, wasn’t I! And I’d better get it off my chest.” He looked down somberly at her loveliness. “You got any idea about what a man’s slave girl dream really is?” His voice was suddenly harsh.

Miranda remembered Wilbur Herman and his anger at female intransigence. Her voice became gentle, a feminine catechism. “I must obey. My body is always available to you, from the front or from the back as may please my lord. I have been enlarged behind for a man’s pleasure. I do not argue, I listen. When I have erred I bring the whip and the cord that you may bind me and stripe my flesh

with whip marks. I willingly enter the cells, the dungeons, the cages in which pleases my Master to confine me. Should my Master whip me only to arouse his lust or to appease it I fetch the cord or the chains and the cane or the whip and I yield myself to his punishments. This is a slave girl, Master." Her voice died away leaving a great silence in the room.

He sighed. "You are far, far beyond me. The way you said that was pure beauty. I'd been going to tell you that I was a right bastard who'd hurt you because I'm a bit of a sadist, and who'd do the other thing to you whenever I felt like it and be damned to your sentiments. You make me feel like a ten year old kid."

Miranda smiled, pleased. "It is simply that I understand. I've been trained. I don't think you understand the training. It's what you are paying for. It's a long hard course I think I passed with honors. You can ask Patricia."

"Do you know what they are asking for you?"

"No, Master. But I am sure it will be high."

"One hundred thousand pounds." He said the sum as though mentioning the Crown jewels.

"A quarter of all you possess," Miranda said wonderingly. "Don't buy me. Surely for relatively trifling sums you could whip the bottoms of a lot of little shop girls." She looked at his shrewdly, "That's what you want most of all to do, isn't

it?"

His face clouded. "You ever tried to persuade some little trick out of Marks & Spencer's or Selfridge's to take her clothes off?" He asked bitterly. "It's about as easy as getting the Archbishop of Canterbury to part with his trousers. You'd think money would do it, but it doesn't. Screw 'em, yes. But one step beyond and they become pillars of the Church. Piss on 'em. I'm sick to death of the whole rotten tribe!"

Miranda laughed gaily. Once more she remembered Herman. Undoubtedly men had a legitimate point. "Don't feel guilty about slave girls then," she admonished. "We've had all that nonsense knocked out of us, and don't ever think it wasn't a long and painful process. It was." She paused, struck by a sudden realization. She voiced it slowly and carefully: "The thing is with your dream: maybe it's you who should whip it out of a girl. Perhaps you should kidnap one of these little tricks, as you call them, and have the joy of breaking her. I can see this as a sort of male need. I'm already broken. I'm designed for pleasure. Is that what you want?"

He looked at her with awe. "You know too much." He admitted. "Yes, I'd like to do what you say. What man wouldn't! But the kidnapping is out. Good gosh, no!"

"It's frighteningly easy," Miranda tempted.

He looked at her as at a Goddess.

“It happened to me,” Miranda said simply. “And I’ve talked to others. Maybe Patricia would tell you.” She looked up at him brightly. “If you buy me, then find yourself still wanting I’ll kidnap a girl for you and see her over the rough spots.”

“Haven’t you any conscience?” He asked righteously.

She laughed in his face. “Don’t be silly. I’ve known the greatest happiness of my life as a slave. What a damn fool girl would want to go back to Marks & Spencers! I wouldn’t!”

Mr. Hansard made a gesture of hopelessness. “You’re bloody wonderful,” he said ruefully. “Makes me feel an ass. I’m a babe in arms.”

He handed over his glass without comment. Miranda performed her function unobtrusively. He sat, she knelt. Both sipping happily. “Do you think it might help you over the thin ice if you whipped me?” Miranda asked gently.

He tensed. “It’s that simple?”

“Of course! I am a slave. It is one of my functions.”

Mr. Hansard worshipped at the Shrine for long moments. “You are not compelled to offer this?”

“No. I only just thought of it.”

He adored her. “I’m still trying to get used to you naked

and with those chains." He admitted. "Those handcuffs knock me into a dither. The way you wear them… You love 'em, don't you?"

Miranda nodded, eyes bright.

"And naked!" He thought quietly for a long time. "I haven't seen many naked girls. Not naked in the way you are. Unconcerned, natural. They've always been coy, or arch, or wanting five pounds extra, and mostly very strictly hands off as though I had leprosy."

She stood erect. Stretched her feet wide as her chain would allow, put her handcuffed wrists behind the back of her neck, stuck out her chest so that her breasts glared at him. She knew she was very beautiful. She heard his gasp. But stood utterly still so that all of her was his.

"You are too beautiful to touch," he said with reverence.

"Are you going to buy me, Master?"

"What you have just done? That wasn't a sales pitch? You haven't been rehearsed?"

Miranda smiled patiently and handed him the whip. "If you believe that then whip me. I'd deserve it."

This time he took it, feeling its heft. "You mean to say you'd stand still while I used this awful thing on you?"

"Yes master."

“Do it.”

Miranda was scared. She could not know what tiger she had unleashed. But she had been scared before. She posed the most awful stance of all. It was her present one, save that she moved to the center of the floor and placed her legs together.

There was no preliminary, no hesitation. Mr. Hansard slashed the slender awfulness round her waist with a considerable determination. She choked her gasp, her cry, her agony. She turned to him and said: “Thank you, Master.”

He was stunned, unbelieving. “Can you do that again?”

“Yes Master.”

He slashed her once more, this time across her rump and round her hips. It hurt cruelly. She did it again.

Mr. Hansard threw the whip aside and relapsed into his chair. Miranda sank to her knees. She was in pain. But glowing.

“Alright. You’re genuine. Where do I pay?”

“Patricia can look after everything.” It had happened. It was incredible. She had been sold!

“I’ve got a key here,” he said absently. “Want those handcuffs off?”

“No Master.”

He sighed. “I suppose I’ll get used to you.”

“Do you wish me to get Patricia, Master?”

He nodded and held out his empty glass.

“Nice of you to get it certified, Mr. Hansard,” Patricia said brightly. She examined the slip of paper, then handed it to the kneeling girl. Miranda looked at it in wonder. One hundred thousand pounds! That was her price. Mr. Hansard paid it. She had fetched the ultimate figure. Her eyes sought Patricia’s. It was a moment for Communion.

“You are getting the most beautiful girl in the world,” Patricia said with immense sincerity.

Suddenly, more than ever before, Miranda realized her slavery. She had been sold! A man had bought her and written a check. The cycle began that day long ago in The Park had run its course. She was now one man’s ultimate dream. She belonged to him. She looked slyly at Mr. Hansard and wondered.

“Do you wish to drive home in the dark, or will you stay the night?” Patricia inquired.

“I would’nt presume…!” He blushed delightfully.

“Don’t worry. We won’t put her in bed with you,” Patricia assured him cheerfully. “I’ll lock her in a cell where she’ll be quite safe until morning.”

“Thank you,” said Mr. Hansard fervently.

But Miranda did not spend the night in a cell. She spent it in Patricia’s bed. She spent it with Patricia.

“I really don’t know,” said Mr. Hansard doubtfully.

“She’s handcuffed and her feet are chained,” Patricia assured him cheerfully. “She won’t do any escaping.”

“My Master thinks I should be bound and gagged,” said Miranda.

“It’s on the public highway,” Mr. Hansard pointed out.

Patricia looked from one to the other. She was concerned with Miranda’s comfort. Being bound and gagged in the boot of a car was no fun. “She’s not going to try and escape, y’know,” she assured him earnestly. “All you need is simple deterrents. They’re fastened on her now.”

Mr. Hansard was probably thinking of his certified check. “You mean she won’t scream or make a fuss or attract attention?” He asked incredulously.

“If you were naked, and your ankles were chained, and your wrist handcuffed, would you invite attention?” Patricia asked dryly. “By the way, the attachments just mentioned go along with her price.”

Mr. Hansard stood, indecisive.

Miranda looked at her new owner piteously. “Wouldn’t you

like to talk to me on our journey?" She pleaded. "I'll be ever so well behaved. I promise. You can whip me if I'm not."

"We'll throw in the whip too," Patricia said with a touch of caustic.

"If you'd like me more helpless, you can put my hands behind my back," Miranda suggested helpfully. "It's not as comfortable. But it really fixes me. I can't do anything." She gave him a brightly expectant look.

"Sounds sensible," Mr. Hansard said, still dubiously. He looked at Patricia.

"My dear man, it's you who has her keys now." Patricia laughed. "Have you forgotten she's yours."

Smiling, Miranda offered her joined hands. Her new owner fumbled. "Takes a bit of getting used to, this," he admitted.

When one cuff fell away, Miranda dutifully turned and offered her back and her wrists. There came the familiar clicks and the familiar tightening of the band. "Always wondered how those things worked," Mr. Hansard acknowledged. "Neat, eh. Don't you ever tie her up in the good old fashioned way? I mean, ropes and things?"

Patricia laughed at his sheepishness. He seemed a most unlikely slave owner. "When she's been a naughty girl. Cord hurts. Handcuffs don't unless she struggles."

"I was looking forward to the bound and gagged bit," he

admitted.

“You’ve been seeing too many movies,” Patricia giggled. “But she’s your property. Use all the rope you want. But go easy on the gag. Gags are no fun. They’re more for punishment.” Patricia grinned at a passing thought. “As a slave owner you have to remember that she can’t wriggle out of handcuffs and chains, but there’s always a faint hazard with cord. Miranda’s had a lot of practice, and you’re up against the problem of too tight or too loose.” She laughed outright. “Really, Mr. Hansard, a slave owner’s life is not an easy one.”

He was infected by the humor and managed a grin himself. “You are both laughing at me,” he admitted good humoredly. “Isn’t this one of the times I reach for the whip?”

“Theoretically yes,” Patricia conceded, “but I’m not for whipping, so it would be unfair just to go after her.”

Miranda felt sorry for her lord and master. She could sense that, for him, there was an absence of expected drama. At this moment she should be kicking and screaming and reminding him of his dear old mother before he pushed in the gag. She kept up a small motion of exploration against her handcuffs. This thrust her breasts out and emphasized her helplessness. She wanted him to get his money’s worth. With a thought of casting bread upon the waters she took a sporting chance. “Master, I think you would be happier if I was tied tight with cord and gagged and put in the boot. So

please do that to me." She filled her voice with love and heartbreak.

