

CHAINS Of JEDRAH

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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By

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They were being sorted. Dark eyes gleamed contemptuously as the rifle barrels pointed their directives with a calm and certain precision. The DC-9 sat sadly in the sand like an abandoned house, robbed of the passengers and crew from which it had drawn life, its gun-compelled landing a thing of horror to remember. Even the desert was sad, without majesty or menace it was simply dreary. The welcoming committee was numerous and nondescript and like the land itself. They had come from nowhere to this place in jeeps and trucks and a Volkswagen. There was even a camel. There was not a building in sight.

There were a few guttural words behind the guns. But it was the man in the Saville Row clothes and the kaffiyeh whose English was lucid, direct and frightening.

"You will obey or be shot. Resistance means instant death. We have no time for heroes."

His eyes roved up and down the ranks. In them, too, was the faint contempt for a race whose day was past. "Cooperation can save your lives and earn you comfort. We do not wish to kill. We are about to dispose of you as suits our convenience. Please obey. Please ask no questions. The men have orders to be brutal." He turned impatiently away to confer with an aide.

Standing alone where the automatic rifle had shepherded her, Stacie cherished no illusions of heroics. Her fear was but slightly modified when she was joined by a girl from the passengers and a stewardess. The three exchanged bewildered glances and watched.

The elderly and infirm were now being prodded back into the plane, they accounted for half the total. One more young woman was extracted from the ranks and sent to join the trio. Her eyes asked a question they could not answer. The balance of the passengers were marshalled in a line. Among them a woman raised her voice.

"What are you going to do with those four girls?"

The impeccably attired director of activities was curt and brief. "You were told: no questions." He irritably surveyed the feminine quartet and conferred with a cohort. "We have no interest in them," he announced brusquely. "They are free to go. There is a village beyond the farthest hill, a couple of miles. It will provide their needs." He turned and glared at the four young and frightened faces. "Go!" He waved an impatient arm. "Begone, you are lucky."

Feminine bewilderment deepened. "Walk out in the desert, alone . . . like this!" the stewardess protested.

"Would you prefer to join the hostages?"

The word itself was chilling. The eyes of the four girls roved from one horror to another in a dilemma they were ill equipped to deal with. The leader observed their hesitations with what may have been sympathy, but sounded more like impatience.

He turned and shouted: "Salim!"

Stacie judged the gangling youth to be no more than thirteen. He was attired in tattered remnants and seemed composed entirely of large liquid eyes and a wide ingratiating smile. Words flew back and forth.

"The boy will guide you." The brief words dismissed them.

The august personage returned his attention to more pressing affairs.

"Am fine young man, a most good guide." Salim beamed at his four responsibilities with immense panache. "Am talking such fine American."

Stacie looked at her companions. They were as baffled as herself. Shrugs were exchanged. With a final longing glance at the hi-jacked plane they turned to follow the Arab boy across the sand. When the staccato commands and clash of equipment fell well behind them, the stewardess summed up their sentiment. "I don't like it! Makes no sense . . ."

"Where are we?"

"This has to be Jedrah, not that that's any help."

"Is Jedrah," Salim confirmed with pride. "Much fine place."

Traversing the first undulation to rob them of backward glances at the plane, Stacie knew unreality. Four white girls and an Arab boy walking in the desert on a track that was no more than a few weaving tire impressions, destination unknown. It was hard to feel relief at what might or might not be a reprieve.

One of the passengers gave her companions a half-hearted grin. "Has it occurred to you girls: we're not a bad looking collection. In fact we're four damn good looking females. Add that to the place we're in and this fool walk, and I get an answer I don't like."

"Harems?"

"That or worse. I know it sounds silly, but is it!"

Sensing the dolor of his charges, Salim made a cheerful suggestion. "You fine ladies please to show me your tits."

It was like being asked to produce your passport. Stacie repressed a giggle.

"Drop dead, kid," the stewardess was emphatic.

Salim was unabashed. "Arab girls wear much clothes," he explained equably. "American girls have little cover up. Lovely tits stick out front. Salim much like to see real thing."

Stacie once more wanted to giggle. The mammary equipment of herself and her companions was admittedly well in evidence. Perhaps, by his own codes, Salim's request was reasonable. "We don't show them either," she told him, not unkindly.

"Well then, just one girl take off all clothes so Salim see."

"Hey, kid, where d'you get the idea?"

Salim looked surprised. "On fine movies. All American girls undress. Much naked."

A couple of actual giggles acknowledged his point. But retorts were halted by a fresh vista, they had topped a rise. "Where's this lousy village?" a passenger asked fretfully.

"Is much close," Salim reassured. "Ah see! Soon we beg ride."

Half a mile distant a small van stood lonely in the vast landscape. Its hood was up, two or three figures seemed busily engaged. Little as it might be, it conveyed an encouraging impression of life. "Will give us nice ride." Salim pride-fully took credit for the apparition.

A dusty trudge disclosed two men and a girl, all Arab. The men were as faceless as their land, but the girl in jeans and T-shirt might have stepped off an American sidewalk. All wore guns. Salim engaged them in a chatter of Jedrah. "We have fine ride," he announced jubilantly.

The four girls were examined by eyes in which there was none of Salim's effervescence. "My name is Rannah," the girl announced without cordiality. "I do not like you, but you will ride." She opened the back of the vehicle and climbed within.

What happened then was pure nightmare. Stacie would always look back at it as the beginning. She followed the first girl to where Rannah offered an inviting hand. As her companion climbed aboard she beheld a thing that held her rooted and, for a moment, speechless. Running the length of the van were bench seats, fixtures, hard and uninviting, one on each side. Above them, fastened firmly to the sidewalls were the open jaws of handcuffs.

The girl about to take her seat saw them too. She also saw the look in Rannah's eyes. Without preamble she leaped from the open door and screamed: "Run!"

One of the men tripped the fleeing girl and struck her a brutal blow on the side of the head. She lay sprawled upon the sand, dazed. Two guns menaced the remainder of the quartet. "Stand still!" There was no mistaking the intent behind Rannah's command.

"You don't mean to use those things on us?" Stacie asked incredulously.

"Of course we do."

"But it's . . . it's . . . silly. All we want is a ride. We'll pay. Why do you want to . . . to fasten us?" She could not bring herself to use a less pleasant word for what she had seen.

The half-stunned girl was slowly getting to her feet, her fear-filled eyes seeing only the muzzles of the guns. She was prodded apart to stand alone.

"You do as we tell you or we shoot her," Rannah stated calmly. She gave her attention to the trembling hurt girl. "Understand? When the others are in the van

you'll get in too." Her gaze scanned the four of them. "We are prepared to kill one of you to make the surviving three accept what you must."

It was spine chilling. But Stacie tried: "But what must we accept! What do you want? We don't know."

Only Rannah's out-thrust arm stopped the swinging rifle barrel aimed at the girl who had the temerity to question.

"You need to know nothing. Do as you're told. Get in here." Seething in frustration and fear Stacie obeyed. Seated on the wooden seat she heeded the injunction of the hostile eyes and placed her left wrist gingerly within the open metal cuff. Rannah snapped the bands tight upon her. "Now the other!"

Stacie throttled her protest. Surely one prisoned wrist made her impotent enough for their need! But she was scared. Resignedly she delivered her right hand into a similar bondage. The clicking of the ratchets as they locked her wrist sounded a death knell to hope. This was neither aid nor deliverance. Miserably she watched her fellow captives similarly rendered helpless. She and the stewardess were locked by both wrists, the other two girls by one wrist only. It sufficed. Salim climbed in with them. Rannah left, the van door closed. "Now for nice ride," said Salim cheerfully.

The ride was far from nice. It was rough and without concern for the passengers, their prisoned wrists took the brunt of it, chafing against the unyielding metal as they braced themselves against the motion. Salim surveyed their distress benignly like a proud parent.

"Why do I have to have my wrists fastened?" the stewardess demanded of him irritably. "Can't you unlock one?"

Salim was shocked. "Oh, most bad to unlock. Salim not have key." He surveyed the situation pensively and came up with a shattering conclusion. "Is now most good, both your hands are fix. Salim can have fine look at tits."

As nearly as was possible within the van there fell a shocked silence before Stacie broke it angrily. "Leave her alone. You touch us and I'll report you."

"This report?" Salim examined the word. "You mean you tell what I do." He guffawed heartily. "Everybody much laugh, they not care."

"Come near me and I'll kick you where it hurts," his victim threatened.

"Salim could tie nice feet." He pointed to a coil of thin rope looped in the framework.

Stacie knew the chill of something more than fear. The boy's very innocence told how far they were from their own world. Naiveté and brutality side by side were to be feared, reason would not touch them. Salim was lifting down the rope.

"No! Don't tie my feet." The stewardess sought frantically for inspiration and, finding none, capitulated. "Oh, go ahead!" she said disgustedly. "I don't suppose it will kill me." Nodding toward her neighbor she sought to cut her loss. "Let her do it, she's got a free hand?"

"Very hot dog!" Salim was intrigued. "Right now, quick." She, on whom had fallen the task of baring a girl's breasts, found it more difficult than supposed. Her single wrist was rigidly held, and the uncertain motion of the vehicle added its own hazard, but she competently used the one hand vouchsafed her. "Dammit, with both your wrists fastened I'd have to tear too much," she said regretfully. "We may need these clothes, they're all we've got." She bestowed a look of infinite distaste on their guide: "Look, kid, with one hand I can uncover one of mine without tearing anything. Will that do?"

The beaming youth was enjoying his power. He scrutinized the swelling bulge being offered for his delectation. "Much O.K. Please to show now."

Stacie watched, sharing the shame, noting the tumescence of the Arab boy in his conquest. Even with a free hand the donor of a girl's flesh found her task difficult. She twisted and squirmed, tugging constantly at her locked wrist in an instinctive need. She grinned sheepishly at her tense companions. "This is a helluva note," she said bitterly. "I've never been helpless like this before. It's twice as difficult as you'd think."

But she achieved her purpose. Scarlet and awkward, she brought into view the curved loveliness Salim desired. The boy's eyes glowed.

"Is not big tit," he complained.

Circumstance had denied erotic stimulation, the nipple was half inverted. Its owner gave her companions a despairing and disgusted shrug and proceeded to apply friction. The pink bud of flesh responded handsomely. Salim's eyes bulged at the phenomenon.

Having fulfilled her contract, the girl arranged her breast to give it full exposure, took away her hand and sat with flaming cheeks so that the concupiscent child of the desert might feast on his desire. The glances she exchanged with the other girls held a faint amusement: there was something pathetically absurd in her predicament.

But, of course, it did not end there. Salim sat next to the angry girl and used his hands in increasingly bold explorations that were obviously genuine in their curiosity as to the texture and nature of the firm flesh. Assiduously he plied his fingertip on the sacrificial nipple, but was unsuccessful in fostering further growth, it was already hard and sensitive. He was enraptured as with a glamorous toy. The girl sat staring fixedly at nothing.

From the female flesh, Salim graduated to the intricacies of the female garb, but found his desire for additional nudity frustrated by the captive hand. It was evident that had he possessed the key to the handcuff he would have used it, obviously he was hesitant to rip and tear.

Stacie could almost watch the inevitability of his thought.

She cringed as his eager gaze sought her own garments and those of the girl at her side. If one breast was vulnerable, surely there must be others! She fought down the impulse to kick at him as he approached. She did not want her feet tied, she was vulnerable enough. She knew the nature of what she wore could enable cunning fingers to untidily expose the twin cones by which the Arab youth was obsessed. Angrily she felt her nipples respond to the eroticism of the occasion.

She averted her face from the wide brown eyes and the full sensuous lips so close to hers as the increasingly knowledgeable fingers tugged and pulled and found the tiny fastenings that had been the frail armour of her nakedness. Even her bra was gently unclipped, so that she soon found herself with the flimsy materials tucked back over her prisoned arms and behind her neck. The sanctity of her breasts was lost to her, they stood out fully naked, her nipples pert and impudent. She was furiously conscious that, with her wrists fastened as they were, her chest thrust out its double glories as though in pride. She sat, flushed and fuming, as the boy's insatiable curiosity transferred itself to the girl who shared her bench.

It was absurd, ludicrous, shaming. Stacie knew she could laugh or weep, but beneath the surface there was fear. If a gawky boy could treat them thus, what might they expect from adults! Salim sat now like a pasha in his harem admiring the intimate attributes of his women. He had fondled and prodded to his heart's content at the total of five female breasts that were the harvest of his lechery.

"Are not all alike?" he questioned.

"Think you've been short changed?" the stewardess asked bitterly.

"Ah, but tits grow if tickle! Is not so with breast?"

"If it was, you'd have mine as big as a melon the way you've been at it," the last girl told him drily.

"Now that you've had a good look, can we get dressed again?" the first girl asked hopefully.

Their youthful guide waved away the request as palpably silly. "You not hurting," he proclaimed. "Salim like to see such good tits. You stay quiet or I tie." He motioned to the waiting rope.

Stacie loathed her dishabille. It seemed furtive and untidy, faintly obscene, yet she was helpless to correct it. She tried to adjust to the incredible: A few hours ago in the Hilton Hotel, now this! She wondered what her father would do if he could see her now. Certainly he would set forces in motion, but they would not be swift enough to cover his daughter's breasts within this speeding van. Her impotence was infuriating, she could touch no part of herself. Her clothes were every which way, her naked breasts proclaimed themselves. All she could do was sit and bear the lively scrutiny of a pubescent urchin. Every instinct forbade her passivity, her arms constantly asserted themselves and were foiled. Never in her life had she known bonds or restraints. The plight of her hands now held unreality, looking along the length of her arms she beheld her metal encircled wrists as belonging to someone else; that she be handcuffed like a criminal in transit was incomprehensible. The shining steel tight-clasping her flesh was, in its modernity, as incongruous here in the desert as the automatic rifles and the jeeps.

"You have nicest tits of all," Salim assured her grandly. Stacie was annoyed with herself for feeling proud.

It was a bitter moment when the van stopped. Now they would really be ogled! Sheepishly Salim tried to mend his fences, but the doors were opened while he was still fumbling with the first girl. Rannah laughed caustically, her companion with the

inevitable rifle leered appreciatively. "Those things will look better with a few whipmarks," she observed casually as she produced her key.

Whipmarks! On their breasts! Four pairs of female eyes focused on her sardonic regard. She chuckled at their dismay as she unlocked Stacie's hands. "Just you. Out!" she ordered briefly.

Solid ground felt good to Stacie's feet. Without asking or waiting to be told her hands flew to their task of repairing Salim's predation. She had no sooner achieved this much desired end than Rannah accepted a cord from her henchman and ordered. "I'm going to tie your hands. If you want to fight or run Fazzim will hit you with his gun."

It was part of the jig-saw taking shape. They were captive.

They would be given no freedom. Looking about her, Stacie saw they had entered a high walled Courtyard. She could run for the gate, but it would be futile. Hopelessly, and feeling foolish, she held out her hands.

"Behind your back!"

Only her total helplessness would appease! Fearfully Stacie turned her back and crossed her wrists, wryly remembering a hundred movies in which she had seen a heroine similarly bound. The cord bit and twisted savagely, its final knot was like the clanging of a prison door. It hurt and told her she was captive, a couple of testing tugs emphasised that she could never free herself. Once more it was a new and incredible sensation.

The next shock was the slamming of the doors of the van and the return of the man and his gun to the cab. The vehicle roared out of the Courtyard and disappeared. Rannah twisted a hand in the hair of the bound girl and tugged. "Make no trouble," she advised. "I can handle you like a kitten."

Stacie knew desolation. She had not even known the names of the other girls, but there had been comfort in their presence. Now she was alone, the fact was sinister. She took as quick a survey as Rannah would allow. What she saw spelt wealth and consequence, a private Oasis walled and tended, the building huge yet graceful, definitely Moorish. She had no way of knowing if it was an isolated palace or part of a community. Rannah gave an admonitory tug. "Come."

He sat in an open mezzanine, a shaded balcony above his patios and gardens, a pleasant place. He was sipping coffee. His robe was of Jedrah but his face was of the West, vaguely familiar, handsome and suave. He did not rise, but waved her to a chair across from him at the small table. "Please sit down, Miss Blair."

So he knew her! Silent and cautious the captive approached. Rannah had disappeared. Tentatively Stacie sat, her bound hands precluded grace. She would let him talk, she could protest later.

"Coffee?"

"Thanks, I'd like some. But my hands are tied behind my back."

He nodded appreciatively. "I will lift the cup to your lips. It will be a pleasure."

She would play it cool. Deliberately her voice was casual.

"Why not untie me so we may drink together in comfort?"

"I prefer you tied. It pleases me." His nonchalance outmatched hers.

Stacie watched him pour. She swallowed both her pride and the coffee when he raised the cup. She needed it.

"Young women find the loss of their hands difficult at first." His voice had a pleasing vibrancy, his English was perfect. Again there was the shadow of familiarity.

"You always tie the hands of your female guests?" She knew her sarcasm trite, but it was apt.

His smile was reflective. "More often than you might suppose," he acknowledged. "It is amusing to watch their reactions."

"I am tied too tight. It hurts."

"Of course, Rannah is most competent."

She knew herself played with. Seething, she kept silent.

"I am Mohammad Yasin," he said simply.

Another of the jig-saw pieces fell into place. She recognized him now! But he was as unbelievable as the rest of the nightmare. Yasin was Arab Oil. Yasin was a delegate at the United Nations, an Arab spokesman. Yasin was one of the most powerful men in the world. She should have been reassured, but she was not. "Would the Secretariat approve this . . . this . . . ?" She shrugged her strained shoulders eloquently.

"I am sure you are puzzled." His faintly amused courtesy was ill-matched with her bound hands. "I will bring you into the picture."

"Could I have more coffee?" Her demand was an assertion of herself. She also wanted the coffee.

Gravely, Mohammad Yasin went through the small ritual.

When he resumed his seat he continued without changing inflection: "I have brought you here to torture you."

Stacie let it sink in. It was too big to encompass in a single moment or with a quick exclamation. Was it opera bouffe or pure evil! For such a word there was no median. Fear was a cold presence within her spine. She looked at Yasin in wide eyed puzzlement.

His rich cool voice acknowledged her inability to respond.

"Not too long ago before we repossessed our Oil, my daughter little more than

a child, by odd mischance fell into the hands of a crew of rough-necks, all American, operating one of your father's drilling rigs. Fourteen of them raped her repeatedly throughout the day, poured crude oil over her nakedness as a parting gift and sent her on her way. I was not then as well known as now . . ."

He paused musingly. Stacie saw the whiteness of his clenched hands, and stilled her voice.

"My representations seeking justice, made direct to your father, were ignored or treated with ridicule or flatly rejected." He eyed Stacie quizzically. "Your father is a hard, biased and conceited man."

Stacie twisted against her tied wrists. Yasin's words made the cord seem tighter than before. She grudgingly conceded his judgment of her parent largely true. She could believe that a few years ago he would have treated the rape of a wog girl far away with amused contempt.

"And you'd punish me for this!" Her voice told her disbelief.

"Is it not fitting?"

Again the seeking to adjust, to comprehend reality. Her eyes were an appeal to reason. "But it's pure melodrama!"

He shrugged agreement. "Most of life is, my dear. That or farce. The division depends on where you live."

"My father will ransom me."

"I am sure he would." He waved the thought aside. "I have more money than he. True, he has some power and much wealth, but neither match my own. This leaves you as his only currency."

"But there'll be a tremendous fuss. The hi-jacking, the disappearances. Daddy will raise the roof in Washington over me . . . !" She probed for a weakness in his armour.

His amusement was genuine, "Let us consider, my dear, what Washington and your father face. The plane with its elderly is already well on its way to its normal destination. The group of passengers most likely to be of profit are in the hands of a guerrilla force for whom I hold some sympathy. Everyone is witness to the fact that you and your three companions were seen to be free and walking of your own will along a desert path without coercion. Conclusions will be drawn, none of them certain. You have disappeared. Who can tell with today's youth . . . perhaps from your own caprice." Yasin smiled. "A good deal of trouble, yes. But you will be worth it."

How neatly she had been sundered from her world! Fear was now rampant. "The other girls?" she asked. "Why them?"

"Your own word, dear child. Pure melodrama! They too are a currency rare and costly in the desert. I will admit to opportunism. It seemed a pity to waste them."

"But it's cruel . . . both them and their families . . . !"

"They have but joined the ranks of women through the ages."

"Have I . . . ?"

"No."

The single negative was fearful. Its implications vivid.

"You are going to kill me?"

Yasin seemed genuinely affronted. "My dear child! Give me credit for more finesse and for some appreciation of what you are. You are an unusually beautiful young woman. Your death would desolate me."

"But you used a word . . . !"

"Torture!" He laughed at her loathing of the word.

"Torture does not mean death. You could be tortured daily and live to be old. There are degrees . . . "

"This, this ugly word . . . is it physical?"

"Indubitably. You will scream. The mental is concomitant."

Reason rejected. Stacie tried to visualise. It was not possible! "But my father . . .. " She groped her way toward a strange conclusion. "He will believe me dead. You will have hurt him there, but without this . . . this personal thing . . . he won't know!" She gazed across the table in desperation. "You are going to hurt me to punish him, but he'll never know. That means you are going to be cruel only to punish me for something of which I'm innocent."

"Photos of you will be taken regularly. They will be mailed to him anonymously from around the world. He will share your pain." Yasin chuckled. "If political circumstances were favourable I might send you back to him after a few years. The marks on your skin would convey an eloquent testimony. So, my dear, you are but an instrument. I suspect I will like you and enjoy you as a person. I may have you taken to my bed. But nonetheless all those connotations of your ugly word will be made very real for you."

So neat, so logical! By Jedrahn standards so obvious! Here, women were not people. They were bodies to be used. If the body failed to please, the hands could be employed. Sometimes they might be allowed the exercise of their minds. But they had no will. Yasin had called her an instrument. Stacie began to feel like one. She understood why he kept her bound, the painful joining of her wrists engendered a state of mind which would eventually possess her entirely. Her voice was now an entreaty.

"I suppose I could grovel. I expect I will. Do you want me to grovel?"

"Hmmmmm . . . !" He took her question seriously. "I have to admit it would give me pleasure as a female act," he admitted slowly. "But if, at this juncture you

actually did it I would find my judgment of you at fault. I do not wish it as a specific end. When you do it, it will be coincidental to the rest of your condition."

Stacie stirred restlessly. "I suppose you can understand how nearly impossible it is for me to assimilate this . . . this horror. I'm trying. I want to be rational with you. But you're so . . . so civilized. I can't equate you with torture." She shook her head as though to rid it of illusion. "I can't equate myself. I just can't believe it! These cords round my wrists tell me something is terribly wrong. But that's all."

The voice of Mohammad Yasin was warm with sympathy.

"My dear, I am honoured that you wish our communication to be realistic. Do not concern yourself with this point. Reality will come. Face it then."

"When am I to be tortured? I mean, when does it start?" He shrugged.

"It does not matter. It is not today." Stacie frowned in concentration. "I'm sitting here in this pleasant place, my hands are tied behind my back so they hurt, and there you are, normal and polite. I'm half expecting this to be all a joke and that you'll burst out laughing and the other girls come bouncing in and you'll untie me." Again she twisted in frustration. "It makes it hard for me to ask what I want to, it sounds so silly and impossible and out of context. But this torture . . . ! What exactly will be done to me?"

"You will be completely naked."

He watched her flinch. But she did not move or speak. "You will be whipped often. If it serves a purpose you will be ceremonially flogged."

Yasin saw now that her features were drawn, but she was still concentrating, seeking to visualise, striving to comprehend.

"You will be suspended by your thumbs." Her eyes were still lost in disbelief.

"Needles will be thrust under your nails." A brief pause.

"You will be branded. You will straddle The Horse." The quiet words without emphasis or anger ware like small blows at her inmost being. By their very simplicity they became believable. She raised her eyes to him, inviting the worst.

"Fiction and history have told you of many things. In the course of time they will happen to you. Those that end in maiming or death will be modified. I tell you, not as a gesture of mercy but of common sense, you will know pain but not injury, To me you are a jewel of great price, save for your torture you will be treated as such. You will be neither crippled nor invalid."

"You said naked . . . ! In front of men?"

"That bothers you! You wear a bikini yet you ask that question?"

To be flogged, yet first query nudity! Stacie wryly recognized disproportion. "Yes, it bothers me."

"Yousef is a man. He will sometimes deal with you. You will not be displayed

naked for male eyes other than within the boundaries of your life here."

"Am I to be . . . violated?"

Her choice of the word amused. "Just by me." He said drily. "Only by some unusual circumstance would I grant you to Yousef."

To discuss her ravishment! Or was the word rape applicable where she was to be penetrated again and again! Stacie shrugged it off as academic. She tried again.

"Is there more?"

"Quite soon your flesh will be pierced for the introduction of rings in the customary places." A flicker of humour crossed Yasin's features. "And also one place usually left chaste."

Stacie tensed, uncertain. "As part of the torture?"

"Secondarily. There will be no anaesthetic. But primarily for my pleasure. As I said, you are very beautiful."

"Rings in my flesh! But where?"