Mr. Hansard flushed. She had touched him. But he gave her a hard scrutiny. "I'm not sure about that little lot either," he admitted. "You two girls are too much for me. I'd better get out of here before I do something I'll regret."

Suddenly Miranda was enveloped in loving arms. Patricia wept. Miranda wept. Lips clung. When it was over, Patricia said to the man standing awkward and embarrassed: "You can dry her tears with your handkerchief. She's your slave." She went to him and gently kissed him too. "Cherish her—" She would have said more. But the tears came again and she turned and ran.

"Is my Master displeased with his slave girl?" Miranda asked respectfully. It had been a long silence as the scenery drifted by.

He grinned at her cheerfully. "No love. Actually I'm scared to death. I keep thinking of the coppers stopping us for some reason or other, they often do, y'know."

"That would be my cue to shout: 'save me, save me!' I suppose," Miranda admitted thoughtfully. "I can't tell you why I would not do it. I don't suppose I know myself. But I wouldn't. I'd just sit quiet and smile politely. I wouldn't want them lifting this car robe and looking at me underneath any more than you do. This is really the beat way: just suppose they did lift the lid of the boot and found me

bound and gagged in there! They wouldn't listen to a word we said."

He nodded agreement. "Alright, I'm sold. Comfy?"

"Yes Master."

"No good asking you to call me Ted?"

"That's for girl friends and wives." Miranda rebuked. "Slaves call you Master."

"My sister's name is Tess. You going to call her Mistress?"

"Of course, Master. Will she be very cruel to me?"

The man at the wheel gave her a sharp glance. "How did you know?"

"Girls are cruel to girls, Master." Miranda stated it as a fact of life.

"Tess is tremendously excited about you." Ted said slowly. "She shares the dream. You've been in it all our lives. She's more positive than I am. Women are, aren't they! I'm expecting her to take possession of you instantly without a qualm. With me it's going to take a bit of time."

"You're still bothered by my breasts and pubic hair, aren't you, Master?" Miranda inquired impishly.

"I told you, you're too damn beautiful. I can't believe it."

"You can make me wear bits of stuff, Master. There's no law

against it."

"Let's see what Tess thinks." He said diffidently.

Miranda wished there was no Tess. Alone she could probably twist her Master round her little finger. But a girl would be shrewd, perhaps jealous, possibly vindictive. In a sudden onset of the strange claustrophobia that is a part of slavery she found herself wishing that a nice English Policeman would stick his head in the window and that she would have the sense to ask him to carry her back into the world. Tomorrow she might well be in some dire plight that would make this moment precious. Instinctively she tested her bonds.

Training had an impersonal quality. Now she would be a subject to whim, to temperament, to moods. She wondered, how close a prisoner she would be kept. Ted had spent part of his winnings on an old large isolated dwelling ideal for her captivity. It seemed probable, from what she had seen of him thus far, that he might be slack enough, or kind enough, to inadvertently provide her with possibilities of escape. Such loopholes made comforting thoughts when in a mood such as gripped her now. She thought of Patricia, of Susan, of Persis, and longed to cry. She was a slave girl sold into bondage. Utterly alone. Miranda knew that if relieved of her chains at this moment she would run. As though sensing her dolor, her master stepped down on the accelerator.

It was a lovely old place of immense charm in quite a lot of ground with too many trees and too many shrubs, all of which had run riot from neglect. Once inside the gate the world slipped away so that Miranda shivered in the knowledge that potential rescuers, should she need one, would be few and far between. Tess, seated on the front steps, was waiting. She waved gaily and stood in bright and eager anticipation. She was young, beautiful and vivid. Miranda wished she could introduce her to Mr. Benson.

Life plays tricks. Its changes and surprises are often incongruities. Anti-climax is scattered indiscriminately. Fears prove groundless, joys dissolve…

“I think you’re gorgeous.” Tess glowed as she handed the slave girl a cup of tea.

Miranda clinked her handcuffs in mute appeal.

“You are an idiot, Ted. Take those things off her while she has tea. She can’t run.” Tess smiled apologetically at her captive.

Ted fumbled and obliged. Miranda immediately offered her hands that they might be handcuffed in front. Ted looked at his sister enquiringly. “I think that’s super. She is sweet! Put them on. I want to see it done.” Tess was ecstatic.

“I can manage the cup quite well now, Mistress.” Miranda actually wanted that tea.

Tess bustled happily. She was a delightful creature. Her

brother had the air of a man with a vast undertaking successfully concluded. Miranda was given a sandwich.

“You’ll have to brief us a bit, darling,” Tess cooed. “Are you sure you can do things in those handcuffs? I’ve never seen any before.”

“Oh yes, Mistress. I wear them all the time.”

“We fixed up a simply super dungeon for you, but we’re so frightfully suburban we haven’t the heart to bung you in there. I mean, after all… So I had Ted install lovely heavy rings in every room in the house so I can lead you round and padlock you anywhere. You’ll never escape.”

“Thank you, Mistress.” Miranda felt she might actually be grateful.

“We have a torture chamber too. Have you ever been tortured, darling?”

“I am afraid I have,” Miranda admitted. It seemed a shame to spoil their fun.

They stared at her in awe, uncertain of verity.

“Is that part of your training?”

“Not really, just coincidental, Mistress.”

“But you have been whipped lots, haven’t you?”

“A great deal, Mistress.”

“Will you always call me mistress?”

“Try and stop her!” Ted laughed.

“I’m going to whip you, darling. I’ve never whipped a girl, but I’ve always wanted to. You will give me a few pointers, won’t you?”

Miranda tendered her cup for a refill and took two more sandwiches. The atmosphere was absurd. She supposed all three of them were about the same age, yet she felt the oldest. What on Earth could such a couple want with her! Benson’s training was wasted in this house. Who was there to appreciate it: a gauche young man and a kittenish girl! She who had been prepared for Princess!

“It’s nice of you to give me Tea like this,” Miranda conceded. She twinkled at them both. “But it’s me who should be serving. I’m a slave girl. You’ve bought and paid for me.”

“Don’t worry, kid,” Ted advised. “We’re feeling you out, and groping around a bit ourselves. Be our guest, at least for Tea.”

“I’ll give you the grand tour afterwards,” Tess promised. “I’ll probably whip you a little then too. I can’t wait to get properly started.”

“Mistress?” Miranda quavered. “You speak of whipping me. Have I displeased you?”

“Goodness no! Quite the reverse. That’s why I want to whip

you. It would be no fun whipping some sniveling wench who'd broken a teapot. But you're glorious." Tess laughed happily. "I know what's bothering you. You'd sooner be whipped for being naughty than just for fun. My fun! That right?"

"Yes Mistress. But a slave girl expects to be whipped for the pleasure of the one who owns her. I do not complain."

"I'd suppose it hurts worse when you know you're innocent? Does it?"

"Yes Mistress."

"You're going to sleep with me tonight. Did you know?" Tess chuckled at the surprise on Miranda's face. "I'm going to have the keys to those chains. It's going to be a simply gorgeous feeling. For me, of course."

"Thank you, Mistress. I will try and please you."

Rotten little bitch! Miranda thought. She wished ardently she was back with Patricia. Her chains had never felt more heavy or the handcuffs grip more tight.

"Arn't you ashamed to have Ted looking at your cunt and boobs all the time?" Tess displayed an almost childish curiosity.

"I have been naked so long I do not think of such things, Mistress." Miranda felt like a Sunday school teacher rebuking a prurient child.

“Lay down on your back on the carpet where we can sit and watch you, and play with yourself. Tickle your clit until you have an orgasm. A real one. No faking.”

It was like a blow. So out of context. So unexpected. Miranda glanced at Ted. He was interestedly absorbed. It was cringingly shaming. The last thing she wished to do. But it was her first direct order in her new slavery. She had no thought of disobedience. She did what she had been told. She did it with all the skill and finesse at her command.

“Did you notice, Ted? She didn’t want to do that.” Tess exulted when the last gasps and heavings had died away.

“You are a little bitch, Tess. I’d never have thought of that.”

“Course you wouldn’t. You men! She’d twist you. She won’t twist me. Make her suck your cock.”

“No!” Absurdly Ted’s hand flew to his flies.

His sister laughed at his scarlet face. “See what I have to cope with?” She addressed a now kneeling Miranda who awaited her next humiliation without hope. “Darling Ted’s an absolute puritan. He’d probably have you in knickers in no time.” She turned to her brother. “Alright then! You give her a test.”

For a moment Ted seemed hard put to respond. Then an amused smile crept across his pleasant features. He focused it on his kneeling slave girl. “Remember that whip thing we brought along with us? It’s in the Hall. Go and get

it.”

“Yes Master.”

With an outward show of unconcern, but inwardly seething with resentment, Miranda set out on her task being careful to exhibit all the grace she had learned about walking with chained feet. First shamed! Now to be whipped for nothing. It was not a good start. She found herself unable to come to grips with her slavery. If only she was not chained! She looked miserably at the heavy links joining her ankles. Without them she could run! All sentimental attachment to her condition born of other times evaporated. Here was the true hopelessness of slavery!

Ted accepted the wicked thing with satisfaction. His interest had perked. He flexed it lovingly. Miranda backed away and knelt awaiting her sentence.

“Off with your pants, up with your skirt, darling. I want it nice and tight when you touch the floor.”

It was as though he had spoken in a foreign tongue. The words flowed over the kneeling slave without meaning. She thought herself the butt of another shame. It took Tess’ agonized protest to make sense of the incomprehensible.

“Oh Ted! Oh no… Please…!”

“Over you go, darling. You know you deserve it.”

Miranda watched aghast. This couple were unpredictable. They were bizarre! But she felt joy in what was momentarily taking place.

“Please darling! Not in front of her.”

“That’s the frosting on the cake, Tess. And you know it.”

Tess stood irresolute, turning her sulky face from her brother to the kneeling slave girl and around the room as though seeking rescue from her dilemma. “I won’t do it,” she declaimed angrily.