"Come, dear child, you are not naive. I want you yourself to name the places on your person where you might logically be so adorned . . . Now!"

The captive stifled revolt, it was unlikely she could give this man ideas he did not already have. "My ears," she offered tentatively.

It was not enough. She knew it was not enough. But to voice such things as though in invitation! "I have heard of a girl's nipples being pierced," she admitted.

His gaze was relentless. Stacie twisted against the compelling cords. "Surely not my nose?"

"Most certainly your nose. The effect is charming."

No mercy! She was not done. "I read a book: the lips of a girl's sex were ringed . . ." She looked at him bleakly. "It seems to me impractical," she flushed. "I still think it is."

"You're quite delightful," Yasin approved. "Yes, your enumeration correct," he mused quietly for a moment. "Your rings will be as lovely as yourself. You may come to treasure them."

"Through my nose!"

"There especially. You will see . . ."

She squirmed beneath his regard. She felt certain he was visualising her naked and ringed like a Pasha's slave girl. It was an indicative admission that such a girl's life was to be envied compared to her own. She sat awaiting his pleasure, he had left her nothing to say.

Mohammad Yasin clapped his hands in summons.

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Vivid impressions, one atop the other. Forever off balance, alternating between hope and starkest fear. Against the captive Stacie there marched a small army of successive shocks.

Rannah, suddenly feminine and darkly lovely in slacks.

The bathing and the cosmetics and the hair, all with hands still tied, ministered to by a dark eyed enigmatic mistress with little to say. Stacie's futile protest as she was stripped and what must be torn was torn.

And then the magic of the gown and the costly trifles beneath. Pure Paris, pure gorgeous extravagance! The hard deft fingers moulded the loveliness to her figure, then guided her to a mirror before which she gasped in admiration of the glory of Rannah's choice. Her own hands had contributed nothing, they were still tied at her back.

Incongruity! The return of fear. Seated, she was fitted with shoes, but shoes such as she had never worn. Wonderfully crafted, perfectly fitted, but which locked upon her ankles by a silver band and between the bands a silver chain. All exquisite, all deadly, wearing them Stacie was captive.

Rannah was adamant: the prisoner in the Paris creation must learn to walk with hobbled feet. If she was to be a lovely lady in chains she must fill the role with grace. "Keep walking round the room until you get used to them," she directed.

It went against the grain, but Stacie worked at her task.

She admitted to herself that the gown and its accessories were a factor that actually made her desire proficiency. Uppermost in her mind was the conviction that her clothing was not designed for torture: all else was welcome, why fight! Soon she was gliding in a rhythmic motion Rannah approved.

"Now! Backwards and sideways. They're the bad ones." The chained maiden learned those too. It was much like learning the steps of a new dance. Girls are naturally adept. She knew herself good, and felt absurdly proud of proficiency.

"Pleased with yourself!" Rannah sneered. "Why not! You've got a talent. Here, you've earned this." She was as harsh in untying Stacie's wrists as she had been in binding them.

The bewildered captive stood massaging her grooved flesh with an infinite relief. The release of her wrists felt better than anything she remembered. She had her hands again! It was a small miracle.

"Sit down. We have a few minutes."

Obeying the directive, Stacie watched her companion and jailer pour drinks. She accepted hers gratefully. It was all too much to believe in.

"You won't be whipped today," Rannah said matter-of-factly.

The prisoner said nothing, but sought help in rapid sips. "What's it feel like to know you're going to be tortured? I've always wondered," the voice of the dark eyed Arab girl had lost some of it's hostility.

"Are girls often tortured here?" Stacie was still groping.

"I asked you a question. Answer it."

"I only half believe it."

Rannah nodded. "For you, yes. But not for a Jedrah girl."

"Have you ever been . . . tortured? Sorry, but I find the word impossible."

"Of course. But never with your preludes."

Stacie gulped and reassessed. "But why . . . how? I don't understand."

Rannah laughed without bitterness. "You are a long way from home. Haven't you read . . . don't you know! Men love to torture us. But they welcome an excuse. It keeps them feeling noble."

"Am I really going to be tortured? Isn't this really a bad joke in bad taste?"

Stacie's question was answered by the look in Rannah's eyes.

"You are going to be tortured so terribly I can no longer hate you."

"In this dress! I thought I was to be naked?"

Rannah laughed. A natural unaffected sound. "It pleases our lord to jest . . . or to boast. Tonight you are on display, a jewel in his crown. Come, finish your drink."

It was a select gathering of sybarites, all male. They examined Stacie avidly, but did not touch. The speech was Jedrahn, with here and there an English compliment.

"You are a very lovely child, you wear chains well."

"Yasin is a lucky man, but do not earn his wrath."

"I would purchase you."

Stacie accepted it all in a calm daze. Concentration on the chain that made her captive occupied most of her attention. To stumble and fall before these grave men would be unforgivable. Without thinking, she gave Yasin a smile of reassurance.

"You are quite remarkable, my dear," he told her in his deep rich voice.

"Can I earn no reprieve?" she asked, greatly daring.

He shook his head sadly. "Alas no, but you can save much extra pain by being as you are. You do me honour."

She felt pride. He had that quality. To be praised or to be loved by him was very good, a constant aspiration. Angrily she chided herself for feminine susceptibility. She took her place beside him at the table and ate ravenously.

Her partner on her other side was elderly, he exhibited no awe for his host or the occasion. His examination of her was frank and libidinous. "Yasin tells me you are not for sale," he said regretfully. "I would pay much for you. Not to love, but to whip," he sighed. "'Tis not long before Allah calls me. There is an ache in my bones, but to whip you would make me young again."

Stacie almost pitied him. Old and impotent unless he could stripe the skin of a girl with a whip! How sad it was. She had read of it. How noble would it be to offer him that one last benison before the darkness! She shuddered, she would have to watch herself. Jedrah possessed the insidious quality of rationalising the irrational.

"Our host intends to torture you," he ruminated without emotion.

"Sweet of him, isn't it!" Stacie could not contain her sarcasm.

"Do not fear to scream," he counselled gently. "It is no dishonour."

It was a very small comfort.

When the cigars were passed around Rannah led her from the room. She had served her purpose. Her ankle chains clinked happily as she was led back to the room where she had been dressed.

"Hands behind again."

It was back to Earth with a vengeance. Disappointed, Stacie turned and crossed her wrists, Rannah bound them with firm precision. The rest happened very quickly, the gown was taken from her, the lovely under-things, the shoes their anklets and their chain. Stacie stood, nude, her hands tied behind her back. Again the hand in her hair, the passages and the steps, and then the door. Within was a narrow cell, a pail and a rug, nothing more. Rannah pushed her captive across the threshold, left and thudded the door shut with needless emphasis.

It was late, the light was dim. Stacie stood naked in her small prison in the gloom. Her heart was thudding. The transition from luxury to stark nakedness in a stone cell had been too swift to comprehend: Planned deliberately, no doubt, as part of her conditioning it called for an adjustment she could not make. Here was her first glimpse of needless cruelty. Her punishment had started.

She turned and looked at the door, she pushed against it with a naked shoulder and then a naked foot. It was solid, immovable. Why, then, tie her hands. Even free of bonds she could not escape, The answer was obvious enough, the cords round her wrists were an assertion of authority, a constant reminder of what she had become, a prelude to suffering. Alone in the claustrophobic cubicle fear become definite, hope fled. In animal frenzy she tore at her pinioned wrists and moaned her desuetude.

But she could not get free, she had not expected to. The pain of the strictures against which she fought and the exertion of her revolt were her only possible expression, she had been reduced to a neatly tied package without a wrapper. She looked with distaste at the utilitarian pail, she would have to use it but would loathe

the act. She transferred her attention to the rug. It was sparse enough but her only comfort. There was no covering, but tied as she was she could not have done much with a blanket had there been one. She knelt, then fell forward on her face. Even the simplest act emphasised her loss of her hands. The rough odorous wool imparted a faint human comfort, it was better than bare stone. Stacie wept in loneliness and fell asleep.

How good it was to wear her clothes again! The tears had been neatly mended. Rannah had bathed her, removed the makeup of the night before and then, surprisingly, untied the chafed numb wrists and told her, laconically, to dress. The faint amusement in the dark eyes that watched the donning of the garments told nothing.

"I will breakfast with you," Rannah said casually. "There is no hurry,"

Stacie drew comfort from the girl, she was a middle ground between Mohammad Yasin and the stone cell. The breakfast table was equally reassuring, it was Western and replete. She looked at her enigmatic mistress uncertainly.

"Don't you want to . . . to tie me, or something?"

"No. I would be amused if you decided to flee. Try it." The quiet dare was more inhibiting than bonds. Stacie seated herself at the table. "Is this the condemned's last meal?" she inquired with little humour.

"Then I too am condemned," Rannah smiled. "Come, enjoy it. American coffee is easy to drink."

"Rannah . . ." Stacie paused, "Am I allowed to call you that?"

"What else? It is my name."

"Well, I'd wondered. You know: there's mistress and madam and miss?"

"I am Rannah. If you called me mistress it would amuse. But there is no need. I will be constantly unkind, but that has been explained. Come, let me fill your cup."

"Rannah, I'm curious. Supposing I leaped through that door and ran, what would happen?"

The dark eyes mocked. "I would probably catch you, I am stronger than you are. If I failed, then someone else would end your flight. The best you could manage would be to circle the Courtyard wall you could never climb. You would then be taken before the master of this house who would probably order you whipped," she smiled in secret amusement. "I would probably be whipped too for failing to control you."

Stacie stopped eating. "You! Wh ipped! . . . You mean . . . ?"

"Why not! I am of Jedrah. Here all women are whipped if they deserve the lash. It is expected."

"But in this day and age! And to one of your own . . . ! Yasin talks in the United Nations of brotherly love!"

"So! There is no contradiction. In imprisoning female prisoners you recognize punishment."

"But a girl like you! Whipping sounds so terrible, It is terrible, isn't it . . . ?"

"It is terrible. You are to be whipped, so you will know." The captive was once more groping.

"That means you are being kind. You could be whipped for trusting me. For not tying . . ."

Rannah laughed. "Your world has gone. You will understand this one, little by little. Yes, I am trusting you. I think you are sure you cannot escape, so you will not try. But have no fear, I will tie you tight enough and often enough. I don't like to be whipped any more than you."

"Why were my hands tied last night in that beastly cell?"

"To help you adjust, a reminder. That is all. You slept." Rannah poured two more cups.

"This is Yousef," Rannah's voice was as enigmatic as her eyes. "Yousef, her name is Stacie Blair. You have your orders."

Yousef was large and very muscular. He was copper coloured and attired only in shorts. He eyed his new charge with what seemed to be a professional interest. Stacie felt she was being measured for the Rack. She hoped they could not hear the thumping of her heart. He bowed slightly as he grasped her arm. As he led her from the room she turned a glance of mute appeal. Rannah smiled and shrugged in deprecation.

They were only female.

"You would like to fight, perhaps to run?" Yousef inquired politely. His voice was soft and liquid. Stacie could imagine him selling Turkish rugs.

She looked about her at the huge stone chamber and the barred windows and the closed door. Sure, she'd like to fight, but to what end! This mass of thew and sinew would beat her into submission in moments. "I would like to run, but I will not try," she told him tonelessly. "Tell me what you require, I'll obey you."

At a height of eight feet a truss rod ran from wall to wall.

It's fixtures indicated a varied utility. Passively holding out her hands Stacie watched the broad leather straps buckled tight upon her wrists, each wristlet held a ring. In but a few moments her arms were lifted high and spread wide to the rod above her head. She stood as though worshipping the sun.

For several moments Yousef studied his captive, then did the most awful thing of all. With powerful and purposeful hands he tore her clothing to tatters as he stripped her. He spared nothing of her garments or herself. The poor torn remnants of her modesty lay scattered pathetically upon the stone. Stacie stood, utterly bare.

It was the first time! Naked before a male she had never previously seen, helpless to

shield her secrets from his gaze. Stacie knew the moment for what it was: the beginning of her torture. She had purposely been dressed in her own familiar things so that her stripping be doubly shaming and her desolation complete in seeing them destroyed beyond repair. Here was the real division. Normalcy had gone. She was delivered to a world in which her only function was to provide the naked nerve ends that would trigger her screams. She looked up at Yousef with what courage she could muster. He gave her his small polite bow and left the room.

A plaything . . . even for a torturer! The rug forever pulled from beneath her trembling feet. Was her tied pose a punishment in itself! It could well become one. Or would the hot iron and the pincers soon appear! She felt the nerves flicker beneath her flesh and muscle spasms ripple across her skin.

Stacie stood in loneliness. From time to time she looked up at her strained arms and wrists, it would be useless to fight such firmly designed fastenings. She did not try, they could hold her thus forever. She was stretched, but not on tip-toe. She wondered why. In all she had read . . . !

She soon realised that weariness and strain would exact their toll of her. But, at the moment, her most compelling sensation was of her nakedness, it was so complete, so impossible to hide. She was vulnerable to the point of cringing.

She let her gaze rove around the room. But why think of it as such! It was a torture chamber, no more no less. She supposed it could be called a 'Punishment room'. But why use euphemisms! Its intent was clear, people were brought here to be hurt. She idly tried to name the structures and the gear, most of it told her nothing. She suspected the most innocent was probably the most deadly. Whips and canes and slender withes hung from hooks. Her gaze returned to them again and again. She gained little comfort that the notorious cat-o'-nine-tails was not in evidence. In reading of it in fiction she had supposed it mostly apocryphal. Perhaps it was. But she remembered she had been told that sometime she would be flogged . . . What instrument did they use to flog a girl! She closed her mind to the thought. Yesterday it had been unreal. Today, naked and looking at the whips, it was very real indeed.

The girl Yousef dragged in was young. She would have been pretty had not her youthful features been haggard with fear. Her eyes were wide and imploring. She did not fight, but her steps were laggard and fearful to the point where she was being dragged by Yousef's harsh grip upon her wrist. She was already naked, prepared physically and mentally for whatever was going to be done to her, distraught with anguish she fell to her knees and clasped her torturer's knees when he positioned her beneath the same bar to which Stacie was tied.

Stacie watched, incredulous. This belonged on a horror film on T.V. Someone would laugh and break the tension. But it was happening. It was happening to her!

The girl wept and pleaded. Stacie wondered if such abasement could indeed lighten the sentence or the blows. The girl might have some previous experience, she probably had! Yousef responded to her sobbing incoherencies with a smile and soft laconic sentences in Jedrah.

The girl froze, even her sobbing stopped. For a long time she stayed clutching the legs of her master. Then, slowly and without complaint, she shuffled back and lay upon the stone, spreading her feet wide apart to offer free access to the penetration of her sex. She looked at no one, but closed her eyes and waited.

Without haste, Yousef discarded his shorts. There came into view a phallus so huge that the watching girl quailed at the sight. Sensing the impression he had made, Yousef shook the thing at her like a bludgeon, laughing at her blush, pleased by her apprehension and the tribute of her amazed scrutiny. "One day," he promised. "One day you too."

Whether his words were a promise or a threat did not matter. Stacie remembered the statement that under certain unnamed circumstances her body would indeed be delivered to this smiling man. She wondered miserably how so immense an organ could enter any orifice she had to offer. He probably tore female flesh thoughtlessly and without caring while in rut. It would be part of the pattern.

Yousef ravished the naked girl with masterly competence.

Could it be called rape! Stacie thought not. For this girl it would not be the first time. There was no stallion plunging, no sadistic thrust, instead a steady entry under pressure so that the recipient gasped and arched her back, flinging wide her arms to clutch at nothing, emitting a long drawn out moan of acknowledgement when the last of the vast impalement was within her sheath.

It lasted long. Stacie counted three orgasms for the girl before Yousef brought the coupling to an end. When he withdrew the wet and glistening weapon from within her most intimate cleft the girl rose to her knees and, without direction, used her lips and tongue to cleanse and dry it before it was once more housed within the shorts. While she performed the service Yousef's eyes met Stacie's. "You next," he promised vaguely and sardonically. He was childishly pleased by her reaction.

From what happened then Stacie drew the conclusion that the girl had believed the use of her body had bought her immunity. When Yousef produced the wristlets her eyes widened in disbelief and an angry flood of denunciation assailed the grinning man. Whatever he said in reply was evidently more than the girl could bear, she leaped screaming for the door.

Within two paces he had a handful of her hair and was slapping her face back and forth until she meekly and hopelessly offered him her hands. Very quickly she stood as Stacie stood, but on her toes, her young loveliness taut and strained and ready. Helplessness brought with it resignation. She moaned as though to herself but ceased to plead. She no longer looked at the man who would torture her, she expected nothing from him that she would want.

Yousef whipped the girl as methodically as he had ravaged her. First a cane across the curves of the young buttocks and then a short and tapered whip for the rest of her, no female curve or crevice was immune. The girl screamed steadily, fighting her strapped wrists and sometimes lifting herself entirely from the floor in the unbearable cutting of her flesh. There was no lash that failed to evoke from her a mad gyration and peal of anguish, sweat stained her everywhere as the ridges of beaten skin rose one by one.

Stacie had no knowledge by which to gauge the severity of what she saw. To her it seemed the girl was being whipped to death, that female flesh could not withstand such pain or bear such marks. Yet when the whipping was done and Yousef returned the hateful thing to its hook the girl continued to moan and to twist and writhe with a vigour that spelt survival. Stacie had much to learn of the resiliency of the feminine

physique. When, again, Yousef leered at her knowingly and said: "You next." She had no reason to believe other than that he spoke truth.

The torturer, mightily pleased with himself, went away and left the two girls hanging by their wrists. The door slammed.

Stacie was deathly afraid, but she longed to give comfort to the punished girl who stood so close in the same confinement by which she was held. Yet she feared to intrude upon the victim's inward communion with her pain. The eyes were closed, the cheeks wet with tears, the weight of the slenderness dragged against the straps as though the pain of the bound wrists was needed to balance the agony of the whip, her toes were on the floor, but not in solid seeking for support. The moans gradually sank away, but the panting respirations were as eloquent of suffering as had been her screams.

"I'm sorry." Stacie felt that so futile a statement was justified to break the silence.

Her companion opened one eye as though seeing her for the first time. "Why sorry? You not whipped." She relapsed into misery.

Stacie gave her a bit more silence and tried again. "Why did they whip you? What had you done?"

Both eyes opened this time, they were faintly animated.

"Break dishes in kitchen." A brief pause. "Throw water on cook." The last words held a trace of satisfaction or humour. The hurt body reasserted itself, toes searching.

"Is that all!" Stacie was aghast.

"Is plenty too much." This time the humour was definite. "How many times have you been whipped?"

"Many, many times. Cannot remember." To the girl the question was silly. She eyed Stacie's unmarked skin in puzzlement. "Why you not get whip?"

"I'm going to be whipped," Stacie reassured her. "They are making me wait so I'll be more and more frightened."

The girl perked up. Her sense of justice was restored. If Stacie was to be whipped she was a friend. "You soon hurt very much," she informed helpfully. "Is best to make much scream or they do much harder."

The advice of experience! Stacie wondered if she could follow it convincingly. She did not recall ever having screamed in pain. "Have you ever been . . ." She could not use the word. ". . . Punished with any of these other things?"

"I have had to sit on the horse. It is not nice. Most bad for a girl's cunt," she brightened perceptibly. "But I am hearing you are to have proper torture. Yousef do everything to hurt. Is me who is feeling sorry for you."

Stacie was feeling sorry for herself. She dropped the subject. "Why do they leave you

tied after you've been whipped?"

"Is same as you. Make feel bad. Cannot use hands," she giggled. "Cook make Yousef free me soon. Is work to do."

And thus it was. Untied, the girl sped from the awful chamber as though it was on fire. Yousef chuckled as he watched her go. "Back next week to sit on horse," he opined sagely. "Is most foolish girl." As he was leaving he turned and consoled. "Despair not, the whip is always ready."

Stacie wondered if it was a quote from the Koran.

She felt great weariness, not only from standing straight with her arms in the air but also from the attrition of emotion in the alternating hope and fear to which she was subjected. Stacie had little doubt she had been witness to the whipping by deliberate design. It had affected her cruelly, a preview of her own agony to come. She was distraught by fears and doubts of her ability to endure so awful a punishment. She envisioned herself hanging limp and unconscious as the thong scored her skin.

When the door opened to admit a widely grinning Salim it was no more than in keeping with all else. Looking around cautiously to ensure they were alone the youth came eagerly forward to examine his prize. Positioning himself before the pinioned girl he scanned her nakedness with a fascination both clinical and erotic. Stacie felt the tell-tale blush rise and quelled an instinct to cross her legs.

"Is much better than just tits," Salim's voice was almost reverent.

"Please set me free, Salim." Stacie thought it worth a try.

"My father will make you rich."

"Mohammad Yasin also make me very dead," the youth pointed out reasonably, his eyes clinging to the inevitable. "Are all girls having much hair round pee-hole?"

"We all have some," Stacie sighed.

"You are going to be much whip. I wish to watch, but Yousef is much not kind, he say no."

Salim was neither friend nor enemy. But, if only she could condition herself to his scrutiny of her nakedness, he was at least someone to talk to. At the moment she felt all breasts and vulva. "Where are the other girls?" she asked casually.

"Are chained to wall in nice stone room," he informed absently. "Salim much wishes to fuck you."

She supposed the male hunger would never be far removed, her nakedness would always generate lust. Stacie had little expectation of remaining inviolate, but surely not this buffoon of a boy! "Set me free and I'll let you," she offered without hope.

"Cannot set free. Salim thinks can fuck you like now." His mind was obviously busy with the mechanics of vertical congress.

"Oh, Salim, it's no fun standing up! Please untie me." For a moment the boy weakened, she could see desire tearing his caution to shreds. But caution won. "First I have good look at cunt," he said non-commitally. "If you kick, I bite tit most hard."

She had lost nothing by trying, but it was infuriating to have so totally failed and now to have to stand and pretend indifference while he explored her sex. Shame mantled her at his next request. "Please to open wide the legs."

Stacie did not want her nipples savagely bitten, so she sulkily obeyed, presenting the avidly curious youth with a complete exposure of her pubes. He was like a concupiscent puppy wagging its tail, using his finger to search within her cleft and to make her gasp, then sniffing her pungency as might a dog. Suddenly she yelped in pain.

Triumphantly Salim held up his trophy. Stacie saw her own pubic hair between his finger and thumb, she could cheerfully have killed the beaming lout. "Don't do that!" she commanded vehemently.

He was delighted with his provocation. "Could pull many. Salim much enjoy to see." He bent once more to his new found hobby.

Stacie kicked at him, but without success. Craftily he bent beside her, encircling her waist with one arm whilst employing his other to pluck. Angrily she fought to shake loose his grip, she kicked and stamped, but she was too helplessly tied. Through the most frantic of her struggles his hand found her black triangle so that, defeated, she stopped her futile and painful efforts. "Please, Salim, don't. If you pull any more I'll tell Yousef and Rannah."

It gave him pause. He did not loose his grip, but stood holding his treasure while considering. "Will not miss one more," he decided firmly. "Salim pull very slow."

The captive miserably realised that from now on her life would always be like this. She would be used as others desired, never as she herself would wish. To be tied naked while an Arab boy amused himself with her body might very soon seem a trivial diversion, perhaps even a welcome one, all things were relative. She resigned herself to the "One more".

If it had not hurt she might have laughed. She was suddenly smitten by the absurdity of what was taking place. It would make a quaint picture. But it did hurt! Stacie was positive that more than one of her pubic hairs was being gripped, and was astonished by the pain of the slow withdrawal, her skin followed the anchored curl and would not let go, each increase of the steady pull made her gasp with the severity until, in furious revolt, she writhed and lunged away from his lecherous hand so that the roots surrendered their hold in one single flash of pain that left her flushed and bitter as she was forced to examine the shining strands wrested from her flesh.

"Salim keep always," said the boy who had stolen them. She was getting accustomed to being naked and open to the eyes of the male. For her, now, it would become commonplace. Nakedness was implicit in Yousef's work upon her flesh, there would be other male members of Yasin's staff who would get a look at her. Salim would be endlessly intrigued and increasingly demanding, but still, she did not want him as an enemy. "Well, have you had a good look at a naked girl?" she asked him without sarcasm.

"Oh, is very nice." His eyes glowed their approval. "Much best than men. Must now fuck."

The captive sighed, always back to the eternal square one.

Youthful females were never left unaware of her desired orifice. "Set me free then," she demanded negatively.

Salim scarcely heard, his eyes and mind were busy.

Without preamble he loosened fastenings and produced a male weapon that, whilst lacking the massiveness of the torturer's, was still formidable. "You kick, I hurt you," he said decisively.

Facing the inevitable, Stacie once more spread wide her legs.

It was then that Yousef returned.

Had her plight been less drastic, Stacie would have laughed. Her would be rapist stood for a moment stricken in dismay, his male organ ridiculously rampant before he tucked it out of sight and dived for the open door. A grinning Yousef caught the flying figure half way, shook it as one does a bag of rubbish, then sent it on its swift retreat with a well planted kick. There came a thud and a cry and the receding sounds of fleeing feet. "Is too young for fuck," said the torturer indulgently.

Yousef lounged against the wall and surveyed the naked girl he was to torture. He discerned her weariness and absence of hope. He also enjoyed her loveliness for what it was. "I intend to make you give me pleasure," he said simply.

"Is it now?"

He laughed enjoyably at the mixed emotions in her voice.

As he passed he slapped her bottom with a huge hand. The door thudded and once again Stacie was alone. But now there was a change, before her on the stone was the coiled wickedness of a black whip.

She had no delusions, this play was torture. Her skin remained unmarked, but she was tired and cringingly afraid. It would have been kinder to have whipped her when she was first tied. It was what she had expected, thus it had not been granted. Some time in the day the black horror on the floor would be used on her: but when! By the time it happened she would be a wreck. Suppose they were waiting for her to plead to be whipped . . . ! To get it over with, to end the awfulness of knowing and waiting for it to happen. She might be tempted. If Yousef were present at this moment, would she have the courage!

As the hours passed she hung more and more heavily upon her wrists. They took the strain protestingly, but it was the only relief she could contrive. She constantly varied her posture within the small tolerances of her bonds: this foot and that, cheek against one arm or the other, head bowed or thrown back so that she could gaze upon her captive hands. That was all. There was nothing else but loneliness.

Rannah had stood before the pinioned nakedness for some time before Stacie became aware and opened her eyes. The girl had been silent on bare feet and the

hinges of the door well oiled. The captive had hung so long alone that sight of the dark eyed beauty was a shock.

"You are very tired," said Rannah. "Please whip me," Stacie pleaded.

The Arab girl nodded in confirmation and picked up the whip. She ran its sinuous length through her fingers several times. "It will hurt far more than you believe," she said tonelessly. "After the first stroke you will no longer be weary."

The captive nodded and closed her eyes. "Do it to me now. Don't make me wait any longer, I can't stand it."

Rannah set her free.

For a moment the relief of the lowered arms was agony.

Then, with a small inarticulate cry and in a purely instinctive compulsion, the naked girl fell to her knees and clasped and hugged herself against Rannah's legs, weeping noisily in great gusts of pent up emotion.

"She has a wonderful instinct for the right clothes," Mohammad Yasin conceded as he broke open a roll and knifed the hard refrigerated butter. "Rannah is a sweet child, she is indispensable."

Stacie supposed she could call herself clothed, but she was almost bare. Her breasts were covered, and her loins, but that was all. The scantiness of what she wore was quite lovely and patterned with gems. She was adorned at neck and wrists with metal and jewels worth several ransoms, her feet were chained and fettered by silver shackles. She was intimately at dinner with her lord. She refused to be ashamed of her hunger.

"I was not whipped today."

"Alas no, I observe no marks," Yasin acknowledged drily.

"I suppose what . . . what did happen was planned?" Yasin laughed and made a deprecating gesture with a stalk of celery.

"You do so long for a proper order, dear child. You would wish to be whipped by appointment?"

It was hard for Stacie to hold back the tears. He was such a charming man, she enjoyed his company. Under different circumstances she would be enjoying herself immensely. Yet the chains on her feet told her she was a slave, there had been no word of remission of her promised torture. "Why are you so kind to me?" she asked inconsistently.

"Am I kind?"

"Yes, this is heavenly."

Yasin smiled as at a favourite daughter. "Have you forgotten the day, and the night preceding? It is a privilege of wealth that others perform my less agreeable tasks."

"No, I have not forgotten. But Rannah does not hate me."

"How could she! You are adorable."

He meant it! She knew he did. She sought his eyes. "But you will torture me!" She made a rapid amendment: "You will have me tortured?"

Yasin smiled benignly at her bafflement. "Need we discuss it, dear girl?"

Stacie wanted to cry and laugh and scream. "My mind is full of it. I can't forget what you have sentenced me to: that's what it is, a sentence as though I had to go to prison to be punished." She managed a weak smile.

He nodded in understanding. "Yousef makes a vivid impression."

"Must it be . . . be, done to me by a man?"

"You would prefer Rannah?" His eyes glinted amusement.

"Yes, please! If in truth you do not hate me personally, then let her be the one to torture me."

"She may not desire the task."

"She would do it, I know she would! May I ask her?" Yasin smiled at her vehemence.

"You misjudge her. She is not a sadist."

"She does not need to be. She is tremendously competent. It would be a woman thing between the two of us. It needs no name . . ."

He was so easy to talk to, so aware of her as a person as well as a female body. Stacie knew she should be frightened at her own temerity: a nearly naked girl with chained feet laying down the law! If she was truly slave she would be punished. She looked her penitence. "I'm sorry . . ."

"You are a delightful child. You have not offended me. Quite the contrary."

The captive girl was suffused with a great warmth toward this man whose prisoner she was. Greatly daring she burned a bridge. "Take me into your . . . your . . . Harem - I suppose you have one? Please, I would like that! Please don't have me tortured."

He surveyed her gravely. She could not tell what her outburst may have earned. He sighed. "The eternal feminine!" His voice was sad.

Stacie sensed his thought. "You mean, give us an inch and we seek a mile?"

"Women do it constantly, even when they know they'll be whipped." He was amused by her perception.

"What else can we do!" Stacie protested. "We have to get everything we want through men, by earning it or wheedling it or cheating . . . It's even more true of a

slave girl." She looked at him coaxingly, "Is that what I am?"

His wry smile was perplexed. "It is not what I planned for you, but you have a talent." He mused quietly while they ate.

"I had never met you. You are not what I expected. I am curious, are you not surprising yourself?"

"How can I do that?"

"By your acceptance. Most girls would be in hysterics or sulky revolt."

Involuntarily she laughed. "You have me nearly naked with my feet chained together. What revolution can I start!"

"You see! That is what I mean: that sentence. It was as though you were discussing this meal we share."

He was right! Stacie examined herself, except for a few kicks at Salim she had not fought. "Am I really that submissive?" she queried doubtfully. "I've never seen myself like that. I'd have said the reverse. Remember, Rannah's kept me handcuffed or tied almost all the time . . . or these chains on my ankles. I can't run, I'd be silly to try."

Yasin shrugged. "Perhaps you are right, but I will not concede the point. You have shown me something you do not know you possess, you harbour a treasure and are unaware. But I suppose the important thing is that you sit across from me now. The chains upon your feet are incidental."

Stacie's voice was mischievous. "I suppose I do have to admit to some annoyance with myself. The closer I get to my torture the less I believe in it. There was a little while today when I was tied and naked and very weary . . . But now . . . ! It is you who make your own threat unbelievable. Will I be tortured tomorrow?"

"I do not wish to torture you at all."

"Why do it then!"

"I have told you. My father would have said it was the will of Allah."

"It is your will, and no one else's. Tonight will I be tied in that rotten little hole in the stone?"

Yasin held up an admonitory hand. "My dear child, you tear a man's heart. You are one of those women whose beauty is so great and their spirit so alive that a mere male can cope with you in only two ways: he must love you or he must whip you. In the middle ground you will always defeat him."

Mischief still held her. "Your problem is simple, whip me and love me too."

Mohammad Yasin sighed deeply. Beside him was a gong.

He struck it a single blow. As the wave of resonant sound washed over her Stacie knew she had gone too far.

Yousef carried her across his shoulder like a sack of potatoes, beating her fists against his back was like hammering a castle door. The chain linking her ankles defeated her frantic kicks. Stacie fought only for pride, she had no expectation of escaping anything. The torturer chuckled as he walked and patted her well bent bottom with his free hand. She continued to struggle furiously all the way to the torture chamber. It kept her from thinking.

Yousef unlocked her fetters. "Must take off all pretty things," he ordered cheerfully. "You put in little bag here." He stood between her and the door.

Stacie stripped herself naked.

Yousef strapped her wrists and positioned her as she had been that day, but now she teetered on her toes.

He whipped her coldly and methodically.

Long afterwards, when Stacie looked back at her first whipping she remembered most vividly of all her reiterated exclamations between her screams: "Oh no! No! No! Oh nooooh!" Her moaning negative was a denial of her pain, a denial that such pain could exist, a refusal to countenance it as possible. Once she accepted its reality she was lost, she would feel the full agony of each blow as it cut at her. But her refutations dwindled away as her screams became continuous. They were replaced by pleadings and abasements she did not bother to recall. The eternal cry of a naked girl beneath the lash. "No more . . . ! Oh stop! stop it . . . stop! Please . . . ! Please . . . !" And then the offer of her body if only he would halt the steady rhythm of his blows. The blows that cut and cut and scored and striated the white skin that had never known pain. She screamed in ways she had never believed possible.

In the haze of her agony, Stacie knew her behaviour deplorable. She danced and kicked and moaned and lifted herself from the floor in futile efforts to ease the steady inflictions that would not cease. No matter what she pleaded or promised the lash curled round her flesh with the steady precision of a metronome. Yousef had been told to whip the slave girl well, and this he did. It was a joy of work. He enjoyed whipping girls, but he had whipped so many the thrill was wearing thin. He heard her pleas and her promises only in an abstract way. His job was to whip her nakedness from shoulders down to knees. This one was special, he was not allowed the use of her sex. He did not care, she was but one of many. He expended his lusts on all the rest, save one. She and this white bitch would fall his way soon enough. He had but to wait. He plied his whip to extract the loudest crack upon the shrinking flesh and the most piercing scream from the tortured lips. He had dreamed of this hour all day long. The white body and the sun tanned limbs danced their saraband of anguish to the measure of his thong.

Stacie had not fainted, but she had reached the misty land of disorientation. When her wrists were loosed she slumped to the stone, rubbing first the hurt wrists themselves and then seeking tentative explorations of wounds such as she had never previously borne, her body seemed welted everywhere. When she was lifted and carried away in the same manner by which she had been brought to her first torture she cared no whit for her destination, even the bound wrists and the tiny dungeon would have been welcome if she could have lain upon the rug in peace without the whip seeking her. When she was finally tossed contemptuously upon something soft it was some time before she opened her eyes enough to know herself upon a bed in splendour.

She did not care about her pain, the strong naked arms of Mohammad Yasin enveloped her and felt searchingly the ridges across her back and all the curves of her loveliness. One had even found her breast and this he lingered upon most of all with fingers and with lips. Her moans mounted and mounted until he stilled them with his mouth. He ravaged his slave girl lustily, brutally and with love. Stacie knew that to be loved like this as her reward she would happily submit herself to be whipped every day. She had never known such intensity of sensation. She clung and clung, raking the back of her master with sharp fingernails as he thrust and thrust into her very heart. Stacie Blair was exquisitely happy.

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"You must possess a magic." Rannah pronounced sardonically. "Our master has gone away on his endless business and left you with me to torture. I have orders to torture you to the extent of my knowledge of such things." She laughed ruefully. "My knowledge is very great. You will scream a lot while we are together."

"I asked for you," Stacie said simply.

"I know. Yousef will be disappointed."

"Don't give me to Yousef, please."

"Never fear. You are mine. You may wish otherwise."

"No. If I am to be tortured I wish you to do it."

"He loved you through the night, did he not?"

"Yes. I am his slave. It is all I want."

"You are one of the richest girls in the world, yet you seek slavery?"

"With Mohammad Yasin, yes."

"And with me! Why me?"

"You know why."

The dark eyes burned bright. "Of course I know. I lusted for you when first I put your wrists within those handcuffs in the truck. I could have killed Salim for baring your breasts."

"You laughed."

"We are women, you and I. We say yes only when we must, then it is real for us. We do not shout desire from the housetops. I am going to torture you. Aren't you afraid?"

"Yes terribly afraid. Can I have more coffee?"

Rannah leaned across the breakfast table and replenished cups. "You ooze lubricity, our master lit a fire within your loins. At this moment you do not care about the

torture, you think it will not happen, that I'll relent. I won't!"

"Torture me, Rannah. It is his wish, his order. Please may I have more toast?"

"I spoil you. You are outrageously happy. Surely Yousef made some impression on your mind? I can see those he made upon your skin."

Stacie knew herself drunk with ecstasy. She gloried and knew shame. "I am done with Yousef," she said grandly. "Will you whip me as hard?"

Rannah recognized the euphoria of infatuation. "I will whip you so you think Yousef's hand held no more than a feather. It takes a girl to hurt a girl. I know those places where you can be hurt."

"You mean my breasts?" Stacie asked absently. She was still within Yasin's arms.

"You are quite ridiculous," Rannah affirmed angrily. "A girl in love! Pouf! I had intended to be easy with you today, but now I will make you scream in ways you have not even thought of."

"Don't be angry with me. I know I'm being silly." Stacie was contrite. She wanted very much to please this enigmatic girl who held her person in thrall. "I will behave. See, I'm not chained or tied, but I do not run away."

"Will this fine courage carry you to the room where it will happen?"

The captive wrinkled her brows in confrontation with the conscience of her past. "Oh yes, I will walk with you to the torture chamber where you will make me scream," she said slowly and solemnly. "But everything I do, or perhaps it's the way I do it, leaves me guilty. You know: the Protestant ethic thing. I ought to be screaming now: I ought to throw this lovely food in your face: I ought to be demanding release with every second breath I take: I ought to be reviling Yasin and you and Yousef . . . In fact, I ought to be making an absolute ass of myself as a . . . a sort of social conformity. Am I being silly?"

Rannah eyed her captive with amusement. "I have wondered about you," she admitted. "So has our master. He believes you are by nature a slave girl even though you do not seem to be. For the rest, you are only being sensible, facing the facts of your condition," Rannah grinned confidingly. "But I will tell you honestly: I am not sure I could behave as you. In your place I think I would be hostile, getting myself many blows and tight bindings and feeling noble within my mind."

"You've read about brainwashing. Is that what you're doing to me? I mean, you switch me back and forth between terror and luxury, I'm always off balance."

"That is by our own caprice," Rannah admitted. "We are selfish. We do not allow our sadness at what we must do to you to rob us of the pleasure of treating you as our guest. We are also curious about your reactions."

"In other words, you're playing with me." Rannah shrugged.

"Allah plays with all of us."

"I'm sure good old Allah is a big comfort to you guys," Stacie said drily. She gazed earnestly across the table. "Look, Rannah, I like being your guest, I like you. If you enjoy my company, don't torture me. There has to be some other way. My father will do anything Yasin demands to get me safely back."

"What could your father do! Think. There is nothing." Stacie thought. Just what could her father do! Money, apologies, the United Nations, all were inapplicable. She looked woefully into the dark watching eyes. "But this revenge . . . ! It's so savage, it doesn't belong anymore. It's out of the past."

"Mohammad Yasin has sworn an oath."

"That brings us back to Allah again." The voice of the captive lost its insouciance. The two girls looked starkly at each other in full reality.

Stacie wondered at the lack of grimness and foreboding in the huge chamber where she would spend her pain-filled days, and perhaps some pain-filled nights. The stone was mellow and light flooded in from the iron-barred windows that half-circled the room high in the walls. No doubt plenty of light was desirable that those who did the torturing might clearly see what they were doing and assess its results.

"Does the need to strip yourself at each beginning bother you?" Rannah asked curiously.

"It was Yousef who stripped me yesterday. He ruined all my clothes. I supposed it was done as . . . as part of my punishment."

"It was."

Stacie set aside the last of her scanty clothing and stood naked. "No, I don't mind stripping before you. It's the purpose of being stripped that bothers me."

"I have left the door open to tempt you. Go, run if you wish. Does your nakedness doubly impel you to flight?"

The captive looked at the wide portal without interest.

"All nakedness does is make me want to crouch in a corner and hide my face and as much of the rest as I can," she confessed dolefully.

"Go and do it then," Rannah laughed.

Stacie squirmed, her eyes imploring. "I can't even do that now you've told me to. You're just having fun with me. If you really want to know, I feel like saying: Come on, let's get on with it."

"Say it then, Stacie."

The naked girl took a deep breath. Already she knew there was a thread between this dark-eyed maiden and herself, a thread that would grow and grow regardless of other things. Rannah's curiosity about her state of mind was a part of it. She tossed reticence to the winds. "Please start my torture, Rannah."

First a belt very tight around her slim waist. The scent of her torturess was tangible

in the closeness of the buckling. Next the Arab girl bound Stacie's hands behind her back, palm to palm, the cords neatly positioned and cruelly knotted with the cinching band that joined them between the prisoned wrists and then continued on to be drawn between the naked thighs and threaded through a ring in the front of the belt itself.

They were face to face now, the torturess and she who was to be tortured, both were breathing faster than their need. Rannah touched the passive lips with her own, then pulled upon the cord.

It was the beginning! Stacie recognized it as such. It was also the end of any possibility of resistance, she was too firmly tied. She gasped as the cord parted her buttocks, cut at her crotch and entered between the lips of her sex. Rannah facilitated its entry within her flesh by a firm application of finger and thumb. The cord was tugged, and tugged again. It hurt bitterly so that the captive gasped and knew shame at what had been done to her.

The pull of the cord beneath her loins compelled Stacie to stand erect, even to arch herself back to ease the pain. Her arms and hands had been pulled down and down so that they were completely lost to her. She stood, her shoulders wrenched back, her loins afire, and wondered if this was it or if there might be something more.

There was something more.

It was a triangular metal rod, of no great dimensions. It held a ring at each end. It was positioned between her arms and her back, the pressure of her strained pose held it there without support while the trapeze bar was lowered from the ceiling. The bar itself sustained short chains at each end, on them were hooks. Stacie looked up fearfully and guessed.

Again there was the intimacy of female bodies while the hooks were inserted in the rings. Then the naked body braced itself as the hidden motor gathered up the slack that stood between the helpless flesh and its punishment. At her back, Stacie could feel Rannah's strong fingers positioning the rod and compressing her skin so that as the mechanism tautened it would not be pinched. And then the moment! The awful moment when the rod nestled itself into her armpits, bit into her skin with a sharp edge of the triangle and lifted her from the floor.

For a moment her toes searched frantically for the comforting solidity no longer there. By the time the whirr of the motor ceased they were twelve inches above the floor, and their owner breathless with pain.

"It is best that I go," Rannah said calmly. "You may be ashamed of what your lips permit, nor do I wish to hear. Perhaps after a long time I will visit you." Leaving she shut tight the door and turned a key.

Alone with the unbearable! Stacie understood. If Rannah had stayed to hear she would now be pouring out her pleas. It was so urgent that she tell of the impossibility of such pain or the bearing of it. So vital that someone be made aware of the need to put her feet back on the floor before her arms were wrenched from their sockets or the sharp edge of the rod ate its way through the flesh and bone and severed them. But there was no one to listen, so Stacie screamed. What else could she do? She screamed steadily for a very long time.

Screaming exhausts. When there is none to hear, it shames itself and dies. But a beneficent nature has provided an immense versatility of expression for the tortured: moans, small inarticulate words and cries, sounds that have no place in the world of sanity. But, because of the place in which they are uttered, are the most eloquent of all. Stacie used them all.

She soon discovered it best not to move. She could kick to her heart's content and move her head as she wished. But it hurt, all of it. To set her suspended nudity in motion as a pendulum was worst of all, she swung and could not halt the momentum. It would die its own death and no other. While she swung she was sure the pain was greater. To hang limp and passive was the best, a poor best to be sure, but all that she could do, to hang with screaming agony beneath each arm.

It was quite different from the whip. The captive had supposed that pain was pain, you suffered it in degrees. But this was different, here was no scalding cut of a leather thong across naked skin. No impact. Here was a relentless imposition without count, agony without intermission, pain without pause. The thing in her armpits was a live enemy against which she had no defense. It worked its will with her, and its will was merciless. Stacie's tears accompanied her moans.

Why, oh why, must she be left to suffer alone! That was the cruellest thing of all. The pain was so great that the suspended girl cherished the illusion that had Rannah been present to witness she must inevitably have ended it. Surely no one anywhere at any time had known anything like this! It was not within the realm of bearing. By night she would hang lifeless, she was sure of it. If only Rannah would return! Stacie wonderingly heard her own voice far away crying, "Please, oh please . . . Oh please . . . !"

It was not the poor hurt shoulders alone. Stacie found herself tied ingeniously. Her weight on the rod pulled at her arms, and they in turn pulled at her wrists: the poor hurt wrists so helplessly tied together that she could no longer move even her fingers.

But the chain of agony did not stop there, it continued on its way with the cord now deeply bedded at the apex of her legs and within her cleft vagina. It was a band of fire as implacable as the rod.

Stacie Blair was being tortured.

The naked girl could not measure time. It might have been an hour or several hours before she fell silent, all sound exhausted save the laboured breaths that themselves imparted pain. If Stacie could have stopped them and lived she would have done so, each respiration delivered her flesh anew to the burrowing rod. She puzzled that she still lived, that she was still conscious. Why, oh why, could not the blackness take her for its own and end her suffering?

There came the time she knew she would neither faint nor die. It must be possible, then, for a girl to suffer anything! Facing the knowledge she found no comfort. The discomfort meant only an endless vista of torture that could go on and on forever. Or would she be granted holidays! Her life's work now was to be tortured. She found herself light-heartedly wondering about a five-day week, sick leave and statutory holidays . . . Could she wheedle privilege from Rannah!

Could she . . . !

"And so, my Stacie has not died!" The youthful torturess easily divined the

progression of her victim's chaotic emotions.

The naked girl tried a feeble smile without much success.

She was almost afraid to speak for fear of pain. She managed only the obvious. "Please let me down."

"It is not yet time, but you may ask."

Hope died in bitter disappointment, an overwhelming desolation that she was not to be freed. "How long?" she whispered pitifully, "How long . . . ?"

"I will not tell you," Rannah said comfortably. "It is best that you do not know how long you have been thus or how much longer you must stay as you are. It is very painful, is it not?"

"Will it always be as bad?"

"As bad or worse. There is nothing that cannot be worse, Stacie." Rannah laughed without malice. "I could light a small fire beneath your feet."

"Kill me."

"Don't be silly. You are being dramatic for my benefit. You have no wish to die. If I produced a knife or gun you would be horrified."

"Then let me down, give me a rest . . . for just a little while."

"It would be much worse when I lifted you again, no kindness at all."

"Yes it would! Oh please . . . !"

"You see! It is as I said. Much better you are alone. When I am here you see hope that is not there. You plead and I cannot listen. It is best I go."

"No don't!" The words had a sudden explosive vehemence.

"Don't leave me, not yet. If you don't want me to plead, then I won't. I'll behave. I . . . I need you. Oh Rannah . . . I"

The dark eyes became misty, they searched the punished nudity in sadness. "I will stay a little while, Stacie. I wish you did not hang like that. It is a will beyond mine."

It was in the mind of the bound girl to retort: "Then set me free." But she sensed the other girl's distress and held her tongue. The thread between them was still tenuous, she would treasure it. Instead, she said wanly: "Thank you for coming . . . thank you."

Even the silence was comforting. Rannah was there! A strange and enigmatic girl, but female and of her age. Strength flowed between them, and something else . . . ! The hurt captive wished the dark eyes would watch her always. It was Rannah who broke the silence.

"This is the first day of your torture. Tell me, when next you are free of bonds

will you not wish to fight or to flee? You will not yield to me as you have done . . . ?"

"I will. Oh, I will!" Again the vehemence. Stacie herself could not explain it. "I won't fight you, Rannah."

"But you would fight Yousef?"

"I . . . I suppose so, yes. It would do me no good, but I would fight him."

"Because he is a man!"

"Of course!" The captive's words were purely instinctive. Born of an emotion she did not yet understand.

"Are you passive to me because you wish no bonds?" Again a purely instinctive response.

"No! Oh, Rannah, it isn't that at all. I . . . I'm happy when I'm with you, I don't want to . . . make a fuss." Stacie gaspingly absorbed pain. "But I wish you would always keep me chained or tied. In some small way so I can't be silly and so you don't have to keep an eye on my. Don't you have a pair of handcuffs . . . ? Something simple. Something that won't hurt but will make me helpless?"

The Arab girl laughed in gaiety at the ingenious request.

"I do not have such things, but I can get them. You must have enjoyed those that held you in the van the day I brought you here?"

"I hated them that day. But they are simple, and if I don't struggle they won't hurt."

"I could put them on you very tight!"

"I don't care! It's a sensible idea."

"You are quite incredible!"

"No, I'm just being sensible. Oh, Rannah, how much longer have I got to hang like this?"

But Rannah was gone.

When, after the passage of centuries, the rope slackened and allowed the tired feet to find the floor Stacie slumped helplessly into a tightly tied package upon the stone. She could not move, but lay there giving little moans of thankfulness and pain, moans that intensified into a crescendo when Rannah gently withdrew the rod and loosed the cord bisecting the swollen sex. Even then she lay still unable to move her tortured arms. She was as helpless as though still tied.

"They won't work. My arms . . . I can't move them." She lay on her back and looked up piteously at the girl who controlled her.

Rannah smiled."They did not like what I did to them. But come, I will help you. In an hour the little arms will begin to like me again."

Stacie would always remember the firm and gentle hands that rubbed away her pain and brought her arms back to life, a life she believed lost forever. She lay upon the bed of the girl who had tortured her, and was massaged with love, later her sweat-stained body was bathed and restored to beauty.