“You will, y’know, pet. You always do after these histrionics,” Ted told her casually. He was still enjoyably flexing the cane. He seemed in no hurry. Miranda felt forgotten. But she watched avidly.

Tess seemed poised for flight. She turned this way and that as though seeking a way out through invisible bars. Her breath was fast, her lips rebellious.

“Since you’re taking so long to obey, you may as well strip completely, darling,” her brother suggested equably.

“Ted!” It was an exclamation of anguish.

“Yes darling?” Ted raised a kindly eyebrow.

“You’re doing it because of her. You’ll get a kick out of it.”

“Anything wrong with that?” her brother asked blandly. “Why don’t you tell my slave girl what your status is? It’ll

help her to know where she's at."

Tess twisted as though tied. The eye she directed at the kneeling girl seemed to seek an ally. "Alright then! If you have to know. Ted's a bastard. He fucks me and… all the other things. And he whips me. He loves whipping me. That's why I want to whip you. The rest of the time I can do what I like. He's sweet when he wants to be. But that just gets me thinking I amount to something. That's when he knocks me down again."

So that was it! Miranda found the picture less obscure. But her own place in it still seemed vague. What need had incestuous twins for a slave girl!

"I'm waiting," Ted said cheerfully. "You'll also get one on each breast now for making such a fuss."

"No! No!" His sister stamped her foot in vexation. "Not that. Please, Ted, not that. Not with her watching me."

"An audience makes it doubly effective, sweet," Ted assured her with judicial seriousness. "By the way, it's now two on each breast. You really are extraordinarily dilatory."

Tess emitted a wail of mixed anger and distress. But her clothes started to fly in all directions. When she was nude she did not cringe, but stood proud and defiant.

She was exquisite. Miranda sensed that this girl was no stranger to nakedness. She wore it with the same pride and

assurance as did Miranda herself. But the kneeling girl's gaze settled on the whip marks on the lovely skin. There were many. Some recent. They had been placed upon her by a heavy hand. There was more to Ted than he had allowed to be seen. Miranda felt a sick anticipation of pain.

"Let's go to the Play Room," Ted said breezily. "You'll need to be fastened. You can't stand still for what you've earned."

"I can! I can!" Tess stamped her foot again in frustration. "Honest, Ted. I'll stand still. I promise. Don't take me downstairs to that awful room." She looked at the kneeling slave as though for moral support. "If you get me down there there's no telling what I'll get."

"Isn't that the spirit of the thing?" Ted asked jauntily. "Besides, you were anxious enough to show the place and try it out on the slave."

"She's just a slave." Tess looked at her brother reproachfully. "Why don't you whip her, not me. Isn't that what she's for?"

Ted laughed delightedly. "Darling, you're delicious! So you thought that buying this marvelous creature would save your lovely skin? It won't y'know. I'm not going to waste you just because I have her. One of her duties will be to whip you regularly. May as well get some value out of owning a slave."

Miranda felt sorry for the girl. Tess seemed in danger of going off pop from pressure of emotion. Ted was deliberately provoking his sister. He beckoned his slave and unlocked her handcuffs. “Come here, darling.”

There was no doubt as to his intentions. Furiously but obediently his sister stood before him.

“Hold out your hands.”

How bitter that moment must have been! Tess’ face was a mask of humiliation as she held out her hands and watched as the steel bands clicked tight around her wrists. Steel still warm from the flesh of the slave girl she had supposed would relieve her of shame. With a disdainful toss of her head the handcuffed girl turned and stalked angrily from the room. Ted and the slave girl Miranda followed.

The playroom was probably less of a shock to Miranda than to the naked girl who stood resentfully awaiting her brother’s punishments. The slave girl recognized all she saw. She had seen too much of such places and felt their agonies. Tess probably was a bitch. But her heart went out to her at this time in this place.

It was delightful to see the effect of the handcuffs on the girl who wore them. Tess’ fists were clenched. The linkage was taut as she strained against it in revolt at the shame of the bond. She was probably exercising control against tearing at the metal. Miranda knew that had Tess been

alone she would be furiously tugging and twisting in a fruitless effort to rid herself of it.

“Let’s see,” Ted affected a judicial air. “I have to work on both sides of you, darling, so I suppose the hands straight up, eh.” Without removing the handcuffs he soon had his sister standing on her toes, suspended from her wrists. Miranda knew the handcuffs would be hurting. Ted’s gaze was suddenly on her.

“Hardly sporting for you just to stand free,” he mused. “I think the whipping post will fill the bill.”

Miranda placed her wrists against the straps. She knew it all. There was a tedious horror about it all. Soon there would be screams, and what would it all prove! She watched and felt the straps buckled tight. She stood helpless. Herself ready to be whipped. But with a perfect view of what was happening.

“First, six with the cane,” Ted announced.

His pinioned sister said nothing. Obviously she knew when hope had gone. Miranda watched the proud face dissolve into agony and supplication as the slashing blows sent the cane thudding into her bottom. Ted was no novice.

“Six of the best!” he announced with satisfaction. He turned to Miranda. “Takes ’em well, doesn’t she.” He was quite obviously proud of the punished girl’s fortitude. “And now for six with the whip,” he said zestfully.

“Oh Ted, darling… Must I?” Tess’ voice would have melted stone. It had no effect on her brother.

He plied the whip with a similar skill. Around the waist, circling the gyrating hips, across the smooth back. One vicious stroke caused Tess to lift herself from the floor by her handcuffed wrists. The watching Miranda flinched in sympathy. But there were no more pleas. Moans and cries aplenty. But the girl under the whip knew when pleading was of no avail.

When the six were done, Tess wept. Miranda understood. The worst was still to come. For a girl to have her breasts whipped was the ultimate. Shame and pain. But, above all, a cruel violation of her femaleness. Ted watched the tears with sympathy and love. How strange this sibling relationship! When they were done he used his handkerchief to dry the lovely face. Then kissed the lips that no longer asked for pity. “Won’t be long now, love,” he told his sister lovingly.

Whistle, splat and scream. Whine and cut and scream. Miranda longed to hide her face. She knew only too well what it was like for a girl to have her breasts whipped. But nothing could have dragged her gaze away from the vivid tableau before her eyes. Tess’ wrists were bleeding as their naked owner plunged and heaved and drew herself off the floor in her paroxysms of anguish. One by one the wicked weals leaped out of the mammary flesh, beautiful, erotic, cruel!

When it was done, Ted left the room. The two helpless girls were alone. Miranda watched her companion's sobbing panting recovery without words. It was not a time to speak. It was Tess who finally broke the silence in the room of pain. Her voice was very tired. "He doesn't mean to be cruel," she said apologetically. "He can't help it. He's been whipping me ever since I was a kid. The other things come naturally, I suppose."

"But why do you stand for it?" Miranda asked in wonder. She was no longer slave. They were two maidens in distress.

"I don't know," Tess admitted disgustedly. "I love him, I suppose. Not just as a brother, but as a man… a male. I can't help it. No use telling me to cut and run. I'd have done it ages ago if I was going to."

"Is that really why you wanted him to buy me…? So that it would be me who was whipped instead of you?"

The whipped girl grinned ruefully. "Silly ass, wasn't I. Might have known it wouldn't work. Ted could whip six of us and want more. Sorry kid."

Miranda's mind churned. Slave to a psychopath! It was a terrible prospect. She could blame neither Benson nor Pat. Ted seemed deceptively what he claimed to be. The face she turned to the suspended girl was stricken.

Tess saw her fear. "Don't panic, darling. He won't maim

you or kill you. He never goes too far. Has a nice judgment of female agony, has my Ted. You'll simply howl and howl and howl the way I've been doing for years. Gosh, these handcuffs hurt, don't they!"

There was a small silence, broken by Tess. "I am going to whip you, y'know. Do you mind?"

How absurd the question! Did she mind! Yet Miranda saw some logic. With the crazy pair the logic might be very plausible. She still felt a great sympathy for the girl who she had just seen whipped.

"No, I don't mind," she said sadly. "I can understand you wanting to. I think I'd want to if I was in your place. Go ahead and whip me. I'm used to being whipped. I hate it, but it's part of being a slave." She looked intently at her companion in distress: "I suppose I am a slave? Is there… is there any chance of me being anything else?" She was not sure herself what she meant. But the words had come out by themselves.

"You mean my friend?" Tess asked cynically.

"Yes, why not?"

"Do you want a friend who'll whip you and shame you?"

"Yes." Intuition told Miranda the one word was enough.

Tess started to cry. "Alright," she sobbed. "We're friends. Don't call me Mistress anymore."

“Ted will notice.”

“Piss on Ted!” Tess proclaimed valiantly.

The lord and master of the two girls made a brief reappearance. Just long enough to set his sister free. He seemed in high good humor. He handed her both the handcuffs that had cut her wrists and the key to fit them. He kissed her warmly and went away.

Tess massaged her wounds. Miranda shared every nuance of sensation. It was always a good time when you were set free. Fears slipped away and became absurd. Pain diminished. The next dose seemed far away. In between there would be happiness. It was rather like starting a holiday. The first day had a sort of Arabian Nights quality: anything could happen.

“I’m going to whip you now,” said Tess.

“Of course!” To the tied Miranda it seemed the most natural thing in the world.

Tess came and kissed her. “Forgive me when I’m cruel,” she pleaded. “I like you. Most of the time I’ll be kind. But now —“ She looked her anguish, “now I just have to whip you. I’ve been waiting so long…”

“I can understand,” Miranda said truthfully. “Whip me. I’m all ready.”

Tess whipped her. Beneath the pain Miranda felt a great

empathy for the girl who wielded the whip. It hurt as the whip always did. Little by little under the scalding stripes she began to moan and to cry, and finally to scream. No matter who held the whip, it was always the same: a naked girl ended in tears and howling shamefully. She tugged in futile agony at the straps upon her wrists.

“It is very beautiful,” Tess said as at a discovery.

“It is very beautiful,” Miranda agreed. “I know.”

“I want to whip you forever. Do more of all the things… the lovely things…” Tess swung back the thong.

Miranda did more! More of everything! As the whip cut and sliced at her she abandoned all restraint. No need of pride before this girl! If shameless agony pleased her she should have it to the full! Why withhold so glorious a gift! Under the searching thong Miranda screamed with the fullness of her vocal cords and tugged at the straps with all the lithe wonder that was her body. She could not free herself. She could never free herself! The whip rose and fell and curled to match the beating of her heart.