"Why do you clothe me, Rannah?"

"I do not clothe you much, slave girl. Only enough that when you must strip each day you will know fear. I find those small pretty things upon your breasts and round your hips evocative."

"I would have thought it convenient to keep me naked."

"True, but there are other things besides convenience. You arc quite impossible. You surprise me as much as I strive to surprise you. I suspect you have come by some erotic wish to be made naked. The thought would have horrified you a week ago. Has it to do with me?"

"I can't explain it. I'm half ashamed. But there it is."

"Do you like nudity when I torture you?"

Stacie shrugged her puzzlement. "I don't even think about it then, it seems so natural after that first moment you have spoken of."

"There are some tortures in which I could leave much of you clothed. Would you not prefer that?"

The captive considered the offer. "I don't think so. I think I'd feel silly as well as hurt."

"Ah, but supposing the one torturing you was Yousef?"

"Even there, during the actual time I was being hurt, I can only see myself as naked. I must be naturally wanton."

They shared laughter. "We women are absurd, Stacie. We do not know ourselves. It is one of the reasons men control us so easily. I too am often shocked at things I think or wish or do. When first I beheld those four shivering maidens by the plane I thought I hated you. Look at me now! I cannot even toss you in a cell."

"But you torture me!"

"Don't dwell on that. It is apart, a duty to perform."

"Mohammad Yasin told me I was not a slave, but you just called me 'slave girl' . . . ?"

The dark eyes dwelt amusedly upon their captive. "I can't tell you that either. The words slipped out without thought. I think I will use them, you have a quality. They fit. You may not be slave to our Master, but I can certainly make you mine."

Stacie savoured the words upon her tongue: 'slave girl'!

They sent a delicious thrill trilling up her spine. Rannah's slave! She closed her mind to guilt and a sense of the ridiculous. If being called slave girl gave her a good feeling, so be it! She raised mischievous eyes. "What should I call you?"

"You will call me Rannah. I am not as silly as you." Seeing a flicker of disappointment in the young eyes, she added:

"When I am angry or you have misbehaved you can call me My Lady. There is a Jedrah term, but that is the best translation I can make."

"Not Mistress?"

Rannah grimaced. "It's threadbare. Besides, it makes me seem a spinster in gown and mortar-board. I went to school in England."

"Yes My Lady." Stacie gave it everything she had.

"You can be whipped for impertinence."

"Was I impertinent, My Lady?"

"You know damn well you are - and drop that 'My Lady' bit. You're feeling foxy because you think your troubles are over for the day. It's not a log walk back to that room, y'know."

Stacie quelled her rising spirits. There would always be steel in Rannah. She could learn gradually how far she dare provoke.

"You spoke of the four of us, Rannah. Where are the other three?"

"They are quite safe, and very angry, and very much afraid. Perhaps I may allow them to share a torture with you."

"Torture! Them! But why?"

"I did not say torture them: they may share yours. They can watch."

Stacie considered the humiliation. Three pairs of female eyes seeing her nudity writhe in agony . . .

"You do not like the thought, slave girl?" Rannah accused.

"Are they . . . are they, naked?"

"No. But if it would make it easier for you it could be arranged."

Stacie flushed. "Silly! But it would make a tremendous difference in the way I'd feel. Please don't do it."

"Don't you want to talk to them?"

"Not in between screams."

"I will torture them too, then," Rannah assured cheerfully. "Then none of you will feel embarrassed."

"You're teasing."

"Hold out your hands."

The sudden order, absurdly, made the captive remember early days at school when the strap or dirty finger nails were the motive. Unconcernedly she obeyed, then gasped with a strange pleasure.

"I told you, slave girl, I spoil you." Rannah held up the silver handcuffs, laughing at the mixed emotions on her companion's face.

"They're beautiful!" Stacie's eyes glowed as though she beheld jewelled bracelets. "Oh, Rannah, you're sweet."

"I am told they are the best," the Arab girl said proudly.

"It is marked on them: Smith & Wesson. U.S.A. They are brand new. Yours is their first skin."

Each savoured the moment in their own way. For Rannah it was delighted amusement at her slave girl's desire. For Stacie it was the warmth of knowing the shining things a gift that must have sprung from deeper emotion than strict practicability. Undeniably, too, they would be much more comfortable than having her wrists corded at her back or a heavy chain tethering her like a dog.

"I will still tie you, slave girl."

Stacie's euphoria was not dented. "I don't mind," she said absently. "Please put them on me, I want to hear the little clicks."

Stacie's handcuffing had all the air of a Ritual. Very deliberately Rannah trapped a slender wrist, flipped over the notched half circle of steel and pressed it home. They laughed together at the resultant clicks of the ratchet and its pawl. The last two clicks exploratory to make the cuff snug but not to cut. When both the girlish wrists had been circled captive in the glinting metal Stacie held them up to admire. A single link joined her hands and limited their freedom. "They're gorgeous!" she breathed. "Oh, Rannah, you're so good to me!"

The dark eyes studied the ecstatic captive with a measure of incredulity. "Slave girl . . ." The voice was serious and puzzled. "All day I tortured you. How then am I good?"

"Oh, but you are! Rannah, don't worry about me. Maybe I'm nuts . . . everything's nuts! But I'm not going to try and figure myself out. I'm just grateful you bought these things for me. Quite simple really."

"See how good they are for me," Stacie exulted at dinner.

"It's funny at first, using two hands for everything. But it's sort of quaint and I expect I'll improve. And the nice thing is I don't have to wonder if I should make a quick dash for the door, and you don't have to wonder if I'm going to."

"You are a nonsensical slave girl," Rannah chided. "Your feet are free, you can run as well as you ever could."

Stacie was unabashed. "Well, anyway, I'm not going to. I'd look a perfect idiot running around the way I'm dressed, or undressed, and with these on my wrists."

The dark haired Jedrah maiden surveyed her slave with pride. Perhaps with love . . . Later, with a studied casualness, she said: "Tonight you will sleep with me."

Stacie's heart skipped a beat. She saw the truth of her slavery. She could be delivered to torment or to Paradise by a whim or a word from whoever owned her. The handcuffs had a life of their own upon her flesh. She sparkled with a new content.

Yet Rannah was cruel. Leading her trembling captive to the holy place of sleep she unlocked a single cuff and clasped it round the lower foot of her bed so that its wearer was on her knees. She tossed the astonished slave a blanket and readied herself for sleep.

Kneeling on the rug at the foot of Rannah's bed, one wrist solidly captive against the heavy and ornately carved wooden frame, Stacie was torn between laughter and tears. She was not sure whether she was being teased, but here was slavery indeed! To sleep on the floor, chained beside her mistress's bed like a pet dog or, more aptly, a pet slave. She longed to speak of her new condition, but was unsure of what to say or how to say it. Rannah was keeping her eyes loftily averted from the humbled girl upon the floor.

"Would you prefer your small cell and the cords on your wrists, slave-girl?" The Arab girl was secretly laughing at her captive's dismay.

"Oh no, my Lady! I want to be near you."

"But my slave girl is not pleased by her humiliation?" Stacie was cautious and uncertain.

"I have never slept on the floor at the foot of anyone's bed, my Lady. It's strange to me."

"Why am I suddenly being called 'my Lady'?"

"I feared you must be angry with me."

Rannah laughed at the girl who knelt so awkwardly on the rug, her arm taut against the tug of the handcuff that locked it to the bed. "Silly girl! You thought you were to get in my bed, not beside it on the floor. But think of all the worse places you could be than where you are. There are many. You will share my bed only when I choose."

Stacie wiped the pout from her lips, it could get her into trouble. Memory of the day welled up. This dark haired beauty was the same girl who had tortured her. Best not to push her luck.

"Forgive me, Rannah."

"There is nothing to forgive, slave girl. Now, let me see you dispose yourself."

Stacie Blair had never felt more foolish. Laughter contended with anger, sarcasm with protest, but prudence quenched them all. Her principle concern was, suddenly, to do what she must with grace. She found herself not wanting to appear awkward or inadequate before the watching eyes. In whatever she did from this day on she would wish the approval of the girl who held her slave.

It should have been simple, but it was not. To kneel, to sit, to lay down had ceased to be easy. Her right hand chained so closely to the wooden leg so near the floor inhibited whatever she sought to do. It was not enough to have one free hand, she wanted two. Relapsing on the rug she searched for comfort, but the handcuffed wrist defeated her no matter how she turned. Exasperated, she sat up, glared at the snug cuff on her wrist, and gave the matter of her night's rest serious thought.

"It was you who asked for handcuffs, slave girl," Rannah mocked.

"I'm doing something wrong, there just has to be a way . . ."

"I am being cruel. I will chain you differently."

"No, don't. You couldn't chain me less. I'll find a spot." The slave girl wriggled and twisted and unexpectedly found comfort, her prisoned hand ceased to tug and hurt. Her mistress clapped gently in applause. "You see, slave girls quickly learn."

"Please, Rannah, throw the blanket over me."

"I will do nothing of the sort. Throw it over yourself."

"I can't! Oh please! Rannah, you're teasing."

The Arab girl's voice became haughty. "You mistake me for a servant? I could take offence. Cover yourself and be quick about it or I'll find a whip."

Groaning inwardly, but with cautious features, Stacie used her one hand to push herself up on a hip. The handcuff bit at her savagely as she essayed tossing throws with the blanket. Catching the amused gaze of the watching girl she said: "Don't laugh. I'll be good at it next time." With a flailing of legs she again found both comfort and cover.

But sleep did not come quickly. The handcuffed wrist was demanding, she could not be unaware of it, an incautious movement hurt. But more potent still was the slave girl's awareness of the vibrant female body in the bed. Before she slept, Stacie thought much about the dark eyed maiden whose possession she had become. In her thoughts was longing.

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By midday Stacie had come to accept that she would never be sure, of herself, of Rannah, of her slavery, of nothing! There would be no pattern. Intimacy, no matter how close or how dear, would never intrude on the purpose of her kidnapping. She sensed with certainty the things that Rannah did with regret, but it was equally certain she would do them.

That morning when she had stripped away the brief things to bare her body for

whatever was to be done to it Stacie had sensed in her companion an aura of an emotion she could not define. At the moment her own pubic hair and breasts were exposed she knew the pure fear that waited all the other twenty-four hours for that confrontation. For her now, nakedness was the true reality.

"You will never be quite naked, slave girl, there will always be the handcuffs." Rannah had mocked.

Always the handcuffs! It was true! Stacie wondered wryly how wise she had been in asking for them. They were turning out to be a greater convenience to Rannah than to herself. Always they clasped her in some way, even in sleep.

"Back against the wall, slave girl. Here, I will position you."

It had been so terribly simple. Her feet had been pushed apart and locked into clamps in the wall, her handcuffed wrists had been raised above her head and linked over a hook. No lock was needed, she could not lift them. So there she stood, the stone at her back, her legs spread so that her pubes were wantonly displayed, her hands high in their steel cuffs so that she was held erect with breasts out-thrust, looking at her world from between tautly raised arms. She felt more naked than naked.

"A little pause, slave girl, so you may stand and think."

"Rannah, please! Can't we get it over with?"

"You wish me to start your torture?" Rannah had laughed gaily.

"Suspense is awful. It's . . . sort of extra."

"How can you tell that this is not your torture! In an hour you will not be happy. By then your favourite handcuffs will be hurting your favourite wrists. Before the day is done you may scream."

Stacie had glimpsed the possibility. She was strained and uncomfortable now. She had learned how potent an hour could be for a girl in punishment. She could not move. From somewhere she found courage to ask her question.

"Rannah, if I'm tortured to enable you to send horrible pictures to my father, why haven't they been taken?"

"Have you not guessed, slave girl! Hidden cameras are trained on you in this room all the time. You will never see and never know. Through each hour they will intermittently record your suffering. We take the best of them for Mohammad Yasin's purpose."

"Must I be tortured all day for a few pictures? You could get them in an hour?"

"I had asked this question too," Rannah admitted. "But he whose charge the cameras are insists that each minute and each hour will etch their imprint on your features and your body for your father to read. I fear he speaks truth, I have beheld it."

"But, Rannah, it's so cruel . . . for so long! Must it be?"

"Yes. It is by order from Yasin. Perhaps he has a purpose of his own."

"But what! He isn't even here to see me suffer."

"Yasin is not a sadist. I am closer to being a sadist than he. No, I think he believes the things I do to you will make you a Jedrah girl. But enough! One more question and I whip you. Do you wish to be whipped, slave girl?"

"No, my Lady."

"That is much better. Argumentative slave girls are a bore. They deserve only the whip. You are beautifully positioned to have your breasts whipped. I have a delightful whip for the purpose, it has silken thongs. Shall we try it?"

"Please no, my Lady." Stacie suddenly felt her two breasts as focal points.

"Ah well, another time. I am going to amuse myself with a small pleasantry."

The taut captive watched without enthusiasm as her female tormentor rummaged in a wooden chest and produced a shining object of chain and silver plate which she held up for inspection. "Do you recognize this, slave girl?"

Stacie felt foolish at her blush and the words she must utter. "I think it's a chastity belt."

"And you are going to wear it. I shall put it on you very tightly indeed so that you are very, very safe."

It was tight, very tight! The silver shield over her sex was firmly compressed by the silver chains embedded in her waist and loins. The padlock, which she was smilingly shown, was modern and emphatic. Its solid click sealed her against penetration. Her eyes pleaded the question she had been forbidden to ask.

"You are curious, slave girl," Rannah was enjoying a private joke. "I shall not tell you what befalls. You may stand and wait. If you stand long enough you may actually want something to happen, even if it is bad." Rannah went away.

That had been long ago. By midday Stacie knew torture, she hurt everywhere. The handcuffs had become an implacable enemy, they cut and burned so that she was forever straining her tired body to find them relief, but her spread legs made their own demands and the chastity belt burrowed into her flesh painfully. Perhaps her plight was not torture, but she could think of no other name for it.

"Most beautiful lady is pleased to see Salim, I am hoping?" The naked girl tensed angrily at the unctuous voice. A male, to see her thus! And such a male! Neither the brutality of manhood or the innocence of a child, only prurience!

"Go away, Salim. If you touch me I'll scream."

The beaming smile enveloped her. "Lady is much kind to scream. Salim will shut door tight."

He did so and returned to the inevitable scrutiny, a lewd inventory. "Our mistress

has locked up lovely cunt," he deplored with much evident disappointment. "But Salim enjoys tits and other things. He has much permit."

So this was Rannah's 'Little Pleasantry'! Stacie was torn between anger and wry humour. She wondered miserably if pictures of Salim's ineffectual ravishments of her person would reach her father. She felt shame and distaste at what the boy would do to her, but supposed it would add little to her pain.

"Salim much like to fuck."

"Go ahead, help yourself."

"You are making much joke. Is not nice."

"Well, I can't help what I'm wearing."

"But you are much pleased." He was obviously debating ways and means.

The helpless naked girl was not surprised when his roving eye focused on her breasts. A man's hunger for the breasts of a girl was insatiable, Salim's was aflame with discovery, his lips and teeth avidly sought Stacie's nipples.

It was futile to protest, and she could not move, so she raised her eyes above the bent head so busily ravaging her femaleness and forced herself to seek for the ports through which the camera's would be focusing on her shame. Looking at the stone walls she tried to divorce her mind from what was being done to her body. She cringed from the thought of responding sexually to this pubescent pup. She could not stop him, but she wanted no orgasms with which to regale his lechery.

A strange contest! Stacie wondered how many women had fought it through the centuries. To keep the citadel of her emotions intact while her outer defences were ravaged by the foe! In a process of attrition the citadel would fall, but its crumbling might be delayed. She could hardly pretend that Salim was not sucking her nipples, but she could send her mind away from what was being done to her.

Quite suddenly it stopped. Salim backed away from her wet breasts, his glowing features irradiated by inspiration. "Very hot dog!" he exclaimed to no one in particular. "Salim is much clever."

The fastened girl knew it would be bad. She watched, without hope, as he searched among the plenitude of objects the awful room provided. With a grunt of satisfaction he chose a sizable wooden chest which he dragged over and thrust against his victim's pinioned legs. Standing on it he seemed pleased with the result. It was not until he threw aside the cloth around his loins that Stacie guessed what he would make her do. "Is good as I tuck," said Salim.

"I'm not going to do it!" Stacie stated flatly.

The Arab boy got down from the box, his smile undiminished. "Is always much argue," he conceded as though from long experience. "Salim soon fix."

When he selected the whip, the helpless girl knew real desolation. It was not so much the thing he wanted of her, but rather her utter impotence to question or refute. To be possessed so totally by this ingenuous adolescent was a humiliation over which she

was sure Rannah would now be laughing. She longed to kick and plunge and fight, but she could not move. She eyed the approaching whip with a certainty of defeat.

"Salim whip nicely all up and down front."

"I'll tell Rannah. She'll be angry."

"Please tell. Rannah say can do."

He might be lying. But the marks his whip were about to put on her would convict him. Stacie had to suppose her mistress felt a whipping would do her no harm. The dark eyed Arab girl was unpredictable. Fastened as she was, the absurd lout would scarcely forego the joy of whipping her breasts. Had it been her back that was to bear the brunt she might have borne some strokes as a sop to pride or in the hope the youth would not dare whip her too much or too long, but to stand and face the whip! It was more than she could bear.

"Don't whip me, Salim. I'll do it." Never had capitulation seemed more abject.

She was thankful her father could not hear her voice.

Salim was obviously disappointed. "You no wish to be much brave?" he inquired coaxingly.

"I'm not brave, Salim, I'm scared. I'll do what you want."

"Perhaps I whip small bit. Make very sure!"

"What small bit?"

Instantly she knew her mistake. He was intrigued. He surveyed the possibilities offered by her nakedness. "Cannot whip cunt, or nice arse, or pretty back," he eliminated the obvious one by one and arrived at the answer, "Pretty tits are nice stuck out," he proclaimed in triumph.

Stacie quailed, fear flooded her being. To whip a girl's breasts! It was unthinkable. She looked down at her firm cones as though bidding them good by. Surely a girl's breasts could not be whipped without injury! Their virgin loveliness would never be the same . . .

"I'll be very nice to you. I'm sorry I was rude," she said humbly.

"How nice you be?"

"I'll take it in my mouth and make you feel good."

He seemed to expand. She thought of small cockerels whose wattles got red and scarlet. "Please to tell, Salim want to hear."

She was to be properly debased! Well, what of it, there was none to see her degradation. Taking a deep breath as though diving into cold water she said the loathsome words. "Salim, I will suck your cock and play with it with my tongue and when you go off in my mouth I will swallow all you give me and then I will lick your cock clean."

Salim stood dazed, absorbing his riches. Stacie's abundant specifics had most evidently had a potent effect. She watched him lay aside the whip, and breathed a great sigh of thankfulness. This time the boy stepped upon his box in much the same grandiloquence with which Suliman the Great might have mounted his throne. His rampant male rod was thrust at Stacie's mouth like a blunt spear.

The helpless girl remembered a favorite precept of her grade one teacher at school: "If a thing is worth doing, it is worth doing well." Ruefully she supposed it applied to even this unworthy endeavour. She was also still very conscious of the whip. It was still there and might be used should she fail to please. Could she, by simulating the arts of a whore, earn gratitude! She would try. Skilfully and busily she plied her lips and tongue to do battle for such of her citadel as was still intact. Salim's grunts and moans were the cries of an army in retreat. Stacie sucked and tongued lustily.

When it was done, a dazed and deflated Salim dragged hack the box and sat on it, dolefully eyeing his limp, wet and flaccid member as though mourning the dead. After a lengthy scrutiny of past glory he spoke the epitaph: "Such small little time," he said sadly.

It was the eternal lament of all mankind: In finding splendour you relinquished it, victory and defeat were one. Stacie almost felt sorry for the boy. Surely his inexperience had not made him believe his loss irreparable!

"Did you enjoy it, Salim?" she asked in feminine curiosity.

"Is most hot dog." He pronounced ultimate praise. After a moment's meditation he asked: "Is fuck so good?"

Stacie was cautious. She had no wish that in some later helplessness this Jedrah youth father a child within her. "Fucking is not nearly as nice as . . . what we've just done," she assured him with simulated vehemence.

He nodded as though willing to believe. Without vigour he pushed the box back where he had found it. Returning, he stood and surveyed his field of battle as though reliving its glory. Stacie cringed inwardly in fear that her nakedness might rekindle the fire. But Salim's beaming smile was now vacant. "I go now," he said grandly as befits a conquerer. He wandered from the chamber in a seeming daze.

The whip lay, unused, upon the floor.

"He didn't whip you!" Rannah sounded quaintly shocked.

"Was he supposed to?"

"I gave him permission. Not too hard or too long . . ."

"He wanted to whip my breasts. Would you have wanted him to do that to me, Rannah?"

Rannah laughed. "He was teasing. He knew they were forbidden. There's your stomach and your hips and the front of your thighs. He could have amused himself with them."

"Why didn't he?"

Stacie explained. Rannah laughed. "The young devil! There'll be no holding him now. It will take a whipping to put him back in a proper frame of mind."

"I'd like to watch," the captive said bitterly.

"Poor slave girl! You feel soiled?"

"I suppose I'll live," Stacie conceded. She eyed her mistress hopefully. "Is there any chance of being let loose?"

"Of course not. You've only been here a few hours."

"It feels like a few days. I hurt."

"But you have not screamed."

"I will if it will help."

Rannah kissed her slave. "It becomes a game we play."

"But why, Rannah! Why do we play it! It seems so useless?"

"Because I wish it. I told you I would make you a slave. Mine! Today has nothing to do with Yasin."

"But I am yours! You know that. I'll let you do anything you like with me."

"That is what we do: the thing I like. Who this morning stripped and gave herself to be fastened?"

The naked girl longed to stamp her foot in frustration.

"You know what I mean," she retorted with feminine sulkiness.

"You mean you should sleep with me in my bed. I know! You shall, but not yet. For now you sleep as a good slave girl on the floor. And safely chained at that."

The captive tossed her head from side to side. "Rannah, what's going to become of me? After the pictures, I suppose they'll come to an end sometime? What then?"

"I think I had best whip you a little. My slave girl becomes a bore. Remember, I warned you!"

"Don't! Oh please! I'm sorry, I'll apologize."

"It is a little late. Besides, I whip you only to help. It will take your mind off the future and your worries," Rannah's voice was sly.

"Oh no! I don't want to be whipped . . . I'm facing the wrong way."

"You wish me to turn you round?"

With this dark eyed girl Stacie could not be sure. She was probably being teased.

But it was probable, too, that she would be whipped at least a little. She knew the eternal dilemma of the slave in which the wrong word or the inflection of a voice could earn her stripes. She had a feeling that whatever she said would now be wrong.

"If I must be whipped, yes. Please turn me around."

"You would put me to all that trouble?"

"Oh, my Lady, please! I'm all mixed up, I don't know what to say."

"It is very simple, slave girl. You deserve a whipping. Ask for it."

Once more! The abasement of words, the dissolution of self, of what you were, before the menace of the whip. The whip made a girl a nothing! "My Lady, I have misbehaved. Please whip me."

"Where, on what part of you, shall I use the whip, slave girl?"

"On my back please, my Lady."

Rannah pretended to consider. "You are most vexatious with your demands. You must be taught the cost of your whims. You may choose: six strokes across your breasts or twenty on your back?"

It was cruel! Stacie longed to weep and to plead. She looked in heartbroken longing at the girl who would whip her. "I wish you would love me," she said wanly. "I dare not think of my breasts being whipped, I choose the twenty." Despite her determination her tears flowed.

Rannah was equal to any occasion. She kissed away the tears. The slave knew the kisses were of love and was comforted. For a few glorious moments she was set free, captive only of her handcuffs, able to move as she desired, aching muscles screaming their relief. Then, all too soon, facing the stone with wrist joined to the hook, her feet now awkwardly sideways in their clamps. Her main concern to press her body against the wall so the tip of the lash would not score her breasts and belly.

To be whipped was still a new experience, the shock as great as the first time, the awfulness taxing credulity. Stacie pressed her forehead against the stone and managed not to scream until the seventh cut across the softness of her back. At the tenth Rannah paused.

"I am being kind to my slave. I should have you away from the wall so the lash could curl around you properly. Be thankful."

"I am grateful, my Lady." How trite it sounded in the midst of torture.

"Still glad you chose the twenty? You are but half way through."

How cruel a question! Any answer was wrong. "Yes, my Lady." Stacie's voice sounded sad and small. Her tears were bitter.

The thong bit and cracked at the already striped back.

From the neat impacts avoiding a lapping on the stone the victim guessed she was

being practiced on. Half the length of the lash was enough to mark the width of her back or shoulders, and this was what she got. Hard snapping blows that welted where they struck and evoked from their recipient a responsive scream. Stacie saw no point in being mute. It helped to scream, she was not gagged, so she screamed. She hoped some of her most piercing cries touched Rannah's heart. But if they did, the whip bit just as hard.

When it was done, only the whip stopped, the pain went on. The tears were hysterical and could not be quenched. The burning cut of the handcuffs reasserted their demand for help. Pain was everywhere.

The girl with the whip turned the face of her slave away from the wall and studied it, the dust from the stone mingled with the salt teardrops from the eyes. "Was it very bad, slave girl?" she asked gently.

Stacie nodded. She could not speak.

Rannah freed her slave, even taking the handcuffs from the chafed wrists. Instinctively, as before, the sobbing girl fell to her knees and clasped the legs of she who had whipped her. "Thank you, oh thank you . . . !" Her grip was convulsive with emotion.

The dark eyes became tender as they gazed down at the weeping girl and the livid weals across the bent back. A week ago Stacie Blair had been a society girl in New York, the thought was strange. Looking at the lovely nakedness Rannah understood how great the desolation this girl must feel, how nearly mortal the sundering from all she had ever known. She found a seat and allowed the set face with its damp hair to pillow itself within the juncture of her thighs and dry its tears upon her dress.

They had no need of words. They were female, that was enough. Females have an instinct for pain. Whether they give it or receive it they understand its nature and effect. Rannah was training a slave girl. In its way it was like being mother to a child.

"Thank you, Rannah. Oh, please look after me! I'll never know the right thing to do or say." The voice was piteous, the hurt face burrowed its way closer to the hidden sex of the girl who gave it refuge.

"I will look after you, slave girl, never fear that I will not. Sometimes my care will hurt you as today."

"I don't mind." Stacie inconsistently sniffed into the fold of cloth.

Rannah leant down and inserted a key in a padlock. The chastity belt fell away and jangled on the floor. Feeling its wearer tense, Rannah laughed gaily. "You will have no further need of it today, I promise you."

"It is nicer than being entirely naked," Stacie ventured.

"I like you naked. You have the loveliest cluster of black curls I have ever seen."

"You have seen many, my lady?" The captive was feeling better.

"As many as you, I expect. You know what school is."

"Yes, my lady. Is my punishment over for today?"

"You are indeed feeling better. You are becoming feminine and curious. Here, dry your tears."

Stacie thankfully obeyed. She longed to ask questions, but feared to do so. It was glorious to be free of bonds and to kneel instead of stand stretched and taut and scared. She knew it incongruous to feel the gratitude she did, bet it flowed instinctively. She wanted to say thank you again, but had already said it twice. "You have been very sweet to me," she said softly instead.

"Sweet! But I have just whipped you!"

"I know." Stacie managed a grin. "But that's how I feel. I'm not going to bother trying to understand."

Rannah nodded quietly, deep in thought. "There is a way for a slave girl to say her thank you," she said slowly. "I wonder if you know what to do."

Stacie felt the current along the line that joined them, the invisible bond that linked a slave girl with her mistress. There was something she must do, or something she must say. She knew it important that her next act be the right one. Rannah wanted something of her . . . But what! It would prove or disprove something for the dark-eyed girl . . . something important.

How hard it was to know! She who had never known slavery or even dreamed of it. How hard always to be right now in this strange world. But how great her need . . . ! Rannah was all she had. Rannah was an anchor in a storm of incredulity. Quite plausibly and with certain clarity the answer came. She knelt back straight and held out her hands. "My handcuffs please, my lady."

She watched, not caring, as the steel bands closed around her wrists and clicked into the now familiar circlets. The eyes of the two girls locked, smiling in their understanding. Without a word the naked girl, her back so gaudily striped by the whip, positioned herself against the wall, her ankles finding their place within the clamps, her joined hands raised above her head. She looked at her mistress with impudent invitation. Rannah nodded in approval, her slave had passed the test. When she had fastened her prisoner securely she kissed her for a long, long time before she went away.

One could chronicle the days, but to what end! They passed! For Stacie they were never the same, each held its own question mark. There was much pain and much discomfort, yet the captive could never feel a certainty that, beyond the first time, she had not been tortured in the true sense of that dread word. Both girls avoided the term. Stacie was torn between thankfulness that her sufferings were no worse and fear of what would eventually befall. The things that happened to her each day could easily be called torture, but she knew they were not. She longed to ask, but did not care. Her owner was sufficiently capricious that a query might provoke the agony she wanted least. Each night her wrist was handcuffed to Rannah's bed, she slept upon the rug without question or complaint.

Rannah was unpredictable. She sanctioned the intimacy of meals and the talk of feminine things, their companionship was real. At such times Stacie's impudence

might be rewarded with laughter or a whip. The captive felt a great need to know the fate of those other three who had been kidnapped with her, she intruded her queries whenever she deemed the moment propitious.

"Perhaps you would be happier not to know," Rannah mocked.

"Please tell me. Don't let me think terrible things."

"Like you, they have disappeared . . . pouf!" Rannah made an airy gesture. "They are now the most costly merchandise in the world."

"You mean . . . a . . . a . . . ?" Stacie could not bring herself to speak the ugly word.

The dark eyes sparkled with amusement. "A bordello, a whore house, a crib . . . ? You picture some evil Arab collecting cash as the clients enter to slake their lust?"

"It's been done often enough. It's what I half expected."

"Come, slave girl, you underrate us. We do not deal in coins."

"I suppose you'll sell them to an oil sheik?"

"Even that is passé. Who needs money! We are deluged in it."

"Yasin's harem then?"

"That might be a last resort. Like those fire sales your merchants have in the U.S. No, they have a more potent value."

The slave girl's eyes pleaded.

"You are quite incorrigible," Rannah protested primly. "I shall make you pay. If you must pester me, I will tell you their awful destiny if you are willing to ask me properly for ten with the cane across that pert behind of yours. There! You can't say I'm not reasonable."

Stacie was intrigued. This was one of their games. She must inevitably ask, but without certainly the penalty would be exacted. "Please tell me, my lady. And please cane my bottom ten times for having the temerity to ask."

"For an additional ten you may have the privilege of visiting them."

Stacie squirmed. Ten was bad, but bearable. Twenty was unbearable by any standard. She was becoming knowledgeable in such matters. She cast her bread upon the waters. "Please give me the extra ten for a visit, my lady."

Rannah was impressed. "I do not think I would bear twenty wounds for such curiosity," she admitted. "I'd have thought you tired of pain."

"I have to know, my lady. It's a sort of duty thing."

"Very well, you shall. But you won't like the price Now, no more of it. I will arrange."

"Thank you, my lady." But Stacie's gratitude was much subdued.

"I love your screams, Stacie, but let us mute them for once." The slave girl looked askance at the rubber ball and the strap. "Will that thing go in my mouth?" she asked dubiously.

"Let us try. You may use your own fingers to insert it. I think it is not easy."

Stacie took the seemingly innocent thing in her handcuffed hands and raised it to her mouth. By dint of compressing and see-saw motion she got it inside, her tongue retreated in confusion, she could make no sound. Rannah buckled its strap tightly at the back of her neck.

"And now the little hands behind the back."

The captive stood passive as she was made trebly helpless.

The handcuffs made such changes so very easy. Rannah stood back and surveyed the effect. "You look delightful, slave girl. I will take it out when you have received those twenty strokes with the cane you so prettily asked for."

So that was it! Her penalty and her privilege had come.

Two days of wondering had passed since the pact had been made. Now her bottom was to pay the agreed price. Perhaps it would be nice not to scream. Stacie was often shamed afterwards by the noise she had made. But the gag was frightening in its effectiveness. It was total. The rubber ball filled her mouth, she longed to swallow but could not, the strap bit unkindly at the corners of her lips.

She was to pay the price before she received the reward!

Obediently Stacie followed her mistress down the passage. What did it matter! It would hurt as much one time as another, perhaps it was best to get it over. Whimsically she debated whether to show the girls what she had paid to visit them. What strange currency a slave girl lived by!

She would be fastened for the twenty. It was the only way she could bear them. The room would provide a way. But, suddenly, the passage was strange, a new direction. They were not following the familiar path to her daily quota of pain. When they reached the door it was quickly opened and she was quickly thrust inside, it closed behind her with a decisive thud, a lock clicked, a bolt shot home.

It was pure nightmare, one of Salvador Dali's most surrealistic creations. Not to be taken seriously. . . impossible!

It was another stone chamber such as she knew so well.

But this one was bare of furnishings. It held only three naked girls, and now herself. The abundant daylight, the lack of dungeon gloom made what Stacie saw the more incongruous.

The stewardess first, she held the center of the bizarre stage. Naked, she was hard to recognize as the trim girl who had served them on the plane, but it was the wracked

contortion of her pose that made the recognition doubly difficult. She hung by her left wrist only, her right wrist being tied with cord to her left ankle. The toes of her right foot had been allowed to rest upon the floor to take some of her weight from the overtaxed arm above her head. Her plight was pure cruelty. She was gagged as was Stacie herself.

The mouths of the other two were also distended by the rubber balls and the straps. One girl was tied to a pillar, her arms from wrist to shoulder were corded on either side as were her ankles, but she was thrusting herself painfully away from her bonds, her body in an outward bow or curve to avoid impalement on a spike protruding from the post to which she was bound, the tip of which was already lost to sight in the upper cleft of her buttocks. She was as naked as her companions, her miserable posture thrusting her sex into a distorted obscenity.

The third girl hung like an impaled butterfly against the stone of a wall, her arms spread out and up. She hung from her wrists, her toes striving vainly for the floor.

The tableau held a strange and erotic beauty of its own. How cruel! How well contrived! Three pairs of female eyes focused on the visitor and implored, three female heads shook wildly in negation of the silence of their gag. Stacie knew guilt at her own absence of agony in such a place, knew the greatest frustration of her captivity in her inability to help. With an eloquent shrug she turned her back that they might see her handcuffed wrists.

How sad a visit! What exclamations of dismay each girl made within her mind. So much of which to speak, so great a need! Yet none would talk, their tongues as captive as their limbs. One of them already wept and none could dry her tears.

Stacie went from one to the other. Each tried to smile, but the gag defeated them, their eyes were their only communion, in them were only questions and despair. All three were in pain. How easy now for Stacie to know their anguish. They looked at her handcuffs with envy.

They had been whipped. Now as much as she herself, but perhaps a single severe beating, the marks were plain to see. Stacie remembered Rannah's words: 'Merchandise': their skin was valuable. But a most curious thing had been done: high on the chest of each, well above the swell of their breasts, a name had been printed in some indelible ink. Convenience, humiliation, identification! Stacie could not know. The stewardess was Wendy, the others, Jane and Suzie. It was their only introduction. Her own absence of such an imprint set her apart. They must be as curious of her as she was of them. At least the weals upon her skin would tell them she was not unfairly favoured.

As a visit it was desolation. All it achieved was a knowledge of each other's continued existence in captive pain. To stand before one of the tortured girls was to be tortured too, for it would not be long until their hurt eyes closed and they relapsed into their private misery. As she stood before each Stacie saw their eyes focus on her scanty slave girl garb. Compared to their own nudity she was well dressed. She longed to tell them that in her punishments she, too, was naked.

It was to painful. Stacie wished she had not come. Her eyes were brimming with tears by the time Rannah returned to take her away. She was glad to leave.

Rannah laughed at the woebegone faces. "You think me cruel. I know! So I tell two

things. You are gagged because it is best you do not exchange such things as you may know. You three are punished by your own request as a price for this visit. Stacie is about to be punished as her own contribution. You three will now be released, she will not."

Simple and direct. Rannah had the laugh on all of them. How helpless they were in their bondage! Robbed even of speech! Following her mistress, Stacie longed to speak but was still gagged. She ceased to care about the tears that trickled down her cheeks.

"You think I am terribly cruel, don't you, slave girl. So now I keep the other half of my bargain. Those three very beautiful girls will be nurtured and trained to become houris for the delight of any man. When Mohammad Yasin desires a favour in high places, favours that money cannot buy, he will use them as a bribe. So cease to worry about them. They will receive pain only in such measure as is needful to make them amenable to their new status."

Rannah looked back and laughed at what she saw.

"Allright, I take it off. I love your chatter and your screams. I do not want you silent." Deftly, but with care she took the wet ball from her slave girl's mouth. "There! You can talk. Is your bottom ready for its stripes?"

"Yes, my lady."

"But you do not really relish them!"

"No, my lady."

Rannah laughed gaily. "So woebegone, so sad! Perhaps I will forgive you the stripes and give you something worse. The day is still young, we have much time. Would you like that?"

"If it pleases you, my lady."

"Poor child! So cautious! But I would be cautious too, were I in your shoes."

The slave girl had a sad feeling it was not going to be a good day. She was glad to be forgiven the caning - if in truth she was! But Rannah was in a pixie mood. The 'something worse' might indeed be just that. She strained tentatively at her handcuffs as was her instinctive habit when in stress. She looked around the familiar room they had just entered and wondered which of its terrors she would meet.

"Lay face down, slave girl, so your ankles fit in these." 'These' comprised an anchored metal clamp, the half circles of which were raised a few inches from the stone. Their intent was all too evident. Sighing, Stacie lowered herself to the floor, her locked hands helping her not at all. Looking over one shoulder she disposed her feet as ordered and watched Rannah flip over the top section and immovably prison her ankles. Her helplessness was now frightening. "I'm not naked," she said irrelevantly as though hoping to start afresh.

"You're not, are you! Never mind. What you've got on won't matter for this one."

When Rannah knelt beside her and began to plait her hair Stacie was both scared and intrigued. The plait was long, twined within it was solidly anchored a knotted cord.

"On your knees, slave girl, erect."

It was not easy, Rannah had to help. Possibilities began to loom, to kneel on the stone all day would not be pleasant. But the preparations were not yet done. A couple of feet before her was a square hole in the stone, into it Rannah inserted and pushed home a solid four by four that had the appearance of much use. The handcuffs were unlocked and discarded.

"A hand on each side, Stacie."

Her wrists were tied to the post with much care so that the slave knelt upright, her hands slightly raised above the level of her chin.

"Comfy?"

"No, my lady."

Not the braid! Its cord was pulled back and tethered to a ring behind her feet. It was gently tested and gently pulled. When it was knotted Stacie could not bend or lean forward, she could not even look down. Her head was held very erect indeed. Her pinioned arms prevented her leaning back to ease the strain. She had perforce to kneel as she had been positioned, she had no other choice. She could move little and that without effect. She longed to slump back upon her heels, but her corded wrists denied her wish. It was not a routine day.

Rannah circled her appraisingly. "You look delicious, slave girl," she approved. "I will leave you soon, but there is one more thing . . ."

Stacie saw her torture only as it approached. Once positioned, her taut braid would prohibit examination. She divined its purpose instantly, and looked up at the Arab girl in mute and agonized appeal.

It was very simple: a block of wood three feet long. Six inches at the base, tapering to a faintly curved smooth edge an inch wide. Straddling the helpless girl, Rannah managed to raise her from the floor long enough to slip the balk of timber into its appointed place beneath the victim's knees. A kick here and there aligned it to her satisfaction before she went away and left the kneeling girl alone. Neither girl had spoken. Each had seen the condition as immutable.

Stacie knew it would get worse, probably much worse. But even at the beginning it was frightening enough to make her clench her teeth in silence while the door closed and Rannah went beyond the sound of a voice in agony. Throughout the preparations she had longed to plead. Now it was too late, there was none to hear. It was awful, it was frightening, but it was best. That was why the dark-eyed girl had sped away.

Coping with the waves of pain from her tortured knees, Stacie tried to assess the limits of her suffering. More urgently she sought easement. There was none. Her braided hair was wicked, without it she could have leant forward and perhaps taken some weight with her prisoned wrists, but erect as she was forced to stay, her arms

were thrust straight forward and took none of her weight at all, her knees got it all. If she wanted to lean her weight on one she could ease the other. She tried it, but relapsed in gasping anguish. Stacie bitterly realized she would stay kneeling and upright as she was, her knees indented on their narrow ledge, until such time as her mistress decided to release her. Even if she fainted, her hands tied to the post would keep her from falling. Between her wrists and her braided hair she could do naught else but endure what she must.

Torture was always the same in its 'if only'. The phrase was Stacie's. Looking along the bare while columns of her arms so securely bound to the post she was impelled to think that if only she could free one hand, even one finger. If only she could so lean back and toss her head that the braid would come undone. If only she had been vouchsafed the leverage to thrust aside the chunk of wood on which her knees were punished so that she could kneel upon the flat stone instead of the cunning edge designed for the endless messages of pain that shot up her thighs and enveloped her whole being. If only . . . If only . . . !

She moaned quietly. Her pain was such a lovely thing. She needed someone to share it, to hear her scream, to reprove or to console, it mattered little which so long as they were a human presence who might eventually feel pity and set her free. Free! How distant the word seemed now! But it was always thus with torture. When she was whipped the horror of the first stroke told her she could never survive until the last, it would not come in time! Then and now she would succumb and die long before the strokes or the hours or the centuries rolled by. She thought of those who had held their secrets no matter what the torturer did to them, but deemed herself not of these. She felt certain she would blurt out what was required of her at the first shock of awfulness. More probably, now she knew the limitless nature of pain she would tell all when they stripped her and bound her at the start.

This was the real thing. There would be no visitors to distract her from her pain. The pain was an end in itself, so none need witness it. The hidden cameras would record it with fidelity for her father's eyes. How incredible that he should see her thus! Perhaps at this moment she had moved enough to find favour on the film. Would the pictures show her as grotesque or beautiful! It still mattered, she was female.

For a little while she moaned and screamed. She did it with conscious intent as though the sound placed a barrier between herself and agony. It tired her so that she moved closer to the dazed acceptance as the pain burrowed and fought its way into her, the acceptance of something that could not be escaped. You moaned constantly to placate that which could not be assuaged, perhaps you sobbed. If you were a girl you cried.

While she went she forced her mind to dwell on things she had read of horrors beyond her present affliction. There had been a tale of a girl taken by an Indian tribe, stripped and tied by her wrists to two trees so that she stood between them with arms stretched taut. Her torture had been a gala event. Men and women had been given the privilege of doing their own single evil with her flesh. Stacie remembered the pine splinters thrust into the soft skin and set afire, the stab of slender skewers into the naked breasts, the heated tomahawk pressed home upon the tenderness beneath the pinioned arm . . . And the screams, always the screams.

Did it lessen her own pain? She had no proof of it, so thrust the morbid pictures from her mind. Perhaps she had gained a small thankfulness that her own flesh was

kept intact. But she was a treasure that must be slowly spent. Yasin wanted her alive and in good health. She wondered cynically if indeed his motives were twofold. Certainly Rannah would deal her no greater injury than pain. But there were so many ways . . .

Was this worse than hanging by the rod beneath her armpits? She could not judge. Her present plight was intensified by her need to stay erect, to make the small motions she desired was to punish her scalp or her wrists. But it was so cruel! To kneel as though in prayer, to keep still when every nerve fought for motion, to sanction the ceaseless attrition of the narrow strip of wood against her knees, to know it would continue on and on.

The punished girl longed for the option of surrender. How fortunate those other tortured girls who need say only a few words or affirm an act to gain release. Stacie made no pretense of heroics, she would yield her body willingly to anyone who would end her misery. She thought bitterly of Salim and wondered if he would succumb to such bribe.

After a long, long time and when the tortured girl had immured herself deeply into the awful half world that only the tortured know, Rannah slipped quietly back into the stone place of suffering. She sat and stared pensively at the loveliness of her slave, waiting in curiosity for whatever pleading the sad soft lips might make.

"I will do anything, my lady, anything . . ."

"What can you do, slave girl?"

"If you were a man I would offer you my body."

"I am not a man, but you can still make the offer."

"It would mean nothing, my lady. You have me now, all of me."

"I think it would be the same with me," Rannah mused. "I would not endure torture I would end by laying on my back."

"Please free me, my lady. Surely by now there are enough pictures?"

"I am cruel, slave girl. You delight me as you are. In this suffering you are quite exquisite."

"Why cannot I hate you?"

"I have asked that too, slave girl. I think it is that we are female. In us is something wanton, a need to hurt or to be hurt. I think we seek an endless orgasm. Would you like me to give you one now? I could."

How great the longing! But Stacie moaned. "Oh please! Not now, it would be all wrong. I am tied so strangely."

"I have come by a quite wicked thought, slave girl. If you would earn release by bartering yourself, would it not be kind if I gave you the possibility?"

"Please, my lady, I hurt too much to tease."

"Yes, I tease. But it is for real," the Arab girl laughed. "My thought is quite delicious. I will send Salim. He will know he will be punished if he consummates his greatest wish. It will be a punishment he can bear: I must not deter him totally. But it will give him pause. To end your suffering see if you can tempt him."

Did hope kindle? Stacie knew it did. But it was a strangely mixed emotion. "Please, my lady, free me yourself. You can. Free me and love me." Her heart was in the words.

"But my plan, slave girl! Is it not delightfully droll?"

"I cannot tell how I will behave when the moment comes."

"That is its piquancy. Salim's grin and his fine erection may make your torture preferable. Then you must persuade him not to do the thing you most want. There are yet many hours for you to kneel, so I will hasten that you may make your choice. Are you not grateful?"

"Yes, my lady. Thank you."

But Stacie was not certain of her gratitude.

"Nice girl is most pretty like that," Salim opened affably.

"Thank you, Salim."

Stacie was annoyed with herself. Here was deliverance and all she had the wit to do with it was be little girl polite.

"Would you like me to fuck you?" Salim was not bothered by inhibitions.

"I'm tied up so much it's not possible."

"Salim set pretty girl free if promise to show how best to fuck."

So it was the boy's first time. Stacie felt a guilty annoyance as eroticism flared. There were those who would be amusedly envious of her privilege. Despite her longing for release, she found herself temporizing. "Would you trust me? If I was free I might not keep my word."

It stayed him for but a moment. "You nice girl, you keep promise. Besides, you are very much hurting."

"Won't you be terribly punished?"

"Salim is not much caring. You are too nice."

"It's the thing between my legs you like, Salim, not me." The boy gave this much thought. "Have nice mouth too," he pointed out brightly. Stacie had the feeling he was hopeful of other discoveries as well.

"Wouldn't you prefer me to use my mouth? I told you it was best." She felt it worth a try.

"Then no need to untie."

Stacie moaned. She was in agony and they were nattering like two housewives. "Untie me, Salim, I'll do what you want."

"Much promise?"

"Much promise."

The untying was more agonizing than being tied, even her neck hurt when the cord in her braid was loosed. When the cord fell away from her wrists her hands flew to the punishing wood on which she knelt. It was both excruciating and gorgeous to raise her tortured knees from the brutal edge on which they had been sacrificed. When Salim contrived to loose her ankles the sudden complete freedom seemed as unreal as the strained posture of punishment had been.

"Is still much hurting?" Salim commiserated.

"It's awful." Stacie was massaging her wounds. "I'll be all right in a minute."

The youth was solicitous. "But has not hurt cunt?" he inquired anxiously.

"No, that's all right. I'll let you have a look at it in a minute."

With a peacock gesture of triumph the boy divested himself of his only garment, the loin cloth. Stacie took note of the implement of her impalement. It evidenced intense excitation. Her mind worked busily with a faint hope.

Ruefully, the slave girl reflected that a month ago her course of action would have been clear. Having wheedled freedom out of this comic creature she should fight and run, surely in such self-preservation there could be no dishonour! But now she would not renege. Having set her free, Salim would get whatever penalty Rannah had planned for him. Why should a slave girl deny him his bargain. He had freed her, was that not enough? He had ended her torture, why question his motives? Without further ado Stacie removed her two scanty scraps of covering, perhaps what he now saw would excite him further . . . !

"So many nice parts!" Salim obviously wished he had three hands.

Stacie was half hysterical with the joy of release. She was in a mood where Salim's ambitions seemed trivial. She also pursued a possibility . . ."I expect you'd like to play with them all," she said demurely. Standing with feel well apart she clasped her hands behind her neck. It was a provocative pose.

It is doubtful that the shrine at Mecca would have held the beaming boy in greater awe. Faced with such a plentitude of riches he was, for a moment, at a loss. Stacie, craftily, helped out.

"You can suck one and hold one and then use your other hand between my legs," she suggested helpfully, uncertain whether she was being clinical or carnal.

The entranced youth leaped into the fray. His eager application to his task reminded the naked girl of the more enterprising of her dates in her early teens. Bracing herself

for her ordeal she wondered how so much friction could emanate from a single boy. Relaxed after release from the awfulness now over she found herself responding. After all, the attention she was receiving could hardly go unnoticed. Without shame she pulled the bare male loins close so that the rampant penis was pressed tight against her hip, her own orgasms were incidental, what counted was his!

Stacie supposed she would always compare her 'nows' with her memories of her life in the other world from which she had been wrested. Ruefully she considered her immediate condition. Nothing in her other existence was comparable: nothing could condone. "You can put a finger inside me if you wish," she said dreamily.

"Is most hot dog!" Salim took the barest time for his commendation before returning to work.

When it became evident that further delays might jeopardize the entente cordiale between herself and her would-be ravisher Stacie lay herself down on the cool stone and invited the son of the desert with open arms. "Some men like to rub it all over a girl's nipples," she offered tentatively.

"You are meaning tits?"

"Try it, you might like it."

She lay quiescent while the play ran its course. Would the camera record this absurdity! To see his daughter act the wanton as she was doing would break her father's heart as badly as the scenes of torture. All that had been done to her and made her a child of Jedrah in word and act. What did it matter! For her, freedom was a dream.