“It makes me too horny,” Tess admitted. “I’m going to have to let you loose.”

The slave said nothing. She knew her place. As the straps fell away she sank to her knees and sought the willing prey of her lips. Tess moaned: “Darling… darling… darling!”

Even though she was whipped, Miranda felt better. Per-

spective returned. She had long ceased to doubt that the whip cleansed a girl's mind. There was a rightness about it. It seemed silly to believe that a girl could know anything of life without it. She looked at Tess gratefully. "Thank you, Tess." She omitted the mistress.

"Why thank me?" Tess was amused.

"I don't know," Miranda admitted, "but I needed that. I'm no masochist, but I needed it. So did you. Do it again if you need to."

"Darling, you're in no position to grant favors."

"I know. But, still, wouldn't you sooner I gave my flesh to you willingly? There's a tremendous difference."

Tess considered. "You're terribly wise about these things, aren't you. I'm so glad you came. I'll try and not be a bitch to you. But… but, would you mind terribly if I whipped you some more…?"

Miranda managed a laugh. "But I've nothing to say about it, have I. I'm quite helpless. You can cut me to pieces."

"I've learned your point. It's more erotic when you ask me. Please, darling, ask me."

"Please whip me more," Miranda pleaded dutifully.

Tess whipped her with an intent joy.

Miranda was tired when it was done. Both girls were

panting when the straps were loosed and the prisoned arms fell limp.

“I really was a bitch, wasn’t I?” Tess’ finger traced wounds across the satiny skin. “Ted may give me Hell for this.”

Tess put her arms around the tortured girl. “Love me,” she pleaded. “Forget the rest. Forget Ted…”

They forgot Ted very satisfactorily…

“I suppose someone has to wear these damn things.” Tess surveyed the handcuffs.

“Not really,” Miranda assured her. “As long as my ankles are chained like this you’ve got me safe enough. The handcuffs are just a sort of emphasis. Bit of a punishment, I suppose. I’ve been wearing ’em so long I feel naked without ’em. But whether they are on me or not is up to you. Or up to Ted,” she added unhappily.

Tess sparkled. Without pause she snapped a cuff on her own wrist and pressed it home. She held out both her hands to Miranda. “Here, put them on me. Tight.”

Miranda obeyed. The click, click, click, had a beautiful sound on someone else.

“That makes us about even,” Tess laughed. “But I could still run. There’s chains around here somewhere. Lock my feet together like yours.” She produced a key from a ledge. “Here, unlock your ankle chains and put them on me.”

Miranda was in a daze. Tess and her brother were just too much. She unlocked the ankle shackles that had prisoned her for so long and snapped them firmly on a willing Tess who immediately strutted round the room in them to test their compulsion. “Walk slowly, but not run,” she gave her verdict. Then, suddenly, realized her plight. “Here, I’m fixed the way you were, and you are free.” She looked around at her chains. She grinned at recognition of her impotence. “Now’s your chance, kid,” she said urgently. “I’ve been stupid. Run! Run like Hell…”

Miranda ran. It felt so good to leap, to stretch her legs to their fullest extent, to allow her arms to follow their natural piston response to urgency. She had only a brief memory of the passages, but it sufficed. She was soon in the tangle of foliage that was the grounds. Next the gate and then the asphalt road. She loped forward in joyous freedom. Free, free, free! She had forgotten how long it was since she had been kidnapped. In that time she had rarely been without some form of restraint. Now there was none. She fled, a white shadow beneath the trees that flanked the narrow road. She longed to cry aloud her ecstasy. Escaping like this, she could bring no reproach upon Patricia’s head. All was fair in love and war: and this was war! A war in which her freedom was the prize. Her white legs flashed. The asphalt sped by beneath her feet.

It is quite possible to drive a car at night without lights. You stick your head out of the window and stay at about thirty MPH. If there is no traffic there is no problem. There was

no traffic. Ted kept the engine throttled down, the car drifted with little sound. He saw Miranda as a white ghost before she was aware of him. When awareness came, she set off into the trees. He stopped the car and gave chase. He had her within the minute.

Miranda fought. Oh, how she fought! She fought for her freedom, perhaps for her life. Certainly she fought for a life within the world as opposed to a life in chains subject to the caprice of others. She fought well and savagely. But she was a girl and she was naked. It was no great task for Ted to subdue her with blows and hurtful twistings of arms and hair. Within a few minutes her hands were firmly tied behind her back. She moaned and wept in desolation. But she was captive. He tied her ankles to he sure and carried her to the car.

“I nearly lost a hundred thousand quid,” Ted observed soberly. “I’m not feeling too pleased.”

“Do you blame me?” Miranda sobbed. She was desolate.

“I suppose not,” he admitted. “But it’s taught me a lesson. Now I have to teach you one. And young Tess!” he added viciously. “You’ll neither of you get any chances from now on.”

Miranda was distraught. She tore at her bindings in a fury of despair. Ted, in haste, had knotted them so tightly they hurt. She was overwhelmed by the realization that from now on she would not be trusted. She would be given no

chances for flight. It had felt to good to run, to leap and to be whole. Now she was bound so that she could only twist and hurt herself. Worse would follow.

Angrily Ted carried his helpless burden into the house and to an apprehensive and still chained Tess. “Come on, you!” He said savagely to his cringing sister.

It was the dungeon, of course! Neither girl expected anything less. Ted chuckled as he put the gag in Miranda’s mouth and buckled it tight behind her neck. “Bound and gagged.” He mocked as he tugged back her ankles and tied them to her wrists so that her nudity was bowed and strained. “Try running down the road in this little lot.” At the door he turned and addressed his sister. “Tomorrow’s the day the cure starts for both of you. Think about it.” The heavy door thudded tight, the bolts shot home. In the dim light of a hidden lamp two helpless naked girls looked at each other in dismay.

“He’s fun when you get to know him,” Tess offered diffidently. The statement fell into the gloom with an absurdity all its own.

Miranda struggled within what little scope was left to her and managed inarticulate sounds behind the ball within her mouth. Surely Tess would relieve her of some of the awfulness! She put all the appeal she could muster into a supplicating glance.

“I’m scared, darling. I’m sure it’s beastly. But if His Majesty

comes back and finds you loose we'll both be in worse trouble than now."

Ted's sister started to cry. A quiet hopeless shedding of tears that Miranda watched impotently and fearfully. For Tess to be thus demoralized told all too clearly her apprehension of things to come. "He'll whip us half to death: see if he doesn't!" She sobbed.

Miranda had little doubt of it. But she supposed she would recover from the flogging, no matter how awful. What she feared even more was the weight of chains in some dark hole such as this. Or, worse still, to be kept tied and gagged. She knew at this moment she would choose the whip rather than be left bound as she was all night. Surely Tess' heart would be touched enough to remove the gag!

"It's all my fault," Tess wailed. She looked down at her fellow prisoner apologetically. "I'm a silly bitch. Ted and I are a pair of odd-balls. You may as well get used to the idea. He's unpredictable, maybe I am too." She held up her hands and examined the handcuffs approvingly. "I say, darling, I 'spose there's no way of slipping out of these things?"

Miranda shook her head in a firm negative.

Tess sighed. She appeared to possess a volatile temperament. She shrugged resignedly and continued: "Half the time Ted lets me do whatever I like, even boss him around. I'm really a spoilt brat and it's all his fault. We love each

other too much. It's being twins, I 'spose. But then I'll say or do something and all of a sudden I'm howling my head off under his whip or spending a night the way you are now. Ted loves roping a girl up. It's probably the main reason he bought you." She giggled. "Bet you were expecting to get fucked six times a day. You won't, y'know! It's me he does that to. You'll get all the other things…" She giggled again. "But you will have me, darling. I'll make sure you have me…!"

Miranda struggled again. But she was tiring. The bent position took its toll of her youthful strength. But she tossed her head wildly in a message of distress.

"Oh alright." Her companion conceded sympathetically. "I'll take off the gag. If he catches us we'll just have to pay for it, that's all." She went to work on the buckle.

"That's Heaven!" Miranda gasped as the ball was dragged from her mouth. "Oh thank you… thank you."

"In for a penny, in for a pound." Tess loosed the cord that joined ankles and wrists. "But I daren't undo any more. Honest!"

The bound captive moaned in ecstasy and stretched herself to the limit. "Will you have to fix me up again?" She asked anxiously.

Tess laughed sardonically. "Your guess is as good as mine. The ideal will be to tie and gag you just before brother dear

shows up in the morning with our bread and water."

Miranda knew a great urgency. Brutally bound on a stone floor. What a pass to come to! She must strive to enlist Tess in a plan she could not thrust from her mind. She looked up at her fellow captive pathetically. "Tess," she said seriously. "This is all wrong. Ted doesn't need me. He's got you. The two of you are an entity. I'm one too many. I'm wasted here. This training you've heard so much about: it fitted me to give joy to some rich voluptuary or some impotent old man who wants a beautiful bottom to whip and a pretty girl to worship him and play erotic games. It's an oriental concept. This is no place for it. Ted's wasting all that money. He could get all sorts of girls for a fraction of the sum. Girls who'd spend a bit of time here and be abused for a thousand pounds. I'm sure if he took me back in the morning they'd refund his money. I know they would."

"You mean you're sort of a high priced whore?"

"Whores don't get chained and bound and gagged and whipped." Miranda said angrily. "No. I'm a slave. You and Ted can do anything you like with me. I don't suppose he'll ever give me another chance to escape, so no one will ever know. If that is not slavery I don't know what is."

"Sounds like fun," Tess observed genially. "Don't take on so." She giggled at a thought of her own. "Tomorrow I'll hurt too much to say this. But if in the future I see that this

whole thing's no good I'll find some way to help you escape." She looked down at Miranda in wide eyed solemnity. "Honest I will. Unless he keeps me chained and locked up all the time I don't see how he could stop me."

"I wish I could love you," Miranda mourned.

"You can, darling. I'll show you how." Tess giggled happily.

Ted strapped one of them to each side of the whipping post so that they could see and share each other's pain. Each stood at arm's length from the timber, held by her wrists. Those poor slender wrists! Miranda mused. Her wrists that had held her so many times as she was held now. She was wondering what versatility her owner might display with the whip that would soon be biting at her skin.

Ted whipped his sister with a cruel methodical determination to teach her a lesson. There were no deviations, no erotic searchings with the thong. Tess made no plea or protest or promise. She was tied to be whipped and accepted that whipping without hope or expectation of mercy. She screamed and moaned as a girl must do while being flogged. But it was almost as though she acquiesced in her guilt and its penalty and bore it as best she could. When the whip stopped she was close to collapse. Miranda was aghast. If he could do that to his sister...! She braced herself for the inevitable.

But it did not come. Her wrists were freed. She stood naked but without restraint. Tess sobbed quietly, her head against

one outstretched arm. She was still strapped tight. Nor did her brother make any move to release her. Ted was looking at his slave girl with a sardonic humor.

“Good at running, aren’t you, love?”

She knew she was being baited, so did not reply.

“Bit light on your feet, wouldn’t you say?”

Her heart pounded. She began to suspect.

“Please Ted. Don’t do that to her.” It was Tess’ first plea.

“Must be a temptation: being able to run like that?” Ted was not to be diverted from his pleasure. “Come on, girl, speak up.”

“Yes Master.”

“Yes what, love?”

“It was wonderful to run again, Master.”

He appeared to consider. “Now, if a girl’s running was a bit of a problem, what cure would you suggest?” He appeared genuinely anxious for advice.

“Her ankles could be chained together, Master. Then she could not run.”

“Ah yes.” It seemed the suggestion had fallen short of his hopes. “Wouldn’t there be something more personal, love? Anyone can wear a bit of chain.”

Miranda fell to her knees before him. “Please don’t whip my feet, Master,” she pleaded brokenly.

“Now, who said anything about whipping your feet!” Ted exclaimed in mock surprise. His tone changed. “But now you’ve mentioned it, love, it does seem a good idea. Sort of fits the crime, eh.” He allowed one hand to fondle the tresses of her bowed head.

“Please master, whip me terribly. But please not my feet.” Miranda was desperately frightened of what lay in store for her.

“Don’t be a rotter, Ted,” Tess pleaded. “She’s sweet. She doesn’t deserve anything so awful.”

“Would you like to join her in it?”

“No.” The voice was agonized.

“Keep quiet then. You’ve got a front row seat to watch.

Ted spread out a rug before the simple frame to which Miranda’s ankles would be strapped. He held up a length of supple cord. “Cross ’em behind your back, love.”

Her eyes filled with tears as the cord bit at her crossed wrists. He was right. There was something personal about cord. It held you tight. It hurt. If it was cunningly knotted you could not free yourself.

Her look of appeal was lost on him. With a little wail of

pure fear Miranda sank to her knees on the rug and then fell flat upon her stomach. She wriggled back until she could bend her knees and place her ankles where they would be fastened so that the soles of her feet pointed at the ceiling. Ted bound them there, very, very tight. Discarding the straps, he used cord, loop after loop of it until nothing she could do, no struggle she might make could cause her feet to move. They were divorced from her, linked only by their ability to absorb and to impart agony. She lay supine, her crossed wrists useless at the small of her back. The rug absorbed her tears.

Miranda looked sideways at Tess. Their eyes locked. Each felt the other's pain. Neither expected reprieve. Miranda tried to smile reassuringly, but could not quite make it. Her nostrils flared as Ted began a tentative tapping with the cane on the soles of her feet. The unbearable would soon begin…

The bastinado is in a class by itself. It is like no other punishment. The Puritan who will observe with censure the erotic stimulation of stripes upon a girl's bottom or her back will find no similar sexual arousal in the whipping of her feet. A girl's feet are not made for pain as are other parts of her. When they receive pain in its ultimate quintessence they are without defense. They have no curve, no pad of flesh, no erogenous weapon with which to counter agony. They must absorb it all. Miranda fainted at the tenth stroke. It was also the last.

For several days she was not chained. She had no need. She could not walk. Her feet were swollen wounds. When she could again place them on the floor her ankles were fettered with shining bands and links, heavy beautiful things from which there could be no escape.

During this time the Hansards were tremendously kind. She was a lovely child who had erred and who had been punished. It was that simple. It was the same with Tess, save that her wounds were not disabling and were hidden by clothes. She was once more king of the castle. Her brother eyeing her extravagancies with an indulgent smile. Miranda watched them in wonder as they did her.

She had given up thought of escape. She hated the knowledge that the cane or the whip could cure a girl of an inclination to freedom. It was simply that the price was too high so you set it out of your mind. The cane on her feet had, once again, broken her. She wanted no more of it. She would be obedient. How many times must a girl be taught that lesson! She wondered glumly.

In the period of her first limping walks she tried to please the two young people to whom she belonged. Where possible she used her erotic skills for their enjoyment. She never presumed. She was always the slave. A slave girl dedicated only to the happiness of those who owned her. Little by little understandings evolved, rapport blossomed. Sometimes Miranda laughed.

Punishment came from Ted. So did the chains! Miranda was never free of chains, and he held the key. It was Tess who provided the gaiety and the quaint notions and who exacted from the slave girl responses that entertained. Nor were the Hansards divorced from life. There were visitors. Miranda was chained in the dungeon at such times, so she never saw them. Thus it came as an exciting interlude when she was told that she would play the slave girl maid at a Tea in which a number of Tess' old school friends would be the guests.

"Pullet party!" Ted laughed. "But don't get any idea they'll help you. Tess has 'em in the palm of her hand." He gave a solemn wink. "Tell you the truth, kid, I think you're in for a bad time."

For that afternoon Miranda belonged solely to Tess. She was Tess' slave girl. It was understood. It soon transpired that she was the center of attraction and perhaps the motive of the gathering. After all, it is not every girl like Tess who owned a slave! The girls were curious.

Miranda wished her chains were lighter. But Ted was adamant. He did, however, sanction her hands being free that she might more easily serve so many. But her ankles were heavily captive. It was a tribute to the effect she created that all the considerable chatter stopped when she wheeled in the trolley. Tess was obviously in a seventh heaven of proprietary pride. The slave girl determined to give of her best.

The chatter had stopped. But the whispers and asides began: ‘She’s really naked!’ ‘Surely those chains aren’t real!’ ‘Are those really whip marks?’ Miranda enjoyed her sensation as much as did her owner.

There was enough to do that she got little opportunity for her submissive kneel. She used it as much as possible. She knew its potency. Whenever she adopted the pose a hush of reverence muted the feminine exchange. The Tea, the sandwiches and the little cakes were disposed of in an excited current of speculation and anticipation.

Tess had briefed her in what was to be the main event. The trolley gone, Miranda knelt before her Mistress and extended her hands. Tess locked handcuffs on the slender wrists. The slave girl then took up position in the center of the floor of the big room, spread her legs as wide as the chains would allow, placed her joined hands at the back of her neck and, thus cruelly exposed, faced the semi-circle of intent young women.

“This is my slave girl.” Teas declaimed with immense panache. “Her name is Miranda. She will obey sensible orders and answer sensible questions. I know you don’t believe it, but she is.”

Miranda, shamefully naked and posed for all to see, was secretly amused. The assemblage was uncertain, at a loss, half believing their leg was being pulled. Yet in the background was the Sweepstake! It might have made even this

possible.

“How much do you get paid for the job?”

“I am not paid, Mistress. I was purchased from a third party.”

“You mean to tell us you can’t get free?”

“I cannot escape, Mistress. I have tried and been whipped for trying.”

A sibilance of whispers followed mention of the whip.

“Why don’t you just walk out with us when we leave?”

“Please let me do that. I want to. Or call the police.”

Embarrassment fell on all present.

“Won’t you be punished for saying that?” Asked a bright eyed brunette.

“I will probably be whipped. Please help me.”

“Can we see her whipped?” A pert blonde excitedly asked Tess.

The delighted slave owner nodded to her slave. Miranda clinked away and returned with the slender wicked riding crop. She kissed it and tendered the cruel thing on bent knee, then took up position and touched her toes. Guessing the electric mood, Tess gave the sacrificial bottom three mild strokes, for which Miranda demurely said her thanks

and resumed the standing pose.

“Is that all! Oh come on, Tess! Let me have a go at her.” The demands came thick and fast.

Once more the slave girl presented her bottom, Tess relinquished the whip. The pert blonde swung with gusto. There were seven girls. Miranda got seven strokes of varying severity, but managed her thanks with serenity. Her afternoon was becoming less enjoyable.

“How about a real whip, Tess?”

“But the poor girl hasn’t done anything to deserve it,” Tess protested.

“Does she have to?” A cynical feminine voice demanded. “If she really is a slave you could hang her up somewhere and let us really make her squirm.” The voice was avid. Miranda shuddered inwardly.

“Darling, if she’s all you say she’d have to do… you know! If we wanted her to. I bet she won’t go that far?”

“Remember her Union!” It was the cynic again.

“She will go that far!” Tess was on the defensive. She was not going to have her triumph shattered. Miranda guessed she must have done a good deal of boasting. “If I order her to do something, she’ll do it.”

“I can think of something super!” It was a new voice, eager

vibrant. “We are more or less in a row. Make her start at the right and suck us off, one by one without stopping. We can take turns at standing over her with the whip in case she slacks. What say, girls?”

There was an excited chorus of enthusiasm. Miranda quailed. Seven of them without a rest! The fool girl didn’t know what she was asking. If Tess joined the ranks it would be eight. No matter how she worked she would almost certainly earn a few stripes along the way. Once again her knowledge of slavery was devastating. The chains on her ankles weighed a ton.

If Tess had possessed qualms they were swamped by the impetuous delight of her pullet party. All the girls were intrigued. She turned, eyes sparkling, to her unhappy slave: “Go and get a proper whip, darling. You’ll be getting it on the back, so a whip’s better than this crop.”

The slave girl departed on her humanitarian errand. The whip would not hurt less, but Tess was right. If it was her bent back that was to receive the lash it would curl around her contours better than the other wicked thing. Besides, she was sure the girls would find the flying thong more exciting. Ted had been right: she was in for a bad time.