She saw it happen in his eyes, they blanked and were lost in some vision of their own. Stacie closed her mind to disgust as the boy's ejaculation inundated her breasts. She had planned it and it had happened. She had won the first round. She lay and contemptuously watched the disintegration of a male libido. She thought of dogs and cats and barnyards.

"Am most sorry. Should have put in cunt," Salim sounded bereft.

"Never mind," Stacie was magnanimous in victory. "I'll make it up to you. May I have your loincloth to wipe myself?"

He did it for her. He was insistent. "Is most bad thing. I cut him off," he declared morosely. "He is liking tits too much."

The thankful girl allowed herself to be cleansed. She watched while the same cloth was used on the fallen warrior. So far she was winning, could she keep it up! "Do you want to tie me back the way I was?" she asked experimentally.

In the throes of post coital depression the idea appeared to have some merit in the adolescent mind. "For not getting cock in cunt?" he inquired interestedly.

"I don't want you to feel cheated." Stacie wondered what maniacal impulse was prompting her.

"If tie most tight Salim get no punish!"

The naked girl wanted to kick herself. Why was she doing this! Was it true that she thought and acted as a slave! Or was it simply the cutting of a loss! She had enjoyed freedom and easement from her torture at the expense of no more than some fleshy friction and a damp chest. Or did she feel a kindred sympathy for this youth who might be mercilessly whipped for what he had so far failed to receive.

"You let Salim tie you?"

"If you want."

"You are most hot dog! Then I not get punish." It was his greatest accolade. "You are now to kneel please."

How stupid can a girl get! She asked herself savagely as she obeyed his request and rested her ankles in the clamps that would hold them immovably. Looking over her shoulder she morosely watched his suddenly urgent fingers make her captive, with the snapping of the lock she knew herself consigned to helplessness.

The boy looked at her in wonder as, without prompting, she placed a slender chafed wrist on each side of the waiting post and smilingly invited him to tie them. "Must make most tight," he consoled apologetically.

Stacie winced as the cords made their familiar grooves within her flesh. Salim made a competent job of both the tie and the knot, she could never free herself, but she no longer ever expected to. It did not matter, it was her life.

"Is most funny with hair," the amateur torturer ruminated picking up the cord still entwined within the victim's braid. "Am not much like."

The naked girl did not like it either as the slow pull brought her more and more upright and took from her the ability to look down at her own person. Her knees were hurting afresh, even on the flat stone she was getting a bitter foretaste of pain to come.

"Is about right I think?" Salim enquired.

"About right," she agreed listlessly. "You'll have to lift me to get the timber under my knees."

It was a strange intimacy that took place then between the Arab boy and the white girl who had become a slave. To lift her he must grasp her firmly in a manner without lustful intent. For him it was the hardest thing he had ever done with her, for her it was an unexpected reliance in his maleness that he should do for her something she could not do for herself, his strength was surprising and oddly comforting. There came into being between them a kindred something Stacie could not name. When he gently lowered her to a resumption of her agony his hand continued to rest upon her naked shoulder in a tender sympathy.

"Is hurt most bad." He had a gift for the obvious. Stacie moaned, not in pain but at her own illogic.

Everything was insane and impossible, nothing made sense. Tears of weariness with pain welled in her eyes and spilled down her cheeks. She could not touch them, she

could not move.

"Have done a thing most bad," said Salim in a sad shocked voice.

It hurt to look sideways and up, but Stacie enquiringly did so, sensing disquiet. What she saw was a thing for laughter or for rage. An embarrassed youth was holding up her briefs and bra.

In her nakedness they were both condemned.

"Never mind," she said wearily. "I don't care what happens." Then, remembering his vulnerability: "Oh, Salim, I'm sorry . . ."

"I think we both get much whip," he mourned lugubriously.

"Just let me loose. I'll put them on and we'll start over." With quick decisive motions he set her free. Without pause she donned the two forgotten trifles, then once more knelt for punishment.

"Salim no can tie."

She looked in astonishment at his dejected face. "You are so nice girl. Most kind."

"It won't take you long to tie me, Salim, then you'll be safe."

He shook his head. "No. No tie. I am liking you." Always the unexpected! Some magic had come from her and touched this naive boy. He would accept his penalty and she would be free, her pain behind her for the day. Yet she was not happy.

"Oh, Salim, I'm sorry."

He looked at her with infinite pathos. "So nice a cunt." It was as though he mourned the dead.

The girl of Jedrah knew what she must do. She could not have done it once, but she could do it now. Kneeling before him as a slave she fondled his genitals in her hands and used her lips to revive that which its owner believed lost. She did not care for pictures or of memories or of guilt. All Stacie Blair wanted at that moment was to give this sad young man some pleasure for the pain he would suffer as her price.

There are many kinds of love.

When they separated and surveyed each other with new eyes Salim was not as he had been, he had passed a milestone. The slave girl knew that had he possessed wealth he would have paid any price to buy her for his own. For this boy who, before her capture, had never seen a naked girl she was all the treasure of the world.

"Am most sad." Sheepishly he retrieved the discarded handcuffs. "The lady Rannah tell me I must do this."

Stacie laughed gaily and offered him her hands. "I don't mind, Salim. I know I have to be chained."

Apologetically he locked a cuff oh her right wrist, led her to the wall, and secured her

safely to a ring. He thrust forward a box that she might sit in comfort. She said, "Thank you," without irony.

He lingered, seeking a last statement. "Is cunt much used?" he inquired politely.

"Not these days," Stacie tried not to giggle. "Most people use other things."

He nodded with great wisdom. "Cunt pretty in hair, but pretty girl's lips most hot dog. You have most fine parts." Once more beaming he left his Princess seated on her wooden throne.

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"I should have you both soundly whipped by Yousef," Rannah declared with laughter. "You have bewitched the boy."

"Don't punish him, my Lady. I cheated, he did not get the thing he desired."

"Oh, I was sure enough of that, slave girl. Perhaps it is you I should punish?"

"If you wish, my Lady. If one of us is to be whipped I expect it should be me." Stacie giggled at the memory. "He's rather sweet, I'm afraid I managed him outrageously."

The deep dark eyes examined the chained girl intently.

"Since you carry so much guilt you may go and kneel again to be tied."

There was a bare moment of tense silence before Stacie's demure: "Yes, my Lady," as she rose to obey, only to be jerked back by her forgotten hand still cuffed to the ring.

They shared a smile. Still intent on a purpose the Arab girl used her key. Without hesitation Stacie knelt in the hated pose, positioned her ankles in their waiting clamps, and raised her arms to place a wrist on each side of the post. She looked at her mistress expectantly without emotion.

It was almost a minute before Rannah's laughter broke the tension. "Stacie, you are impossible! I do not believe you! What has Jedrah done to you!"

The compliant candidate for torture shrugged wryly. "I do not know, my Lady." The lovely lips twisted in deprecation, "I too am puzzled by me. Once I was not like this." Manfully she held the posture in which she would be tied.

"No tears? No plea?"

"No, my Lady," the eyes glinted with a single spark of mischief. "I am a slave girl." The briefest pause and then:

"When this is done, my Lady, am I to be whipped also? Will you truly give me to Yousef?"

"Why not! It is what you deserve. Since it is he who will whip you I will be merciful: twenty strokes. It will be enough."

"Thank you, my Lady." There were tears in the voice, but they did not fall. "Will you please tie me now, it is very hard to kneel like this."

"Get up and come here!"

The command was like the crack of a whip. Stacie looked up in alarm, she wanted no more punishments. Fearfully she obeyed.

"Your hands."

Stacie watched the shining steel capture her wrists. "You are an outrageous little masochist! What must I do with you!" Rannah's voice was joyous.

It happened then as it had happened before. Without volition Stacie sank to her knees and clasped, as best her fettered hands would allow, the legs that in their strength and warmth gave her the comfort of which she had a great need. She felt no abasement in the act, only love and longing. She understood nothing and did not care. If this was where she belonged, so be it. After a long while she said softly: "I am not a masochist, my Lady. You know I'm not."

"I know that," Rannah looked down at the supplicating loveliness with exasperated affection. "But if you keep offering that beautiful body of yours for punishment you will get more of it than you deserve. You have me lusting to whip you right now."

"I offer myself only to you, my Lady."

"Have you forgotten Salim!"

"Yes, my Lady. He does not count." There was a hint of a giggle.

"If you had never been brought to Jedrah you would never have discovered yourself. Is that not truth?"

"It is truth, my Lady."

"You are the most natural and instinctive slave girl fantasy could devise. You're not acting, are you?"

Slowly the kneeling girl relinquished her hold and sat back on her heels. She shook her head in perplexity. "Oh Rannah, I feel silly. No, I'm not acting, I can't help it. I find myself doing and saying the things I do as though I was drugged or hypnotised. You know: I sort of see myself and hear myself as though I was someone else. But I don't want to change it. I suppose that's the frightening thing." She shrugged and grinned ruefully, "Or the wonderful thing . . . according to how you look at it. If you ordered me to go to Yousef now to be whipped I'd trot along like a good little girl."

"You are incredibly wonderful. I am lucky."

"I'm not silly, Rannah?"

"You could never be silly. Come, I wish to bathe you."

"If you take off my handcuffs I will bathe myself. It is not seemly for you to attend me. I am a slave."

Rannah chuckled delightedly. "You wanted handcuffs, you have them. You'll wear them whether you wish to or not."

They bathed, both together in the huge pool. Stacie sensed the intensity of the current between them. Rannah's nakedness excited her, it was lithe and slender and strong.

"Come, slave girl, I will let you sleep."

Stacie knelt upon the familiar rug on which she spent her nights. She offered her hands that she be chained. Her right wrist was unlocked, she was raised and thrust upon the bed. Her left hand was dragged above her head and clicked firmly to the scroll work at the head. She lay naked on her back, free to do all she would need to do. She could well spare the single hand by which she would be kept captive. The smoldering fire flamed hotly within her loins as the dark eyes found and held her own.

"I have kept you waiting far too long." With a moan of anguished hunger Rannah sought the scented flesh of the slave girl on the bed. Stacie's single arm rose to clutch and cling. For both it was a fresh chapter in their lives.

They feasted endlessly upon each other's flesh, it gained in savour as the days and the nights drifted through their love. It was an unending appetite that regenerated itself as often as it was appeased. They luxuriated in each other without thought or count or care of time. They lived in a perfumed garden of delight.

Yet always Stacie's wrists knew steel. She had asked and she would be given the handcuffs, the affection for which Rannah shared. If one captive wrist inhibited their lovemaking it was laughingly unlocked and tethered elsewhere, it added spice. They giggled over the possibilities uncovered by the chaining of the prisoned hand, first here and there around the bed, or simply joined to its fellow when they bathed and ate their meals. They lived in a Lotus Land beyond the World.

For Stacie it was a homecoming and a discovery. She asked no questions, nor did she look either forward or back. She revelled in her slavery as she revelled in her love. As a slave she had no decisions and no fears. Rannah was a rock shielding her from harm, sustaining her with the bounty of her flesh. She received no real punishments, only small whippings delivered and received with squeals and laughter as she lay chained upon the bed that had become her world. She knew herself a slave and wished to be more and more a slave as she found within her slavery the greatest joys she had ever known.

If sometimes the rapturous slave saw within her mistress's eyes the shadow of a prescience beyond her ken she spoke no word. Knowledge was a penalty of being free, and she was captive. True, she occasionally remembered her torture and the pain chamber where she had spent her days, but if Rannah was content to forget then so was she. But she was female and when their halcyon days had lengthened into a couple of weeks and they lay satiated and entwined upon their bed a pixie mood prompted her sudden question.

"Rannah, what about those cameras?" she giggled. "Are they still clicking on an

empty room?"

The dark eyed mistress sighed. She had waited for the question and dreaded it. "The cameras have ceased their work," she said dully.

Sensing disquiet, the slave girl raised herself on her one free elbow and looked with concern at her beloved. She was suddenly desperately afraid. "My torture . . . ?" she could not frame the question.

"How can I do that to flesh of my flesh!" The Arab girl's anger was vehement. "I will not torture again, I love you."

"But Yasin . . . ?"

"He will punish me. I do not care!"

It sounded like an affirmation of her own. Stacie looked down with tenderness at the serenity of her loved one's face. She understood how easily it came to a girl's lips.

When a girl loved it seemed good to make a sacrifice to pain.

"He will punish you because of me?"

Rannah smiled impishly. "Not because of you, but because of me. You have disobeyed nothing."

"Punish, what will he . . . !"

The dark eyes held no regret. "You have been punished . . . it will be things like that."

It was not possible! Rannah tortured . . . whipped! The slave girl's mind worked frantically. "Is there not yet time? Can't we catch up? I mean the pictures and my . . . my pain?"

"I will not hurt you again, Stacie beloved. I cannot."

"I . . . I know. But give me to Yousef. In a few days surely there will be enough pictures. Yasin need not know."

"He will know, but let us not concern ourselves. Our Master will return before many days, but if I am clever we will have at least half our nights. I think his need to torture you will slowly wane. Let us not desolate ourselves with horrors."

"But tomorrow . . . give me to Yousef. Mohammad Yasin will be less angry with you if he finds me hurt. Please, Rannah, please! I can't bear to have you tortured because of . . . us."

The dark eyes sought for wisdom, the dark head nodded sadly. "Very well then. Perhaps it may be best for both of us. Tomorrow Yousef shall have you for a little while enough to give the cameras some work. But for tonight let us live out our dream." Rannah reached out a sun drenched arm to find her heart's desire.

Yet in the morning Rannah rebelled, she could not bring herself to deliver her love to torment. So, greatly daring and greatly loving, the slave girl awaited a time when

her wrists were handcuffed together so that she was free to walk without being tethered, and took herself upon the dread errand.

"Please, Yousef, I am to be punished. Take me to the room and make sure the cameras are working."

He surveyed her in amused surprise, but there would be few secrets he did not know. Stacie found herself blushing.

She recalled his deferential bow. "And how must I punish you, lady?"

Stacie cringed but shrugged offhandedly. "You may suit yourself about my punishment. It may last no more than three hours." It was like asking the cook to prepare a special dish.

She followed his lead, feeling foolish and tiny beside his muscularity. When she faced him in the chamber where she must bear her pain to feed the camera's hungry eyes she held out her linked hands. "If you will free them, please, I will strip for you."

He had a key, there seemed to be a lot of keys but none where she might find one. When he took the glinting metal from her wrists she found herself freshly shamed to reveal all her nakedness before his sardonic inspection. She stripped herself hastily and stood as brazenly as she could contrive. She felt positive he correctly assessed the situation between herself and Rannah.

"Your hands, lady," he was unfailingly polite.

She watched him buckle the broad padded straps upon her wrists, she was not surprised to be suspended, to hang naked made a girl frighteningly accessible. When her toes left the comfort of the floor she knew her arms had been stretched more widely than before. Her shoulders were cruelly wrenched. She tried hard not to move.

There were other bands for her ankles, the ropes that led from them to the columns on either side were long and looped high above the floor. She began to tremble at thought of what he would do to her.

Yousef pulled taut her ankle ropes one at a time. The first two heaves spread her obscenely and should have been enough for any carnal mind, but it was only the beginning. Stacie moaned softly as he tugged first one and then the other to open her more and more cruelly, her feet being lifted, almost to the level of her hips. The sounds she made were as much in fear as in pain. She had dreadful visions of torn ligaments and sundered joints. When he was satisfied her legs had been pulled out to each side more blatantly than any ballet dancer doing the splits. Between her gasps she reflected bitterly that 'split' was now the word for Stacie Blair, she was positive her sex was gaping wide with lips pulled well apart.

When Yousef chose his whip Stacie was appalled. She had supposed her wickedly stretched limbs torture enough. Pure terror prompted her plea. "Please don't whip me as well, Yousef."

He stood and calmly surveyed his work. Stacie was sure her wracked nudity must appear bizarre, grotesque, a caricature of her normal loveliness, but how well delivered to the whip!

"Why should I not whip you, lady?"

There was no satisfying answer, of course! Stacie did her best. "I'm in agony now. Isn't this enough?"

"You do not scream."

"I'm trying hard not to."

"I give help." The lash snaked out and wrapped itself around her totally offered thigh.

Yousef listened judicially to Stacie's screams with the same grave attention a wine taster gives his vintages. Thoughtfully he sought for better effect, his whip snapped and curled its twin wound on her other side. She now had two flaming circlets of fire to prompt her choice. Yousef listened attentively to her pealing cries, he was a connoisseur.

"Don't hit me again, Yousef. Oh please . . . ! Do something else . . . anything, but not the whip."

"An iron heated in the fire perhaps?" he asked solicitously.

"Please, don't whip me, I can't stand it."

"Little lady has no choice."

"On my back then . . . whip my back."

Yousef made a gesture of contempt. "A girl's back, pouf! It is as nothing, you would laugh."

"No, no, no! Please, Yousef, my back! I'll scream. Don't hit me down there again . . . oh please!"

"Right up through cunt, pretty lady. Yousef most clever." A third party might have appreciated the skill. Stacie could not. Her whole world exploded as the leather bit up at her from below, kept Yousef's promise, and spent itself within the cleft of her bottom. She could not scream fast or loud enough to voice not only her agony but also her outraged anger that any girl should have to bear such punishment in such a place. Yousef nodded in deep approval. Here was a girl worthy of him, already his erection was demanding. He looked longingly at Stacie's strained breasts. How lovely they were! What satisfaction a man would have in whipping them! What noises would the charming child make as they bounced beneath his tong! But they were proscribed . . . ! He sighed contentedly enough, sooner or later all things came to the man who held the whip. He had thought he had lost this one, but here she was screaming her head off. He knew himself a lucky man.

"I will not whip your back, pretty lady."

"My bottom then. Won't that satisfy you?"

He laughed at her earnestness. "Your bottom is split, lady, you have two halves: one cheek at a time perhaps?"

Stacie moaned. He was laughing at her. She was tied so tightly she could not even twitch. He could whip her to death. "Oh yes, yes please . . . do it as you said." It would be better to be whipped there than have her loins sliced to shreds.

"Pretty lady ask Yousef to punish."

Stacie was desperate. She threw her head from side to side and gazed hopelessly up the slender taut arms by which she was held. She was pitiably unable to move, if Yousef wished to whip her in strange ways she was wonderfully stretched for his purpose. Somehow she must try and divert his interest, hating herself she tried the age old bribe. "Yousef, don't whip me. I'll be very nice to you."

"You do not bargain, lady. Yousef fucks you or whips you as it pleases him. You now be much whip."

She moaned with the hopelessness of her plight. Her screams pealed out afresh as a new stroke bit at the junction of hip and thigh and lapped over one cheek of her bottom with a cruel thunk. Yousef laughed his pleasure.

It was frightening to be so totally robbed of response. Her legs and arms were pulled out and tied so that not even a flinch or a quiver could result from the cuts as they fell upon her skin. She was as the inanimate metal placed upon the anvil beneath the pounding hammer of the smith . .

The man who was whipping her was an artist. She knew he would now match the last lash by a similar infliction over her other hip. He would mark her beautifully and geometrically. She tried to close her eyes but could not. There was an element of disbelief she must appease by watching Yousef draw back his arm and measure distance, his target was herself. The long lash snapped and scored her scaldingly in the precise spot she had known it would. She lost herself in screams which Yousef drank in with hungry ears and eyes.

"You are very beautiful, lady," he said after a long time. It was a simple tribute to a loveliness he was uniquely equipped to judge.

"No more . . ." Stacie shook her head slowly in negation. "No more . . ."

"All girls being whipped say that, lady," he laughed reminiscently, "and offer to fuck: always they do that. They think most valuable their slit inside their hair. Last girl I whip she offer her little arse too: as though I could not take it when I wish."

Smilingly tolerant of feminine weakness the torturer circled her tractioned nudity with one arm and with his other hand cupped the sexuality within her pubic hair, he plied his palm and fingers thoughtfully as on familiar ground. Stacie gasped at the unexpected attention.

"All girls like this while being whipped."

Stacie could believe it. Even though her vulva was swollen and sore from the vicious cut of Yousef's whip the respite of this half amorous fondling was welcome, anything was better than the continued sibilance and cracking impact of the lash. She closed her eyes, she could think of nothing suitable to say, she hoped her panting gasps were enough.

He would always milk a girl of her pride, it was part of his trade. "Are you not grateful?" he insinuated.

"Oh yes Yousef, you're wonderful. Thank you."

He inserted a blunt finger. "Can make scream this way too."

Stacie was sure he could. She increased the tempo of her moans, only part of them were simulated.

Suddenly it stopped. Yousef backed away laughing at her flushed and bewildered face. "Now I whip your cunt again." He was totally omnipotent, every part of her was his to hurt.

"No! Love me . . . love me! Don't whip me there again." How silly it sounded! Trite, childish, demeaning. The words had formed themselves. She looked at her torturer in wide eyed appeal. "Don't whip me there . . ."

He whipped her there, not once but twice, glorying in his power and her panicked screams. Stacie believed herself split open by the impacting thong, yet even at her peak of agony she could not move, nor twitch nor shrink so tightly was she bound. Looking down across her breasts she saw her flesh drenched with the sweat of torment.

This time when he cupped his hand across her pubes she screamed in genuine hurt. He had whipped the labia skilfully so that, for the moment, they welcomed nothing male. But the naked girl ground her teeth determinedly against protest, if he would play with her there it was still far, far better than fresh new cuts upon her skin. Yousef's whip was a greater enemy than his hand. No matter how pathetic a weapon her femaleness might be she must use it to the full. She moaned in what she hoped he would hear as pleasure.

"Thank you, Yousef."

"You are most pretty lady, such fine screams."

The captive gasped and moaned in the bizarre blend of emotions his busy hand generated in her youthful flesh. Yousef the Torturer was too old a hand to be deceived or influenced by feminine wiles or female agony, but she could try. Without ceasing her vocal acknowledgements of his skills, and at the expense of pain, she leaned forward enough to enable her to kiss the bare skin of his shoulder. She made her lips linger and breathed hotly on the wetness made by her mouth. "Please, Yousef My Master, whip my bottom, save me elsewhere," Stacie Blair made her voice soft with love, she too had skills.

She could tell she had reached him, the lecherous hand paused, his breathing quickened. After a moment's thought he announced her prize: "Yousef now whip pretty lady with fine cane instead of whip."

How terrible a girl's state that she be made happy by such words! Yet it was so. Canes and bottoms matched, awful as it might be it would still impose a lesser agony than the lewd thong searching out her femaleness. "Thank you, Master, thank you . . ." The words were not all abasement, they also held gratitude.

Yousef the Master terminated his ministrations just short or her orgasm, such denial was implicit in punishment, girls being whipped were not supposed to know joy. Stacie sighed resignedly and watched in hopeful anxiety for what would now be done to her. The scald of the whipmarks on her flesh were no good augury for anything.

The man who was whipping her went about his change of implements with tantalizing deliberation. Setting aside the awful whip he brought forth the canes. The stretched and naked girl with her flaming sex watched fearfully as he sorted the wicked lengths to find the one that would slice her wracked and distorted buttocks to his pleasure. She could not tremble, but felt the twitching of her inmost nerves as he selected the black and shining withe that would soon bed itself within her flesh. He flexed and swished it testingly while he smiled at the apprehension on his victim's face.

"Thank you, Yousef my Master," she would lay her charm on thick!

He laughed unaffectedly at her wish to please him. "Why thank me! I am about to hurt you more than you have ever been hurt before." There was excitement in his voice.

The naked girl's eyes widened, her head tensed. She did not understand, but she was suddenly desperately afraid.

Yousef saw her fear and savoured it. "I told you I would use a cane, lady: I did not say where."

Realization and denial were instant and vehement. "You may not whip my breasts. It is forbidden!"

"Your breasts, lady! I did not speak of breasts."

Stacie stared at him in horror. What awfulness had he devised that pleased him so! If not her breasts, then where! Her face . . . ! With a sudden thrill of anguish she knew! Her eyes followed his to focus on her foot.

It was quite perfect, of course. It would be! Like all the rest of her nudity her feet were beautifully positioned for torture. She looked along her rigid thigh and leg to where the tractioning band held her foot motionless and isolated in space, so great was the tension of her bonds she could scarcely wriggle her toes. As though fascinated by serpent eyes she watched him take up his stance and measure the swing of the cane that would desolate the sole she could not hide. When he began preliminary tappings to test her courage she broke down.

"I'm sorry, Master, I was wrong. Please forgive me."

"There is nothing to forgive, lady. I now cane the soles of your little feet instead of whipping your fine large cunt."

"I won't be able to stand it, I'll faint."

"You have been bastinadoed before?"

"No never. Oh, please!"

"If lady has never had her small feet whipped how can she know the pain? Perhaps you will like it."

"I won't! I won't! Oh, you mustn't . . . you mustn't!"

"But indeed I must." He was teasing her and loving it. "Then . . . then, whip my cunt again." She was in a panic of fear. "If you whip my feet I won't be able to walk . . . perhaps never!"

Yousef enjoyed her drama as he enjoyed his power. This white maiden was truly a treasure house of vivid responses. How satisfyingly she was about to scream. He drew back his arm.

Stacie Blair saw it all, saw the cane snicker and whirrr its way towards her foot, saw the terse smile of cruelty on Yousef's lips, saw the actual impact as though on flesh other than her own with herself as spectator.

Her being was fragmented. For a moment she was so choked with screams she could utter none of them, the sounds that emerged were animal, inarticulate, terrifying. There had never in the whole world been pain like this, there could not have been. She was sundered, lanced, burned and consumed by its fire. She felt herself slip away into darkness.

Yousef was pleased. This lovely creature had paid him her ultimate tribute. What had promised to be a dull day was turning into a memorable experience. He was quite unperturbed by a loss of consciousness in his victims. The expression on their faces when he revived them and they realised their torture was to continue was one of his favourite perquisites of office. Thoughtfully he found the bottle of arrack and took a deep and luxurious draught before pouring a generous potion down the gaping throat of the whipped nakedness.

The wounded naked girl coughed her way back into the daylight. Her throat burned and she sought to reject a second libation, but the bottle was thrust between her teeth so that she was compelled to swallow. She felt no gratitude for the fresh life her system acknowledged. For her there would be no joy in consciousness. Her whipped foot was throbbing and aflame with a nauseating agony different from anything she had experienced before. She looked up without hope at the smiling visage of her torturer.

Stacie Blair would never know why they exchanged no words. Yousef had no need of them, she believed them useless, she had consigned herself to death. No girl could survive what Yousef was doing to her. If only Rannah would come! But the dark eyed girl would purposely stay away. When she did come it would be too late.

She looked sideways at the captive foot, virgin, unmarked without a wound. In a few moments it would be sliced by the cane and made horrific as its twin had been. It was unreal that she could look at it and know this was about to happen while she impotently watched. She looked at her torturer as if hoping to find in his face too a disbelief in what was taking place. He smiled in pleasure, valuing her desolation. His slight and courtly bow told her to abandon hope.

The taps upon the cringing sole were real enough, light authoritative raps to make her curl up inside and long to die. He made a long drawn out ritual of it, turning

toward her after each that she might share the glinting amusement in his eyes.

"I think but ten on each small foot," he confided slyly. Stacie's cringing fear turned Yousef's swing and the wide arc of the cane into slow motion. It was actually a flashing stroke, but watching it the naked girl died a hundred deaths and as many tortures. Her foot did not move, it waited patiently and passively for what was to be done to it: traitorous in its submission as though the pain would be only hers without a sharing. A small and lovely foot delivered into Hell, tied with exquisite cruelty so that even when the cane struck it did not move.

The captive's screech of anguish slid with her into the dark.

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"It is pleasant that we sit thus at the beginning of a day."

Mohammad Yasin sipped his coffee and smiled benignly across the breakfast table.

His philosophic mood was not shared by either of the girls.

Rannah had been strangely distrait since her Master's sudden return, and Stacie was still striving to orient herself. The lovely scented world she had shared with the dark eyed Arab girl had been dissipated by Yousef's cane and whip, perhaps it was gone forever! She sensed in their suave Master an implacable undercurrent of some fearful purpose. That he had ravished her throughout the night had countered the awfulness of her wounded feet. He himself had brought her back into life from the black void into which the Torturer's second slash across her feet had cast her. It had been his face, grave and tender, she had first seen on her second return to consciousness, it had been on his bed her wounds were examined and, later, her body riven and transported by his passion.

"There is much work to do," Yasin continued musingly. "Yes, Lord." Rannah's breakfast lay mostly uneaten, she sipped her coffee absently.

"It would seem very little has been done." His words drifted like clouds across the sun.

"The fault is mine, Lord."

The captive girl knew herself lost in what was taking place around her. New forces were at work. Tentatively she moved her feet in a motion of disquiet, testing the chains locked on her ankles and the pain of her bruised flesh. Her handcuffs had disappeared, she felt naked without them even though she was now clothed by Yasin's wish. But the chain joining her feet hobbled her far more helplessly, the metal bands round each ankle were heavy and demanding with each step. She had been obliged to learn to walk again. But now, thanks to Yousef, she walked in pain.

"And why your fault, child?"

Rannah motioned listlessly. "You know my fault, Lord. I will not excuse it."

Mohammad Yasin sighed. "This girl we hold for torture: she has a terrible potency. She has made you as much captive as herself."

Rannah remained silent, vividly aware.

Yasin's eyes as he gazed at Stacie were kind. "You have not known, child, that here in Jedrah this woman love you have practiced with this wayward girl is punished by death or mutilation."

She looked at him askance. Once more her world collapsed.

"Death! You mean that we . . . ?"

Yasin laughed, delighted by her responsive fear. "No, child, I speak of the Jedrah beyond these walls."

Her ankle links rattled as she stirred in perturbation.

Dark eyes smiled back at her in reassurance without joy. Striving to come to grips with things unsaid she turned appealingly to Yasin. "Please, Master, if I have done wrong punish me. Do not blame my Lady Rannah."

He looked at her with an impatient tenderness. "You are as besotted with my daughter as she with you."

Both of them laughed at her disbelief.

"There was no need to tell you. It alters nothing," Rannah said simply.

"I am very proud of she who bears my name." In Yasin's words was love.

"Then it was she . . . !" Stacie was blushing.

"Yes, it was me with whom your father's crew had their sport," Rannah laughed drily. "I tried to hate you for it but I failed. I cannot hate you, no one can. You have even touched the heart of Yousef: though you believe it not. Salim worships you. Next to our Lord, my father, it is you I hold most dear."

Stacie's world reassembled itself. She turned glowing eyes on the man who owned her. "Your daughter, Master: then you will not punish-"

The wave of his hand broke across her sentence. "A father who fails to punish serves neither his honour or his child." He quoted coldly. "Ask she whom you love if this is not so."

Rannah smiled lovingly into her slave girl's anxious gaze.

"My father speaks truth, slave girl. Should he condone my guilt it would weaken all of us. Come, smile. We are not to die."

Mohammad Yasin struck the gong. When Yousef came he smiled. He knew!

"You will take the Lady Rannah and give her twenty strokes with the kurbash." Yasin said without emotion. "Draw blood if you must, but not prodigiously. Fasten her in readiness, but hold your hand. This child must witness the punishment."

It was as though rehearsed. Tradition had written the script, honour enacted it.

Rannah heard her frightening sentence without visible emotion. Her first thought was of the girl she loved, she gave Stacie a reassuring and admonitory smile. Without a word she knelt before her father and kissed his hand. For a moment they lingered thus his fingers affectionate in her hair, his eyes sad but proud. Then, in serenity and purpose, the daughter of Mohammad Yasin preceded Yasin the torturer from the balcony.

"Please, Master, punish me instead. I love her."

His regard was curious. "She has told me of this trait in you," he acknowledged meditatively. "It is quite charming and clutches at the heart. I believe you truly would follow and exchange places?"

"Yes Master. Please give me permission."

"If you were of Jedrah you would know the absurdity of your request. By our standards it has a certain impropriety meriting its own penalty."

"I will accept the penalty, Master, if I may ease my Lady." Yasin laughed at her solemnity. "You had best hail your submissiveness before it provokes me into erotically desiring to whip you myself. You exude an astounding sexuality. Cease your talk of punishments."

She sighed in defeat. "I am not happy, Master. I am fearful for my Lady."

"You are not supposed to be happy this day. Let it not concern you."

"Master, may I speak of myself?"

"Of course, child, you are concerned with your torture?"

"Yes, Master. Has . . . what has been done to me sufficed?"

"If you are petitioning, come kneel before me as a slave girl should."

Awkwardly in her new chains Stacie obeyed. Yasin turned his chair to face her. "Why do you call me 'child', Master? I am a woman."

Again she had aroused him. "You are many times woman, your blood is hot, your breasts are ripe." His voice gained tenderness, "But there is in you an eternal child, an endearing quality by which you defeat us all. Cherish it."

She could not know. Jedrah taught a girl strange things about herself. If this masculine male saw her as a little girl she felt no affront. "Would you torture a child, Master?" she asked slyly.

"In the same way I whip a daughter," he acknowledged. Jedrah held her captive too, not this man alone. Jedrah rationalized the unbelievable. She looked up, hoping he found her lovely. "Must I go on being tortured, Master? Are there not enough pictures?"

"If the tortures and the pictures are done, what should I do with you?"

"Send me back to my father's house, Master." Her suggestion was delicately

tentative.

The atmosphere was charged. She hoped he could not see her tremble. Stacie knew how easily she could trespass on his tolerance.

"I had intended to torture you for months or years." It was as though he was speaking to himself.

She kept a prudent silence.

He shook his head in wonder and amusement. "You have seduced us both with your witchery. Perhaps I should have a stake planted in the ground, tie you to it and have you burned."

"Yes, Master."

He slapped his leg in delight. "The way you say that I could believe you mean it. This submissiveness of yours is a menace. You subvert us all."

His pleasure infected her with mischief. "I have not known I was a witch, Master."

"Well, know it now." Thoughtfully he tossed her a key and watched her face. She examined it, unsure, doubting. "For what, Master?"

"Your shackles. Unlock yourself and go."

He was not jesting, she could tell. She looked at the small key within her hand. It had the weight of all the world. She looked up piteously. "I cannot."

"There will be clothes and money."

She examined the impossible and found a woman's solution. "I will not go without, Rannah, Master."

"Rannah is bound, awaiting punishment."

"Yes, Master. I cannot leave her."

"You quibble terms, child! I offer you freedom." She twisted in misery. "I love her."

"But you would leave me and my house?"

It was as though she saw him for the first time. Memory of the two nights was etched deep. It erased Yousef and his whip. She knew herself in the grip of some deeper slavery she could not name. She cast aside the word love as trite and unsatisfying. Here was something rich and wanton and darkly completing, it was of Jedrah. Stacie Blair had no weapons with which to combat it.

"Forgive me, Master, I cannot. Nor do I know why." She held out the key.

He gestured it away. "You would curse yourself in other months and other years."

She nodded. "Perhaps. I do not know."

"I said you were no slave, but I was wrong. Rannah saw you for what you are."

"I am a slave, Master. Don't ask me why."

"You are one of the richest heiresses in the world." Stacie shrugged.

"It is gone . . . past."

"Your father . . . what of your love for him, and his for you?"

"Fathers lose their daughters. It is the nature of life."

"You choose slavery . . . knowingly?"

She nodded, without hesitation she again proffered the key. Once more he swept it aside.

"Those wounds in your flesh and beneath your feet? They are slavery."

"They were of my torture, Master."

Yasin waved an impatient hand. "As a slave you would be constantly whipped: if not for disobedience then because of the stirring in the loins your sensuality provokes in those who own you."

The thought was new to Stacie Blair. She examined it and found it no more than curiously exciting. "A slave is a slave," she said demurely, eyes glinting.

"And have no mercy on your parent! Condoning my revenge?"

The captive had thought of it, but females are equal to such contretemps. She took a deep breath and challenged him: "We can tell him jointly I have entered your harem of my own will. It has the garment of respectability, he would accept it."

"You are presumptuous beyond what any slave would be."

"Then punish me."

"If you keep harping on that tune I shall do so."

"I would gladly tell my father I am slave. But that he would not accept. He could never understand. No one in that other world could understand. If you wish to be kind we can concoct a letter. He need never know that while I use the pen I wear your chains." Hesitantly she extended the key.

Yasin's features wore a strange mixture of incredulity and adoration. "No, child, go to him now or remain lost. It is best."

"As you wish, Master."

He surveyed his kneeling slave girl soberly. "Have you no idea what today brings you?"

"No master. Not beyond the . . . the whipping I must watch."

"You are to be ringed."

He saw her tense, her face shadow. She said no word, but looked up at him with the wide eyed innocence of a small girl. "As a punishment, Master?"

"No. You will be doubly exquisite," Yasin laughed in retrospect. "I had cherished a dream of returning you years hence fully ringed and well marked by the whip as one final gesture of my vengeance."

"These rings . . . ? In Jedrah they are considered beautiful?"

"They are beautiful, they are potently female." In silence Stacie Blair envisioned herself.

"You need never wear them. The key is in your hand." She looked at it, startled. Without further thought she tossed it in his lap.

Quietly he tucked it away. "You will always wear chains. If, from this moment on, you seek to change your mind or to escape you will be forcibly dealt with and punished."

"Of course."

"The whip will never be distant."

"I have known other things here than pain, Master." They looked at each other and smiled. They had made a pact.

It was a strange journey and a strange command. Stacie was glad there was none to hear the thumping of her heart as she traversed the now familiar passages. The servants who passed her on the way pretended not to see her shackled feet or to hear the clinking of her chain. She had learned again to walk with fettered feet. It took longer, that was all. She wondered whimsically if she would ever run again. Each step she took was a hurting reminder of Yousef and his cane.

On that score she was happy. Unless she foolishly erred with a thoughtless stupidity she need never be tortured again. Whipped yes! But in no worse ways than the one she was about to witness, terrible as she suspected it would be. Yet it would mark a limit to the pain that she might earn, there should be no more of Yousef's sexually cruel ingenuities.

She knew it vital she should not dwell on what had taken place between herself and Mohammad Yasin. She could not understand herself and her motives, nor could she defend them against a reproachful conscience. Her slavery with all its love and its wonder would not withstand the attrition of an endless guilt. She had done what she had done, not from a conscious decision, but because for her there had been no other choice, she embraced slavery because of some deep seated need within her own psyche. She had no doubts now, she would close the door of her mind to any that might come.

Rannah was hanging by her wrists from the bar, only her toes touched the floor. Stacie remembered it as the final pose wherein a girl was whipped. The girl to be

punished was still clothed. What she wore was scanty enough and might shred beneath the thong, but it could scarcely fail to offer some small protection to the loveliness it hid. Stacie breathed a sigh of relief, it was not seemly that the daughter of Mohammad Yasin be exposed naked to a torturer's eyes, it was bad enough that he should search her body with his whip.

"I must watch you whip my Lady Rannah," she told Yousef softly. "I am to be fastened in such ways as may please you so that I do not interfere. I need not be stripped. This is our Master's order."

The Torturer gave her his small bow and his little smile.

What a repository of secrets he must be! How intimate and knowing a part of this household that he served. He indicated a pillar off to one side of the place in which he must swing and curve his whip. "If it please you, Lady."

Stacie Blair who had become a slave girl obligingly backed against the post. It seemed a natural thing to do. She was unconcerned about herself. If she was to be bound motionless throughout her loved one's punishment, so be it. She did not care. Automatically she stretched her arms behind the pillar that they be secured.

Yousef tied her tightly: he would! Force of habit or the code of his profession, no doubt. To have simply tied her hands where she had placed them would have been enough to restrain her from mischief. But when the chafed wrists were firmly corded he cinched her waist and her shoulders too. Her chained ankles he left alone, there was nothing she could do with them. Precautionary restraints! Stacie smiled at the notion: when Yousef tied a girl she knew she had been tied. It hurt.

The kurbash was a fearful thing, a sinuous supple strip of hide tapering from its stock. Placed against the softness of a girl's skin it had a cruelly contrasting wickedness. Yousef picked it up and ran it through his hands. "Our Master will not be present, my Lady?"

"He will not be present. Now that the slave girl is here you may begin my punishment." There was no tremor in the Arab girl's voice.

The deferential bow preceded an act that left the watching girl aghast. With deft and brutal clutch and tug the Torturer stripped the Lady Rannah totally naked.

"It is a ritual demanded by ancient custom, child," the victim explained to her adored.

Yousef stood in reverence before the lovely nakedness he would now whip. "This is not by my wish, my Lady."

"That is understood, Yousef."

"I will make the blows as light as custom permits."

The naked girl flashed him a look of scorn. "You will do no such thing, Yousef. I thank you for the wish, but you have my father's order. You will whip me as hard as custom may decree. I shall not thank you for mercy."

How beautiful she was! What courage! Stacie's heart went out in tenderness and

love. She shrank from the ordeal she must watch.

"Do you wish to be gagged, my Lady?"

"No. I will try not to scream, but if I do then let me."

"It is time then?"

"It is time, Yousef. Whip me."

Yousef's bow reminded Stacie of the deference accorded a good customer when it came time to tender an extravagant bill. The girl bound for punishment acknowledged it with a quiet smile. With her eyes she followed him as he took up his stance. When she had seen enough she turned her lovely head away, smiled one last time at her breathless slave girl, and looked straight ahead of her at the wall. Stacie believed she had never seen anything more beautiful.

Yousef whipped his Master's naked daughter with immense competence. Having received his orders he followed them: no mercy but a modicum of blood. With a kurbash it was no easy line to draw. He whipped Rannah conventionally from her knees to her shoulders, but he allowed the lash to curl so that hip and belly and thigh were scored as was her back. With care and judgement he cut the tied culprit across the level of her breasts: great snapping thwacks of ringing leather that raised their weal but sent no searching tail to cut either of the twin cones with their scarlet nipples: nipples so vivid that the watcher resolved to enquire if they were dyed for the occasion.

The whipped girl swung and shivered beneath the impact of the length of hide, but she did not scream. She catered to the weakness of her flesh only by panting moans to accommodate the gasping breaths evoked by agony, soon she glistened with the sweat of shock, but her gaze remained steadfast on the wall. Stacie knew she was exerting every nerve and sinew of her will not to scream. For the daughter of Mohammad Yasin a scream would be dishonour.

Stacie watched the wounds mount upon her loved one's flesh. They were terrible to see, here and there was blood. Yasin was less tolerant of fault in his daughter than in others. Rannah was paying a cruel price for failure to obey. Stacie longed to share the cost, then realised with a thrill of fear that her own day had scarce begun, almost certainly something awaited her.

When the twentieth slash had left its carmine wound upon the naked loveliness of the errant Arab girl the torturer who had delivered it circled her slowly to admire his work and to admire the body on which his tracery of stripes had found a worthy canvas for the brush of his kurbash. For Yousef all that he now beheld was wholly beautiful. Lust had left his eyes, he worshipped. After his protracted moments of homage he made his polite bow, set aside his kurbash, inclined his head once more to the girl bound to the pillar, then left the room and closed the door. Stacie and her mistress were alone.

The silence of the pain room seemed all the deeper for the anguished breathing of the whipped girl, it was the only sound. Stacie stood breathless and helpless watching her love. Instinctively she fought her cords. They fought her back with pain and held her tight. She did not move her feet, the rattle of her chain would have seemed a sacrilege.

Rannah leaned against her tractioned wrists, her damp hair against a raised arm. She had not lost consciousness, but her eyes were closed as with a child covering its head with the bedclothes to find a sanctuary from demons. Intermittently her breasts rose from an inhalation that became a sigh, drops of sweat formed beneath her arms and trickled down her flanks, the weight her seeking toes could not support hung cruelly from her punished wrists.

It was a long time before she returned to the world where Stacie was. The bound girl watched the suspended nudity slowly tense, the toes accept a greater burden, the head shake itself into awareness. When the dark eyes focused on Stacie's anguished gaze the red lips twisted into a half smile.

"Calm your fears, slave girl. I still live."

"Oh, Rannah, you were wonderful! I would have screamed and screamed."

"I envy you. It must be good to scream. It is a Jedrah thing that we be mute when whipped."

"Why has Yousef left you tied now your punishment is done?"

"You should know, slave girl. You were tied as I am. It is a ritual that we stand naked and hurting to reflect upon our sins."

"Oh Rannah! You have no sins. Are Jedrah fathers always so cruel to their daughters?"

"My father is not cruel. It is I who was cruel by my disobedience."

Stacie tossed her head angrily. "It is neither of you. It is Jedrah. A girl is nothing here except a body to be used or to be whipped."

"Come, slave girl, is that truly all I am!"

"I wish I could get free. I want to kiss you . . . No! That is not all you are. I don't know what any of us are, I'm lost and I don't care. Now that I'm going to stay forever I suppose I'll sort myself into the scheme of things somehow."

The dark eyes became intent. "Stay! Forever!" Rannah smiled, "You do not appear to be going anywhere."

Stacie told her.

The Arab girl listened quietly, her features softening as though the stumbling words washed away her pain. She nodded understandingly feeling a great surge of love and something akin to awe. "Slave girl!" she laughed delightedly. "I told you, did I not! You seek slavery as a river seeks the sea."

"Only to you . . . and to Yasin."

"So you include my father! He has fallen prey to your seduction as have I. You are beyond the dreams of fantasy, I shall whip you daily."

"Thank you, my Lady. But, please, not the kurbash." Eyes sparkled.

"That is what I mean! You are a bundle of eroticism so potent you ignite us all, a walking explosive . . . And you don't even know it."

Stacie Blair examined the premise and was intrigued. She shook her head positively. "No, my Lady, I don't know. I think you tease. But if it is so then I think it must be of Jedrah. I was not . . . what you have said, before you brought me here."

"At least then, you owe this poor desert of ours some small gratitude."

"l owe it everything," the tied slave considered. "Oh Rannah, are you sure it is not just you . . . just us!"

"Can you explain away the adoration of Mohammad Yasin. He has just offered you more than any other man in this land would yield."

It was true! Stacie knew it so. She absorbed the riches of adoration with gratitude, they would sustain her should she be ever tempted to look back. But she suddenly remembered another offering of which she was doubtful.

"Rannah . . . Those rings . . . ! I can't believe it. But he said today?"

"Well? Are you not proud?"

"But it won't happen . . . not really . . . will it?"

"Most certainly it will happen. I have just been whipped because I failed to have it done. I was expressly ordered. My father wished it."

"Why aren't you ringed?" Stacie asked triumphantly.

"Silly girl! I am not a slave. You are."

"You have just been whipped as a slave is whipped."

"I was punished. A girl being whipped has nothing to do with a girl being ringed."

"If only slave girls are ringed it means some sort of degradation."

"Don't be argumentative. I am helpless now, but tomorrow I will not be tied. I can whip you then: if you insist on being difficult. For a slave girl to be ringed is the highest honour her Master can bestow. She wears them with pride. They are of love. Yours will be large and costly. You will adore them."

"No anaesthetic . . . ?" The question was a vivid fear in Stacie's mind.

The whipped mistress laughed at her slave girl's dismay.

"Again you must forgive Jedrah. It is considered that a girl so honoured will bear her pain with the same pride she would bear a son."

Stacie squirmed. Jedrah had all the answers. She was ashamed of her own feelings:

thrill matched fear, excitement countered pain. If told now that it would not happen she would know disappointment. She confessed her mixed emotions.

"You see!" Rannah smiled amusedly, "You are a slave. You think like a slave. Why feel shame, your feelings are those of a bride on her wedding day. See the rings as wedding bands binding you to all you love."

Stacie gave her companion in distress a look of mischief. "You should write poetry, Rannah. Those rings will hurt terribly. I'll scream. I'm not like you."

"Scream then, beloved. No one will think less of you."

"I suppose I'll be . . . fastened?"

"You'll be tied so tight it will hurt. The artist's work must not be spoiled by struggles. I may tie you myself . . . if anybody ever thinks to let me loose!" It was Rannah's first evidence of irritation with her predicament.

"I'm tied tight now. Is Yousef a sadist?"

The punished Arab girl chuckled at the question. "No, I wouldn't call him that. He gets terribly sexually aroused when he whips us or tortures a girl. But all men would. It is one of the mysteries. I think Yousef would give his life for my father or myself."

Stacie giggled. "His arousal . . . if we must be polite. Is it because we're naked or because we're whipped?"

"The two go together, silly. Either one does it. Sometime, when you've been a particularly good slave, I'll give you a special treat: I'll let you whip a naked girl and find out for yourself. I'm sure that for men or for women it is the most potent aphrodisiac in the world. When I whip you I'm on fire. Poor Yousef! Right now he'll have some poor serving wench on her back receiving the lust generated by my whipping. Usually the girl he whips has to endure his penetration as something extra at the finish. But I am forbidden as are you."

Stacie grimaced. "I have much to learn."

"As a slave girl, yes. When you made this incredible choice of yours I'm sure my father made it plain that slave girls are whipped constantly, mostly to satisfy their owner's lubricity?"

Stacie giggled again. "You really flower up good old sex, Rannah. You should take lessons from Salim."

"I dislike four-letter words. If you use them I shall whip you."

"Very well, my lady, I'll be frightfully proper and watch my foul tongue. But, yes, your father did warn me. Maybe I'll get used to the idea. I don't know about getting used to the whipping . . ." She paused to view a sudden thought. "I say, Rannah, was today your first . . . time?"

The Arab girl laughed in retrospect. "I'm afraid not," she admitted cheerfully. "It is only my second whipping with the kurbash, but the number of times I have been whipped . . . ? I've lost count."

The slave girl was curious. "But, Rannah, you are the daughter of a rich and powerful and educated man. Were all your whippings because you'd been a bad girl, or were some of them for that . . . that . . . other reason?"

The wealed mistress sparkled at her slave. "You want to know so much, don't you! I'm not sure what I should tell. But yes, I'm quite sure I have been whipped to give someone joy. Never by my father, but he may have sanctioned it believing it would do me no harm. He is, after all, of this land where women and the whip are one." She chuckled at a memory. "When I was sent to school in England we all forgot . . . The head mistress wanted to call the police when she was informed by the matron of the whipmarks on my skin. I have never forgotten her face when I explained, or tried to explain, the truth."