The room was alive with animated chatter. It slowed as Miranda knelt, kissed the whip, and handed it to her Mistress. Suddenly there was silence. Each girl realized she had let herself in for a highly personal experience before a

critical audience. Miranda guessed there would be those among them who were having second thoughts.

But they made a game of it. After much argument they drew lots to see which of them would be whipmistress while the others were serviced by the slave lips. The honor went to a girl who had, so far, been inactive. She accepted the beautiful thong with awe. “I’ve never done anything like this before,” she admitted dubiously.

“You don’t need a University Degree to whip a girl!”

“Lay it on hard, Dorrie. Don’t let her dawdle!”

“But don’t let it curl round on her breasts,” Tess instructed firmly.

They then took another draw for places and sat themselves down as the numbers indicated. Some of them were blushing.

“Can we each choose our own position?” A voice inquired uncertainly.

The thought was applauded. Miranda found herself kneeling before a pair of anonymous legs. “You can take my pants off.” Their owner instructed. Miranda obeyed. The two legs separated, hands gripped her hair and thrust her lips against the exposed pubes. “Do it good! Do it good…!” The voice urged almost desperately.

Miranda began her task.

By the time it was done she had collected seventeen strokes across her back. She who held the whip had discovered a new joy. She watched avidly for the faintest excuse to use it. One overly vigorous stripe had curled beneath an arm across a breast. Miranda had cried out in agony and rolled upon the floor. Four more eager lashes found her before Tess could come to her rescue and she again applied tired lips and tongue to the sexual urgencies of eight suburban damsels. It was a highlight in the lives of all, save for the slave girl in her chains.

Miranda was allowed a brief retirement to the powder room before she served cocktails. Washing, and doing over her face she grimaced at herself in the mirror. Was this all she had become! A plaything for empty headed girls, or a vessel for Ted's inconsistent savagery! Her handcuffs shone in the bright lights as she applied the lipstick. She was a slave! More and more the stark realization was borne upon her. Close to tears she hurried back to her duties.

There was now a sensuous intimacy about the group. They had shared concupiscence. The vessel of their orgasms moved among them with her tray and the tall glasses. They envied her grace in chains and marveled at her ability to walk daintily. She still wore her handcuffs. Even as the girls chattered busily at each other their eyes were on the naked girl whose servitude they were beginning to accept. More than one traced the whipmarks on her back with an exploring finger and asked questions about the pain. The angry red bar across one breast was viewed as a medal

might have been. They began to use her name and casual endearments. She had become vitally real. She excited them.

No doubt it was the excitement that caused the cocktails to flow in a volume that kept the slave busy with the mixer. No doubt it was the stimulant of the drinks that prompted the next bright and wonderful idea.

“Where’s that brother of your’s, Tess?”

“Let’s put Miranda onto him.”

“Make her suck his cock while we watch! Bet he’d love it!”

They were insatiable. Tess’ eyes shone as brightly as the rest. It was very much her afternoon. Her slave girl was a success. They were having to believe…

The bright idea caught on. The demand became vociferous. They needed a male: to watch him gasp and squirm beneath the captive lips that held such skill. To see him reduced as they had been by a naked girl in chains. Miranda sensed that it would not matter to them who that male might be. But Ted was their only hope in this house. She could not imagine him consenting to such a show. But then, who could tell…! She cared little. Her part in it was nothing she had not done many times. There would have been a greater thrill for them if they themselves drew lots to see who had the honor, or degradation, of servicing a rampant male. But she dared not voice the thought. The task would

be hers. She looked at her Mistress for confirmation.

Tess was radiant. She kissed her slave and whispered: “Go and get him, darling. But don’t tell him why. He’s in his study writing letters.” She laughed. “He’s probably got the door locked. But don’t let him fob you off. If you come back without him I’ll toss you to these wolves. On your way, darling…” She kissed her slave girl lovingly and returned to her guests.

In human affairs it is hard to pinpoint the birth of a wish, or an idea, or a conviction. Often it is the coalescence of many emotions that can transmit to the tongue or to the limbs a word or act afterwards considered involuntary. ‘Why did I do that!’ you ask. But you do not know.

It was thus with Miranda. Without pause, without thought, she turned not towards the study but into the big hall and out of the front door. There was no one to see a naked girl in chains clink her way down the stone steps to where the several cars stood awaiting their tipsy owners. She picked a model she remembered and placed herself behind the wheel. It was incredible! Her chains and her handcuffs impeded nothing. Her feet found the pedals, her fingers turned the key. Without a backward glance she drove down the ragged drive and on to the road. She pushed the accelerator further and further down. The car leaped forward. Her heart sang a paean of exultation.

Her mind feverishly computed. Her chained feet found the

pedals easily, no problem there. The handcuffs were more difficult. They accommodated the steering wheel and the ignition with surprising ease. She could drive without being aware of them. But unless she stopped the car it would be dangerous to manipulate windows or use the hand brake. Her heart sang. She needed nothing but to go, go, go!

But where! Even that decision was easy. She reviewed all other possibilities with a quick scan and headed toward Patricia. Miranda needed Patricia as a ship needs a harbor in a storm. Pat or Wilbur Herman. If only she could go to Wilbur! But that was done. She set the wish from her mind. Patricia was her goal. Patricia would look after anything: even an irate Mr. Hansard.

Thought of Ted was frightening. Suppose he used a faster ear and a greater knowledge of the roads and caught her! She quailed. Her punishment would be beyond imagining. Afterwards there would just be dungeons or cells and double chains. But it was an unlikely chance. Surely she would be miles upon her way before her absence was discovered.

How thankful she was that she had not been bound in the darkness of the boot when Ted transported her. She knew where she was and where she was going. Her main concern was to stay on the side roads where red lights would not disclose her nakedness. This need was aided by an amusing feature of English motoring in that there are

many ways of getting anywhere. A village may be mentioned on many signs, not all pointing in the same direction, but any of them if followed long enough will take you there. Miranda followed the devious arrows and before nightfall was honking at the Park Gates. The Gates that she and Persis had entered in happy innocence so very long ago. Her heart was thumping.

Blessing allowed himself one raised eyebrow and an interested smile of enquiry before he was soundly kissed by a chained girl who clinked her way to the study and a whirlwind embrace by ecstatic female arms.

“The silly ass phoned an hour ago,” Patricia laughed delightedly. “He wants you put in a dungeon and simply loaded with chains so you can’t move. He says you must be made of quicksilver. Welcome home, darling.”

The loving took a long while. When it was done, Miranda asked the inevitable question.

“No.” Patricia declared decisively. “He will not get you back. He let you escape. In Mr. Benson’s eyes that’s unforgivable. Just imagine if it had been some other girl than you. By now there would be policemen all over the place.” She put her hands on the escapee’s shoulders.

“Was it very bad, darling?”

Miranda told her.

They mingled their tears and their love. Then spent an

amused half hour with an intrigued Fred Bates while he cut away the chains and the handcuffs for which they had no keys. Miranda wanted nothing upon her flesh that had been part of her servitude to the Hansard pair. When that was done, the slave girl asked a boon. “Patricia, may I run around the Lake like this, naked, no bonds? It’s something I want to do terribly.”

The two of them ran together. Two laughing white naiads utterly free in the twilight of evening. For a little while Miranda believed she had never known such happiness. It would be another of the memories that never die.

Over dinner they became practical. “I phoned Mr. Benson right away,” Patricia announced. “You are to stay here with me. You are mine. Understand that, darling: I own you.” Her eyes sparkled. “I shall whip you three times a day and love you all night. Tomorrow morning your former owner will arrive breathing fire. I will deal with him. In fact I’ve thought up something rather amusing…”

Miranda knew a great welling of gratitude. What contrasts her life had brought! This was one of them. The miasma of Tess’ Tea party dissolved. Memory of the whipping of her feet would remain vivid all her life, but it was removed by distance. The glorious run round the Lake had brought her back into a strange and wonderful world where she belonged. She felt this belonging with every fiber of her being and was glad. “But when you get married, Pat, what then?”

“Oh, we thought of that. Mr. Benson has two ideas. You refuse to take my job, so be an assistant to whoever does take it. Then, too, he says that if by some happy chance a buyer shows up: someone who you are just made to order for, why not look him over?”

Miranda shuddered. “Must I be sold?”

“Not to anyone who has not been vetted by all three of us!”

Patricia declared fiercely. “Mr. Benson is angry with himself over the mistake he made with Hansard.”

“But how can we ever know?” Miranda asked gloomily.

Patricia nodded in understanding. “It isn’t easy. I’d so much sooner you take over from me. You belong here. This has become your home. It’s a sort of natural. But if we set that project aside we have to take another look at you and what you expect from life. Fact is, darling, we made you into a slave girl. But not just us. In the end and over there with Susan you made yourself. You wanted to be the best damn slave girl this place ever produced. You succeeded. You are absolutely stunning. You possess a tremendous pride in what you are. Probably that’s your psychological block against my job: too great a contrast.” She gave her companion an amused querying grin. “I bet you still have a lovely dream about being purchased by a fairy Prince?”

Miranda wept. “I wanted Wilbur. I had him. He had me. Now he’s gone. It’s all over.”

“Don’t take it so, pet. I could kick Wilbur myself. But look at Persis and her handsome Major. That worked out.”

“All men want me for is to whip me,” Miranda wailed.

“There’s some women who’d be grateful for even that.” Patricia laughed. “Dry your tears, pet. We have a lovely collection of little bottoms in stock right now, you know some of ’em. I’d suggest you work a few frustrations of them for the next few days. Most of them need it. You can also give them sage advice. It could be an amusing time. But right now you are too tired to think. Come on, I’m taking you to bed. I might even let you sleep.”

It was a situation that would have horrified most girls. But Miranda was amused. She wanted to giggle. But it would never do for the dungeon door to open and disclose a giggling captive. Patricia, while chaining her, had warned about a properly downcast mien.

Miranda was chained naked in a dungeon. Much thought had gone into her preparation. Patricia had insisted on her being totally beautiful, and had spent much time with the arts of women to that end. The result was striking and erotically vivid. She stood with her back against the stone. Her arms were raised and stretched to form the letter ‘Y’. Her wrists were chained to keep her only slightly on her toes. She was very beautiful. Patricia had gasped, almost in envy, as she stepped back and surveyed what she had

done. “Give the silly twit an erection,” she prophesied inelegantly.

For once, the waiting was fun. It was well worth the discomfort. How heart warming it was to know the keys to her chains, and very heavy and cruel chains they were, rested in Patricia’s pocket. Not even six angry men could tear her from her prisonment against the stone. She found herself with a sanctuary wish that she might be chained in such ways for all time so long as it was Patricia who controlled the locks. A dungeon in which a girl was placed with love could be a refuge. She tensed happily against the heavy iron that secured her. Then tensed again as she heard the awaited sound. Instantly, as rehearsed, she allowed her head to droop in a simulation of weariness and lost hope.

“We realize she has to be punished.” Patricia was saying briskly. “We’ve had her chained up like this since she walked in on us. But, of course, we arn’t through with her yet.”

The actress Miranda tiredly lifted her head and gazed blankly at her visitors. When her eyes focused on Ted Hansard they opened wide in horror and she tugged madly at the chains which held and exposed her with such finality. Ceasing the hopeless struggle, she stood at bay, panting. Cecil B. de Mille would have applauded.

“Regular little bitch,” said Ted pleasantly.

“We had thought her a very nice girl,” Patricia offered diffidently.

“Where’s those chains and handcuffs?” Mr. Hansard demanded aggrieved.

“Chains and handcuffs!” Patricia was astounded. “You mean… they were on her when she escaped?”

“Too right they were!” Their visitor exploded. “Damn girl’s a bloody Houdini.”

“Miranda is very versatile.” There was a touch of hauteur in her voice.

“She’s going to be a lot more than versatile when I get her home!” Ted affirmed vehemently.

“But, Mr. Hansard, Miranda is home.”

Patricia’s small bomb hissed and sparkled for a moment before its explosion was digested.

“What d’you mean by that?” Hansard asked bleakly.

“Miranda is staying here. As you can see, she is safely contained.”

“You trying to tell me you’re keeping this damn girl?” Ted asked angrily, his eyes fierce.

“What other choice have we, Mr. Hansard,”

“Don’t try and twist me. The other choice is to tie her up

tight. I'll do the job myself. Bung her in the back of my car, and that's the last you'll see of her. I guarantee you that!" Ted was spoiling for a fight.

"We can not allow that, Mr. Hansard," Patricia said gently. "The risks are too great. You have shown yourself unable to cope with them. I have questioned Miranda and understand she has made one abortive escape and one successful one since you purchased her. Supposing she had gone to the police. You would now be in a cell seeking bail."

"So would you!"

"True! One more reason for not placing our merchandise in your care."

He glared at the chained girl. "Damn fine act you put on when I picked you up. Butter wouldn't melt in your mouth; wouldn't try to escape; ride with me in the front seat… Bitch!"

"How many times you sold her?" He demanded of Patricia.

She ignored his innuendo. "Mr. Benson is prepared to refund half your money now and the other half in one year's time provided you have caused no embarrassment in the interim."

"Half!" It was a bellow.

"The offer is generous. Consider it. We do not have to give you a penny. In fact, by your behavior you have forfeited

our goodwill. In fact, Mr. Hansard, we cannot understand you: whipping Miranda's feet. That was pure brutality."

"She belonged to me, didn't she," he said sullenly.

"She might have belonged to you still had you and your sister used her in such ways as her training befitted."

"Training! She needs her arse sliced!"

"She will be properly punished, Mr. Hansard. But not by the bastinado." Patricia's voice dripped contempt.

Ted Hansard deflated. "I suppose you're right. The offer is generous." He lapsed into thought. His chameleon quality asserted itself and he became again the shy gauche young man they had first known. "Damn disappointing do all round." He looked from Patricia to the chained girl. There was suddenly a pathetic longing in his eyes for something his money had not purchased. "Never did get off on the right foot…" It was as though he was thinking aloud.

The two girls said nothing. But looked at him with faint sympathy now that his bombast was gone. Miranda, still playing her role of weary desuetude watched through eyelashes bent and hopeless. She sensed that he desired her. His need was an aura reaching out to touch something no longer his.

He shifted awkwardly. "Would have liked one decent show… Tess messed things up, didn't she. Never did see what I thought I'd bought…"

Miranda was lost. She might condemn herself later. But at that moment there, was but one thing to do. It was a strange mixture of emotions, but principally generosity and pride. She knew that Pride was the main ingredient of her surrender. She looked helplessly at a Patricia who had read her thoughts. “Pat, may I? Please? Just once to show him.” She had a sudden inspiration. “You too. I mustn’t be alone with him. I’ll serve you both… up in the special room?”

“You’re incurable,” said Patricia. But there was laughter in her voice.

“Can she talk to you like that? I mean’s she’s being punished isn’t she?” Ted looked at Patricia. He was far at sea. “What is it she wants to do? Do you let her ask for things?” He sounded indignant.

“You silly twit! The girl’s offering herself to you for one final glorious production, just to show you that you could have had your money’s worth if you’d had any sense, and maybe if you didn’t have a sister,” Patricia added.

“You mean you’re going to let me punish her?”

“Not in your way, Mr. Hansard.

“It will be in my way,” Miranda told him with immense pride.

That she was about to suffer a good deal of pain there could be no doubt. Yet Miranda’s heart sang as she mixed

and served the drinks. Ted was deeply sunk in an arm chair once more the little boy lost. Patricia, too, was seated, but with the air of a lawyer exercising a watching brief. The slave girl knelt before each in turn with her small tray and its glasses. Mr. Hansard disposed of his with a rapidity denoting deep emotion.

Miranda gave no pause. No sooner was his glass relinquished when she was on her knees between his legs. Her fingers were nimble. A moment later his sex was firmly held between her teeth. As Patricia had foretold, it was indeed erect.

Patricia began to be involved. She could not fail to be amused by the play of shock and salacity on the features of her guest. Miranda dealt with his manhood with verve and confidence, making a tremendous play of cleaning up with her tongue afterwards. Mr. Hansard watched in a daze of embarrassment. He had lost all initiative.

“That was wicked of me, wasn’t it, Master. I’m a naughty girl.” Miranda handed him the slender riding crop. “Perhaps three on my bottom, Master,” she pleaded.

She bent over exquisitely. First stretching up on tip-toe, then coming forward as in a dive. Ted Hansard gasped. But under the watchful eye of Patricia delivered only three very moderate inflictions.

Miranda knelt before him and looked up adoringly into his bemused eyes. “Oh, thank you, thank you, Master. You

were very kind. I deserved much worse than that. Are you sure you should not give me another?"

"Noooo—" He waved his hand in a vague gesture. Both girls knew he was inhibited by the presence of Patricia.

More drinks. Patricia nursed hers. But, once again Ted's disappeared. "You're a bloody beautiful girl." He shook his head in a strange sorrow.

"Oh, thank you, Master!" It was as though he had imparted to his slave a momentous discovery. Miranda stood before him and posed in every provocative posture she could devise. She tickled her painted nipples. "Do you like these, Master? And this." She parted her legs wide and opened the tender lips within her pubic hair, one index finger on each. "See Master! My love thing." It was as though she, too, had made a discovery.

She played her game until it had achieved its result. She dived within his legs and once more ate of the fruit a man can offer to female lips. The protest he had started trailed away. Patricia watched his little death with the eye of a connoisseur.

"I'm quite incorrigible, Master." There were almost tears in the voice that acknowledged a non existent fault. "I'm so bad! I wish I was a better girl. I've done it again. Please whip me. Three more please."

Miranda bent over in her best manner. She hoped Mr.

Hansard was not seeing more than one of her bottom. She suddenly gasped from an unexpectedly severe cut. Evidently Ted was getting the range. She looked up and sideways with glowing eyes. “Oh that was splendid,” she breathed. “Do you think you could get the next one a bit lower down where it will hurt more.” It was obvious she knew herself in the hands of a master.

In an effort to oblige, Ted took a mighty swing that missed her bottom altogether and cut into the top of her thighs.

Patricia winced and closed her eyes. The recipient of the stroke flared her nostrils, flinched and gasped. A cane upon the thighs is a truly terrible pain. For a moment Miranda doubted her ability to hold position, doubted the wisdom of what she was doing. But Pride held and came up smiling while the waves of awfulness rippled through her flesh. “You are clever. Just exactly right,” she breathed. Ted took a deep breath and struck again.

She was glad it was the last of the three. She would play for a rest. Ruefully rubbing her wealed flesh, she looked deeply into Ted’s eyes and told him he was the most able man with a cane in the British Isles. “You hurt me beautifully.” She ended, “May I kiss your hand, Master?”

Graciously he permitted the homage. The watching Patricia found it hard to judge how much of his bafflement was from the drinks or from Miranda. They were a potent combination for any man. He looked at the slave girl al-

most with worship. Miranda served more drinks.

“May I have a drink, please, Master?”

“Don’t give her one,” counseled Patricia mischievously.

“Ah, but she has earned it,” Mr. Hansard marveled fervently.

“Thank you, Master.” She shot a reproachful glance at her beloved and stuck out her tongue.

“Oh! Did you see that, Mr. Hansard?” Patricia cried in mock shock. “She stuck out her tongue at me.”

Miranda took two large and hasty gulps. She was sure she would need them. Kneeling before her master and mistress she admitted her fault. “I’m terribly impudent, Master. I don’t know what gets into me.”

“This is going to get into you.” Patricia picked up the slender withe. She smiled tenderly at her naughty girl. “Over you go, darling.” She turned deferentially to Mr. Hansard. “You don’t mind?”

“Not at all.” He assured her in a lordly fashion as though there was enough of Melinda’s bottom for both. He poured down the drink to join the others and prepared to watch.

Miranda was apprehensive. Patricia knew where to hurt. Patricia was also slightly disapproving of the whole performance. The slave girl suspected she was about to be

taught a lesson.

Patricia was not cruel. But she managed a twist of the crop so that its tip found its way where Miranda had no wish for it to go. She was made to part her legs and was then whipped on one cheek at a time so that the tip had plenty of scope for its seeking into the secret crevice. “Let that be a lesson to you,” she said severely after the fourth.

“Isn’t she wonderful,” Miranda breathed as she offered Ted a further potion. “Girls always know where to hurt girls.”

Ted looked at them both as though not believing what he saw.

“Dear Mr. Hansard, I’m sure you’d enjoy eating Miranda.” Patricia cooed at her victim. “Come, come, Miranda. Stand up straight and spread your legs.”

The command was unexpected. But Miranda did as bid, clasping her hands behind her neck to give herself fully exposed to the man who would enjoy her. She sensed amusement.

Ted exhibited shock. Miranda guessed that had it not been Patricia who gave the command he might have refused the honor so attractively presented. There were streaks of prudishness in Ted. But his respect for his hostess was great, and there is always the factor of curiosity. “She tastes very sweet, Mr. Hansard,” Pat encouraged invitingly. Her eyes intent on his hesitation.

Mr. Hansard knelt. The slave girl moved forward so that he must either retreat or perform his task. He essayed the latter.

Telling of it later, Pat always insisted that during the affray Miranda's face showed nothing but boredom. Ted's assault upon her sex was uninformed and productive of much motion on his part with very little result. Possibly he needed a chart with the clit marked by an 'X'. He finally gave up the battle from sheer exhaustion. He had put his tongue where his mouth was without profit.

"Oh thank you, darling Master!" Miranda effervesced as I though she had enjoyed six orgasms.

"Pleasure, I'm sure," Ted acknowledged, sinking back in his chair.

"Now how would you like to do me?" Patricia asked impishly.

Mr. Hansard tensed as though from a blow. He was obviously unprepared for such an honor. Rising to his feet, he fell flat on his face. "I'm over here, Mr. Hansard," Pat lilted seductively.

He found her and buried his face in pubic hair. "I say, you must be shedding," he complained, extracting wiry hairs from off his tongue, but returning instantly to the fray. "See if you can find my clit," Pat suggested. "It's not all that far back."

But the treasure escaped him. Finally he fell backwards on the floor. The two girls dragged him back and on to his chair.

“I’m so sorry, Master.” Miranda was again between his legs looking adoringly into his befuddled features. “That was all my fault. I really am a bad slave girl. You won’t mind whipping me again, will you?”

“Always a pleasure to whip you,” Ted mumbled. He was a gentleman to the last. He accepted the whip and looked at it as though it was Webster’s dictionary.

“I think you should whip me in a girl’s most intimate place now,” Miranda whispered as though to be overheard would be disastrous. “You know, between my legs.”

He brightened. “Lead the way,” he said gallantly.

Miranda lay on her back. She winked at Patricia. Then turned to the tipsy male as she flung wide her lovely legs. “There, Mr. Hansard,” she panted. “Isn’t that beautiful! It’s all yours.”

Ted looked at Nirvana. Perhaps he sensed that ten million males would give all they possessed to stand in his shoes.

“It’s a lovely cunt.” He said and struck. The crop left a scarlet wound across Miranda’s most feminine place. Mr. Hansard sank slowly to the floor.

The two giggling girls carried him to his car. They started it

and drove it on to the road. They parked it on the side, well distant from the gate and walked back to the house.

“Wasn’t it gorgeous,” Patricia laughed. “I was angry at you at first. But you had the right idea. He’ll regret you all his life.”

“Now I’m horny!” Miranda wailed.

“We’ll look after that, darling.” Patricia took her by the hand.

* * *

The days passed. Happy days. Two girls together. For one a wedding on the horizon. For the other a kind of freedom she had never known. Miranda was in wonderland. Sometimes Patricia whipped her. They both adored such exquisite moments of communion. So long as the whip was wielded by someone she loved Miranda was insatiable. She was jolted out of her Lotus Land one morning by Patricia’s bland announcement:

“He’s found a buyer for you, darling.”

Female eyes exchanged questions and answers. They had no need of words. Miranda entered desolation. “When does it happen?” She asked tonelessly.

“He’ll join you when ready. He came with a letter from Mr. Benson. He’s waiting for you. Go naked, of course. He’ll want to see what he’s getting, just as that other one did. But make yourself beautiful. I’m inclined to think this one has a bit more appreciation. Before you go down to him come back and get yourself handcuffed. I think it’s appropriate.”

Miranda did it all in a daze of misery. She wanted to stay with Pat, always. But she was sold, sold, sold. She made herself very beautiful indeed because Patricia wanted her to.

When the handcuffs closed upon her wrists their eyes met.

Patricia’s were bright with hope, Miranda’s dull with despair. She looked at the steel that joined her hands. It was symbolic of her future: chains and slavery. Patricia hugged her very tight. She was crying. Patricia fled towards another slavery. Her eyes were dry. Her emotion was too deep for tears.

In the special room she went immediately to the bar. She poured a drink for the man who might or might not buy her. But a large one for herself. She had quaffed half of it in desperate gulps when she heard the sound of the door. She turned and started forward to kneel as she must do. Then stopped, frozen in astonishment.

The man who had closed the door and stood looking at her with enigmatic eyes was Wilbur Herman.

For moments they stood drinking in the sight of each other. Then with a cry of pure delight Miranda, forgetting all else, flew into the arms that reached for her and raised her from the floor in a bear hug during which she somehow managed to clasp her cuffed hands behind his neck and glue her mouth to his in a kiss that had no end. Carrying his naked prize as though she was weightless Wilbur set her down beside the bar.

"Honey," he said. "You was pouring a drink. Make it two! I ain't never wanted one worse than I do now."

In a maze of happiness Miranda obeyed. She would have obeyed this man no matter what he wanted of her. It was not until their glasses had met in a toast "To the goddarnest best little gal' I ever seen!" and the drink half consumed that she remembered and wailed in agony: "Oh Wilbur, there's a man coming." She blushed absurdly, but had to finish, "He, he… wants to buy me."

Wilbur Herman gave his own gargantuan roar of laughter. "Damn right he does, Honey! And he's right here." He gave her a playful dig in the tummy. "What's it feel like to be bought and paid for?"

Her blush deepened. She saw him as all the Gods of old rolled into one. "You mean…? You actually…?" She could not put so precious a thought into common words.

"I do mean. And yes I actually…," he mocked her. "You're bought and paid for and hog-tied for delivery. Ain't no es-

cape for you. I can do whatever I like…"

This time the hug lasted much longer. When he set her down again he tilted her chin and asked directly into her eyes: "Will you marry me?"

It was all too much. Miranda did her best. But her heart was thumping, she was consumed with joy. Thought crowded on thought. Question on question. "Yes I will!" she said. "And what about Susan?"

"I been a goldarned fool," said Wilbur Herman.

They were seated now. He in the big armchair, she on the floor with her head resting on his knee. She made sounds of denial.

"I been an absolute bastard," said Wilbur with conviction.

More sounds of denial.

"To think I'd do what I done to you. Must'a needed my head examined." His huge hand stroked her hair. "Ain't never been no one but you ever since that first day I roped you. Beats all what a jackpot a man gets hisself in over women."

"But Susan?" Miranda had to know.

"Don't you worry none about Susan, Honey. Sure, she and I think a Hell of a lot of each other. Wouldn't never see no harm come to that little girl. But it ain't like you and me. I should'a knowed that. Anyway, little Susan done real good

for herself. She's the new Directress. Benson appointed her today. She'll do Pat's job, and she'll do it damn well. Pat's a'going to marry old Benson, the old son of a gun."

"But won't Susan be hurt? I mean… is she happy?"

"No, she won't be hurt, and you're damn right she's happy. Think of it. That job's made for her."

Miranda thought. It was true. Susan was perfect. She felt a great relief. Susan would be happy.

"But why marry me?" she asked genuinely puzzled. "I belong to you. I wouldn't run away."

Wilbur Herman shook his head as though he too was puzzled by so inconsistent an abandonment of his principles. "Must have holes in my head," he admitted cheerfully, "but I thought about this a lot. Sure I got you as a slave, and don't think I don't like it that way. But I can't haul you around the world on a chain, even if it's an invisible chain. Ain't got much in the way of kin. So I need someone to leave with what I got. Someone to look after my house and look after me. Dammit, I suppose I just plain want a wife to be proud of. You was always about the most beautiful thing I ever seen." He added as a sort of afterthought: "Be a lot nicer for you, wouldn't it, Honey?"

Miranda's shining eyes were his answer. But, she told him gravely: "First I'm your slave. I'll always be your slave. I want to be your slave more than I want to be your wife. I

can't help this. It's something I have just discovered about myself. Always make me know I'm your slave. Don't ever let me pull too many female tricks on you. Keep Sarah where she is and send me down to her whenever you think I ought to go. Promise?"

"Funny you ask that. Sure I promise. Guess I knowed about it all the time. See what I brought you."

Miranda gasped with joy. They were the jeweled emblems of slavery she had envied on Susan. Wilbur fastened them tenderly on her neck and on her ankles. They were exquisite.

"Now all that's understood," Wilbur said with resolution. "I'm asking you properly: Will you marry me?"

"Of course I will!"

"Stick your hand out then."

"Leave the handcuffs on. Please!"

"Damn right I leave 'em on. Pat give me the key. That's something you won't ever get your hot little hands on. I know you love wearing them things. I like 'em on you too. But there may be times when you'd like to get 'em off. It won't do you no good. They only come off when I'm damn good and ready to take 'em off. O.K.?"

Miranda glowed.

“That ain’t what I wanted your hand for.” He fumbled in his pocket and pulled out a small case. “Let’s try this on for size, Sweetheart.”

It was quite the biggest and most expensive engagement ring Miranda had ever seen. It fitted her finger perfectly as she had known it would. The man and the woman clung together for a long time.

“Happy?” Wilbur asked.

The shining brightness of her eyes were his answer. Miranda had never believed such happiness possible or that it would come to her.

Slowly and sensuously she got to her feet. Standing well before his chair she raised her chained hands above her head, rose upon her toes and stretched her nakedness provocatively to its full perfection. She stood thus for a minute so that he who had bought her could see every secret of the treasure he owned. Demurely she pleaded:

“Take me home, Master.”

Wilbur Herman picked up his naked slave and carried her from the room.