They talked of many things and of their love. The kurbash was forgotten, the blood had dried on Rannah's skin before she was released. Yousef was deferential and solicitous. Stacie was left tied to her pillar. She could almost believe she had been overlooked.

The feeling intensified as the hours passed. But the sun was still high when Rannah returned: a quite different Rannah, clothed, groomed and svelte. Only a bare midriff bore evidence of the hide whip. She wore the wounds without concern, they had their own stark beauty on her skin. With her was a man. A man with two expensive leather bags.

Stacie knew! There was no pretense. The eyes of the two girls locked constantly as she was made ready. It was good to be loosed from the pillar and good to have the chains unlocked from her feet. The male was middle aged, small, obsequious and faintly clinical. Stripping before his curiosity evoked no blush. She guessed he had seen much of female flesh. His name was Mr. Mussa, his profession was to perform the service he had come to do to her. Stacie could believe him skilled.

There were two tables, a large and sturdy one with straps, beside it a small one on which were objects from their visitor's bags. Things from which Stacie cautiously averted her gaze. Obediently she lay upon her back on the larger surface and allowed Rannah to strap her down into a perfect X. With the cinching of her waist she could no longer move. There was a soft leather band across her forehead and another over her neck. She closed her mind to their clear portent. A harness criss-crossed her breasts, when it was buckled she could take only shallow breaths. The little man's work would not be hampered by any motion of hers, even her knees were tightly buckled down. She knew why that was too! In a little while Stacie Blair would be changed forever! She was possessed by a strange excitement. The familiar current between the dark eyes and her own throbbed doubly intense. Having rendered her

motionless, Rannah went to the foot of the table and left the stage to Mr. Mussa.

The pain was of that sickening variety associated with doctors and dentists and the clinical probings of childhood. A pain against which there was no defense, and against which the whole being rose in revolt and anger that it should happen. For Stacie it was a series of agonies that came fast, one after the ot her. With her nose it was but brief moments before she felt an unaccustomed weight upon her lips and knew it for the first of the rings she was to bear. It seemed enormous, but she had schooled herself to meet the fickleness of new and strange sensations. Within her mist of agony she beheld Rannah's anxious eyes and in them found her hope.

With her nipples, she managed only to moan and gasp.

There was first the absurd minute in which Mr. Mussa frictioned them with his finger tips to ensure their maximum erection. But they had already responded to Rannah and the strapping down of her nudity. They were hard and ready. Ready to be forever changed. Mr. Mussa pierced them neatly and with dispatch. Almost instantly they bore an unfamiliar burden that the rigidly strapped head could not be raised to see.

Pain was throbbing and constant. She could see the swabs stained with her blood.

With the piercing of the lips of her vulva Stacie screamed.

Fear and outrage and the secret place itself were all a part of the cry that filled the room. But she screamed only once. The strange incredible thing within her nostrils moved as her lips moved beneath it. They were its resting place. It retaliated with pain. She moaned and wept, her tears falling back upon her hair. A beaming Mr. Mussa nodded brightly, packed his things and went away. His place was taken by Rannah looking down with love at the nakedness she adored. She allowed the moans to subside before she spoke.

"Would you like me to free you, slave girl?"

To the hurt girl the question seemed redundant. She tried to nod but could not move. "Yes, yes please!" she gasped painfully.

"When you move it will hurt more. That is why I asked."

"Please, free me. I want to be free."

Rannah tugged at buckles. When the legs and feet were relieved of the bands of leather she tenderly locked the chains back on the slender ankles. It was Mohammad Yasin's wish that the slave girl be chained, this time she would not disobey.

To sit up became a long and painful journey to be undertaken by slow degrees. But Stacie had her hands and her hands did not hurt. As she tenderly raised herself under Rannah's watching eyes she admitted within her mind that the pain burning at her most secret places was no worse than she had expected it to be. She wished she had not been pierced everywhere at once, but she would cope. She smiled weakly at the dark and anxious scrutiny of her beloved.

"I'll be allright."

The effect of the ring on her voice amused them both.

Stacie tried to laugh. Cautiously she edged herself from the table. As she stood erect her incisions took the measure of the metal inserted through them. The pain flared anew. But Stacie was female! With a gesture of apology and with laughter in her words she said: "Please, Rannah, a mirror. I've just got to look. I don't care how it hurts . . ."

Lovingly and with sparkling eyes the Lady Rannah helped her chained and naked slave girl hobble from the room.

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Stacie wondered if all the black rulers of African states looked like Edie Amin. Not so huge perhaps, but similar contours. This one did. He sat at the dinner table like the Rock of Gibraltar. His voice was Oxford and Harvard and many other things, his dinner jacket was emblazoned and beribboned. He was lucidly articulate and at ease. His name was Amatar Moghere. He had come to Jedrah and the house of Mohammad Yasin to be offered the free gift of a white slave girl. There were, of course, some favours attached. But Mr. Moghere was well versed in such transactions. He preferred them.

Stacie felt sorry for the girl who still bore her name, Suzie, on the skin above her breasts and whose feet were chained as Stacie's were. They exchanged surprised stares of commiseration at sight of the rings impaled within the other's flesh. Both were naked, the wounds of the rings made any garment painful, they were still fresh. Stacie cherished a strong suspicion that Yasin wished to show her off. She knew he was immensely proud of owning her and of the splendour of the costly metal he made her wear. Suzie, of course, would be simply merchandise to be displayed to good advantage. The girl was quite lovely but desperately afraid.

Even after days the rings still left Stacie breathless with their beauty. She was never unaware of them. All her life she would remember that first confrontation in the mirror during which her heart had thumped painfully and Rannah's hand had been reassuring on her arm. So many emotions had assailed her that she could name none of them, but they had clambered enough to drive away the pain and leave only the pride. They were far larger than she had supposed, they were arrogant and demanding of attention, beautifully crafted of some light and lovely alloy whose weight would not distort. She had expected shame from the one pendant from her nose, but she felt none: only an amused curiosity as to how she would adjust to it. The joy of Yasin in what he had done to her became her own.

There were several guests at the formal dinner, mostly the aides of Mr. Moghere. A quaking Suzie was seated next to the great man himself; Stacie drew one of the lesser dignitaries on her left and on her right Mohammed Yasin. It was a place of honour. Rannah faced her father at the end of the table. Amatar Moghere set the tone of the conversation by a frank appraisal of the chained girls and a pronouncement:

"This is as it should be: chained white recognizing their rulers. We have waited far too long."

"You should emphasize the point at the next assembly," Yasin suggested affably. If his voice held sarcasm he hid it well.

"My name is Hamid Boshan." The youngish African at her side was regarding Stacie with a greater appreciation than he was bestowing on his shrimp cocktail. "You have very fine breasts too but they spoil them by too many babies too soon. Will you be available later for fucking?"

Stacie had been warned by a giggling Rannah. She was prepared for conversational shock. She glanced questioningly at her master, but Yasin's attention was elsewhere. He appeared not to have heard.

"I belong only to Mohammad Yasin," the slave girl said demurely, feeling

smug.

Mr. Boshan sighed. "You have delightful whip marks."

"They are lovely," Stacie agreed pleasantly. 'I'm so proud of them."

Her partner digested this slowly. "You walk most gracefully with chained feet."

"Thank you. I have to, y'know. If I don't I'm punished." There was a hissing sibilance to Mr. Boshan's, "Ah . . . ! You are then truly a slave?"

"Of course! Only slave girls are ringed, haven't you noticed?"

Hamid Boshan had been noticing steadily, as had the rest of the males present. He sighed deeply. "It is a custom we do not have. It is most becoming. If a man hooks his finger in a ring you would not be inclined to argument, eh!" He beamed at a private vision in his mind.

It was a thought that had occurred to Stacie also. She was now frighteningly vulnerable to control. One finger could reduce her to passive submission. "A true slave girl is always obedient," she said sententiously.

"Yet you are white, you are American . . ." He looked at her searchingly. "Is it a game you play, or has the whip taught you your place?"

Stacie was enjoying him; it was a game. "My place is where my master desires, the whip keeps me from forgetting." She felt it worthy of the Koran.

"I think you are: what do you call it . . . putting me on," said Mr. Boshan.

"But I am not!" Stacie sparkled her eyes at him and placed female fingers on his arm. "I would be punished. Besides, it's kind of you to talk to me . . . a slave."

He beamed and seemed to expand. "You would make a very fine fuck, I can tell," he said with serious judgement. "Are you sure you . . . er, master will not permit?"

"I'm afraid not. I'm terribly sorry."

Mr. Boshan's sigh of disappointment fluttered his napkin.

"It is a great waste," he said sadly. "But tell me, why are your feet chained, do you run away?"

"We wear chains to please our master; he finds them beautiful. For him it is the ankles, for my Lady Rannah it is my hands. I have become used to them, I do not mind."

"Do you not mourn for America and hamburgers?"

"Why should I? There I could not be ringed or chained."

"I do not understand you," Hamid Boshan admitted. He dealt with the fish course in a few mouthfuls, eyeing her shrewdly. "I do not think the young woman beside my chief is as you are."

"She may not have been trained as cleverly. I think that the only difference between us."

"She does not bear whip marks as harsh as yours. Perhaps there lies the real difference?" he hinted slyly.

"You could be right, Mr. Boshan," Stacie conceded without guile. She knew she herself would never underrate the potency of the whip on the female psyche. There was the evidence of the lash on the skin of the sweet and frightened girl striving to keep abreast of Mr. Moghere's redundancies. The whip made a girl see things as they were. Perhaps Suzie had not been helped enough! She smiled demurely at her companion. "Being whipped has helped me to understand a lot of things."

"About men . ? Or the world?"

"Are they not the same?" Her smile made Mr. Boshan certain a section of the planet was beneath his heel.

"If it was I who owned you . . ." he surveyed her gravely, "would you be as obedient as you are today?"

"Of course!"

"There is a thing that is not . . . It is not done in my country. Would you suck my cock?"

Stacie trod hard on an errant giggle. "What slave girl would not consider it a privilege, Mr. Boshan!" Her wide eyes held all the innocence of girlhood.

"Do you have a sister?" asked Mr. Boshan.

With the cigars, both slave girls came into their own, they began to earn their daily bread. Each had been briefed. Their ankle chains clinked constantly as they flitted back and forth with the brandy, the cigars and the ashtrays. It was a beautiful little cameo Rannah had coached. Their movements were studied and gracefully stylized. When not actively engaged, they stood erect and waiting at each end of the room, their hands behind their backs so that their breasts attained their full contour and the nipple rings hung free. There were penalties for failure. Even Stacie had been promised a whipping if she failed to please. The threat did not worry her; she felt secure in all that she was.

But it worried Suzie. "I'm scared to death," she confided in a whisper when they were together at the serving table. "I'm not as good at this as you. Besides . . . he's . . . he's impossible."

How to console! Stacie could think of nothing but lies, the truth might be more than Suzie could handle. She saw herself as gloriously fortunate by comparison. Her soul revolted at the thought of being taken to Mr. Boshan's "My Country" as a plaything for one of these men. It would be best for Suzie to put on a poor performance and be rejected. Rannah's whip might be preferable to what she now faced. She was almost glad their brief moments side by side forbade her telling all she knew. But she need not have worried: Fate is always there!

A slave girl in serving her masters must kneel, she does not stand. To proffer a small tray and whatever was upon it is most elegantly done by falling to one knee before the lordly male, eyes discreetly veiled so they neither impart or receive a message. It is not normally a hard thing to do. But when the serving girl's ankles are chained it is no longer easy, it becomes both difficult and hazardous. The number of links between the anklets of the two girls were barely sufficient to make it even possible.

Stacie had mastered the art. Rannah had compelled her.

In any case she was by nature graceful and had a will to excel. Suzie would have had small incentive. She was in trouble from the start. Moreover it was she who must serve the honoured guest. Her distaste and her fear of him helped her not at all.

Amatar Moghere loved to harangue any Assembly of the United Nations into which he could insert his bulk. He now used his host's lounge as a sounding board. His staff listened with reverence, Yasin nodded gently, his thoughts elsewhere. Rannah's attention was anxiously but unobtrusively upon the two slave girls, one of which was unwittingly the raison d'être for the gathering.

"We have reached that point in time . . ." Mr. Moghere declaimed sonorously. "When, with the armaments of our allies we may sweep clean this continent of its polluting white -"

It was at this precise point that Suzie dropped the glass on his trousers. The glass was full of gin!

It is quite possible that Mr. Moghere's desolation may have been considerably modified by this fortuitous proof of Caucasian decadence. It put a neat period on his sentiment. Unfortunately it also put a large and spreading wetness on his trousers. Stacie longed to giggle. Suzie did! Pure nervous hysteria, but ill timed.

"Let us whip her here where we may all enjoy her punishment," said Mr. Moghere magnanimously.

In the flurry of servants and the brandishing of towels and napkins Suzie managed to get both her knees on the carpet, she buried her face in her hands and wept. Stacie and the lady Rannah exchanged glances of despair. The scent of juniper hung menacingly.

"Stop your crying, girl. Make amends. Show our guest you are capable to serve him," Yasin's voice held cold authority. For him there was more at stake than a pair of trousers or a slave girl's bottom.

Both Stacie and her mistress were horrified. But the Master had spoken, neither dared contest his order.

The unfortunate source of the disaster managed to dry her tears and look fearfully around. Taking heart from the absence of cane or whip she stumbled to her feet. Showing about the same enthusiasm as Ann Boleyn approaching the headsman's block she went forward to retrieve her honour. Stacie poured the drink and placed it on the tray.

It says much for Amatar Moghere's courage and sense of destiny that he did not head for the door to seek refuge in his own particular emergent nation. He sat

expectant and beaming. After all, any witch doctor will tell you lightning does not strike twice in the same place . . .

But Suzie and lightning had little in common. This time the falling glass decanted just below the senior Statesman's vest inundating that portion of his person sometimes referred to modestly as 'private parts'.

It became immediately evident that this alcoholic invasion of Mr. Moghere's most secret asset was exacting a toll. He sat erect, his mouth fell, his eyes bulged. He showed all the evidence of acute distress. This time Stacie's giggle would not be denied. With great presence of mind she held her hands before her face and pretended to weep - no doubt in sympathy for the great man's pain! Suzie was already shedding copious floods of salt. An anxious aide retrieved the fallen glass. With a horrified exclamation the visiting head of State headed for the door.

Whatever stringencies of economy emerging Nations might be subject to they evidently were not reflected in the wardrobe of its ruler. Amatar Moghere returned resplendent, even to the decorations. The evil effects of alcohol, in the wrong places, no longer to be observed on his features. "Such a thing could never happen in an African State," he proclaimed with satisfaction.

A stern rebuke from Rannah and an awareness of her Master's regard cured Stacie of her ill timed hilarity. She busied herself with bottles and glasses and with a considerable flourish delivered their V.I.P. a fresh gin with an obeisance that captured the attention of all. However, while she continued her duties it became all too clear that every eye was focusing on the kneeling, naked, sobbing figure of Suzie in the centre of the floor.

"I think just twenty with a cane across her bottom will be enough," said Mr. Moghere grandly. "I am a kind man."

Stacie looked at Rannah askance. Only a girl to whom it has actually happened could know the awfulness of the sentence just pronounced. There was an excited susurration of talk among the men, Mohammad Yasin sat frowning, the tempo of Suzie's weeping intensified. Mr. Moghere sipped his drink, happily expectant of entertainment to come.

For Stacie Blair it was one more graphic emphasis on her slavery. She felt a righteous compulsion to rise to the defense of the lonely girl kneeling in her grief without a friend, but she knew it useless and unwise. It might add to the punishment, certainly it would get her punished too. She was impotent. She was slave. She was unhappily aware that Yasin would have forgiven the first blunder. But in deference to his guest, and in hope of retrieving lost ground, he could scarcely forgive the second.

Suzie's sentence as pronounced by his visitor would stand.

It seemed that by mutual consent the weeping delinquent would be allowed to return to the world in her own time and in her own way. Possibly there was curiosity as to how she would comport herself in contemplation of what was to be done to her. Suzie took her time. When she emerged from behind her hands she used them on her tear drenched cheeks as she looked from one to the other of the intent faces as though seeking a friend and champion. She received a wide lipped smile from Mr. Moghere and a cold absence of expression from Mohammad Yasin. Inevitably her pleading eyes came to rest on Stacie and Rannah.

Rannah knelt before her parent. "Please, Lord, may we counsel her, the child needs guidance?"

He nodded briefly, irritated by the contretemps.

Stacie and her mistress led Suzie from the room. The distraught girl clutched at them as though for sanctuary. "I can't stand it, I know I can't. It will kill me."

Rannah caught Stacie's eye. "She's never been whipped as you have been," she explained. "Her skin was kept unmarked. It was a mistake." She shook Suzie's shoulders. "You will not die. Ask Stacie, she has been terribly whipped."

"You will not die, Suzie," Stacie felt it a small comfort to offer. She turned to their mistress. "But, Rannah, she must be tied. No girl could keep still for twenty. I couldn't! I know I couldn't!"

"That is what I fear ," Rannah admitted. "But she must. So much depends on it. Suzie, do you understand! You will have to bend over to be caned. You'll have to stay like that until it's done. If you go rolling on the floor you will be punished much, much worse."

Suzie looked at them wanly. "I don't know about such things. I do try but I'm no good at it. To be hit twenty times on my bare skin with a cane or a whip or something . . . It's not possible!"

"It is possible," said Rannah with a firmness she did not feel. "And you are going to do it. Come."

They led Suzie back into the lounge.

"It is you who will punish her," Yasin said to his daughter.

"You may go for the cane." He looked at the trembling culprit. "You, girl, stand in the middle of the room and wait."

Stacie sped to her duties. For the first time that evening she wished her ankles were not chained. Only her hands could hurry. Her feet would move only as fast as her fetters. For a little while she was a busy girl, drawing almost as many appreciative glances as did the sad and lovely child awaiting her penalty.

It was by no means the most severe of the canes Rannah returned with. "Bend down and clutch your ankles, do not bend your knees," she ordered.

Suzie obeyed, her face a mask of anguish.

The Lady Rannah caned the slave girl methodically, but without inspiration. She did what she must. The visitors from another land watched avidly, their eyes hungry. Mr. Moghere beamed as Stacie replenished his glass. Mohammad Yasin was bored.

It was strange to see the rings in the nipples and nose of the bending girl fall away and hang apart. They shivered and trembled as did the rest of her with each blow. The blows were light, and Stacie wondered if they might not earn the girl who delivered them a penalty herself. It was at the seventh stroke when Stacie was almost ready with her sigh of relief at Suzie's fortitude, that doom was pronounced.

"When do we commence to whip this stupid girl?" inquired black Africa.

Rannah stopped in mid stroke, turning a perplexed gaze upon the honoured guest. Suzie turned a stricken face in the same direction but maintained her bend. Stacie got the impression that the rest of the company, with the exception of Yasin whose face remained cold, were on the verge of clapping in applause.

"She is but a child," Mohammad Yasin said tersely. "The punishment suggested requires she be tied: we have a room . . ."

"I am most comfortable," said Mr. Moghere accepting another drink.

"She is not accustomed to punishments of such severity."

"I am not accustomed to being bathed in gin."

Yasin sighed. His case was weak. Resignedly he nodded to his daughter. Rannah struck a blow worthy of Yousef. Suzie yowled and rolled writhing on the floor, hands clutching her striped behind.

"It is as I say," Mr. Moghere beamed at this confirmation of his thesis. "The white race is decadent and ready for the knife."

Rannah sank humbly to her knees. "I fear we must tie her, Lord."

"And so we shall," Mr. Moghere agreed munificently. "But perhaps you will allow us to deal with the ridiculous damsel?"

Yasin nodded at his guest and at his daughter. Rannah laid down the cane and retired to the sidelines. Stacie knew she was trembling. The Ruler of tomorrow's world signalled to one of his aides.

The watching girls had to admit it was neat and efficient as of long practice. The Aide, obviously gratified by his promotion, produced from the side pocket of his jacket a folded length of brightly hued foulard tie. Prodding the still writhing Suzie with a highly polished toe he requested. "You will stand up please."

Suzie tensed and looked up in surprise at the new voice, but beheld no source of hope in what she saw. Hastily she stood erect.

"Your hands please."

Suzie looked stupidly at her small hands as though seeing them for the first and last time. Dubiously she offered them. Mr. Moghere's assistant bound them together tightly with the colourful strip. He was deft and expert and cruel. Suzie watched the coupling of her wrists with fresh dismay. She was trembling.

A fresh face entered the picture. It grinned cheerfully and turned its back. Suzie was lifted by her hips and deposited on the Saville Row Dinner jacket like a sack of oats. Hands reached up and lifted the tied wrists over a bent head, then pulled them down and held them in a huge and powerful grasp. Suzie's nudity flowed down from the immaculate shoulders in a cascade of ivory, her bottom flaring pink, her chained feet far above the floor. As the man who held her bent so did she. Her bottom was

delivered to the cane. She was shamingly helpless as a child across its parent's knees.

"She will learn not to waste good Gin," said Mr. Moghere. Aide number one whipped the girlish bottom with cruel competence. It could not be said he indulged in wild gyrations of power behind each stroke, but each was more brutal than the single lash from Rannah that had precipitated the African takeover of an essential service. White teeth shone from smiling black faces around the room. Mr. Moghere's was the whitest and largest of them all. Suzie screamed wildly from the first, her chains clashed as she kicked frantically in the only freedom she possessed.

At the eighth stroke the ebony V.I.P. held up his hand.

"This screeching pullet has no regard for the ears of my colleague," he complained. "Has someone a small handkerchief?"

It was instantly forthcoming. Stacie felt sure that had he requested a small elephant it would have been produced from somewhere. Suzie was instructed to open wide: an injunction she obeyed with obvious loathing. The caning of the white flesh continued briskly.

When it was done the small round bottom was swollen and livid, there were specks of blood. The Aide retrieved his tie, folding it neatly for further use. The sobbing Suzie, in a daze of pain and fear, was given but a few moments in which to compose herself before being ordered back to duty.

"It is you who will serve me now," said Mr. Moghere prudently pointing to Stacie. He guffawed coarsely. "Someone else may have the privilege of being bathed in gin."

Mohammad Yasin was irritated, his evening was going badly. Initiatives were in the hands of Amatar Moghere instead of his own. It was a moot point as to whether Suzie's fumbling had endeared or damned her in Mr. Moghere's eyes. His guest's next insinuation added fuel to the fire.

"The young lady so merciful with the cane should perhaps feel a few strokes herself to teach her not to waste the time of men."

"The daughter of Mohammad Yasin is not to be whipped in public," Yasin's voice was a controlled fury.

"No daughter of mine would so insult her father's guests," said Mr. Moghere blandly.

Stacie was horrified. That her beloved mistress be so humiliated was unthinkable. She sensed that Yasin's tolerance of the evening's buffoonery had reached an end. If his carefully nurtured plan was aborted because of Suzie's fumbling he might well exact a further penalty of pain from the frightened girl.

But Rannah was equal to the contretemps. Her face proud and insolent, she knelt before her parent. "Lord, I admit my fault. Our guest is right, I deserve punishment. Permit me to yield myself."

Stacie knew her Master's dilemma. Pride forbade compliance. Yet much might be at stake. Rannah had stepped tactfully into the breach. Her pain could buy a

compromise, but it was one Yasin was unlikely to accept. Quite suddenly she glimpsed what she must do. She knelt beside the girl she loved and looked up with pleading eyes.

"Lord, it is not meet that my mistress be so used. I am her slave: if a girl is to be whipped, let it be me."

Stacie warmed herself in the affection that lit her master's eyes. Beside her Rannah whispered: "No! Oh no!"

"I accept the offer," said Mr Moghere with such alacrity that Stacie felt flattered, and also quite certain his concern was to see a girl whipped rather than discipline a fault.

Mohammad Yasin nodded thoughtfully. Stacie felt certain he was pleased, the knowledge would aid her in the ordeal for which she had volunteered. Faces were saved and tempers curbed. Only her bottom was forfeit.

"Very well, child, your wish is granted." In his look was love.

"I would suggest the same number of strokes," said Mr. Moghere as though making a generous concession.

Stacie quailed. Delivered as Suzie's had been it was a brutal punishment.

"Certainly not," Yasin said firmly. "It is not merited."

"Fifteen," Mr. Moghere offered hopefully.

"Ten," said Mohammad Yasin.

"Twelve!" The honoured guest's bid sounded final. Sensing a rising tension, Stacie did her best. "I am most grateful for twelve, Lord."

The bidding was done. Now the slave girl had to pay the price agreed. She trod lightly and musically to the center of the room, smiling at Mr. Moghere in gratitude for his generosity. The staff from the African State viewed her with hungry approval. The aide rose and, once more, produced his many hued tie.

"We don't need that," Stacie said with more courage than she felt.

"I wish it used. It pleases me," Mr. Moghere's voice grated. Stacie held out her hands and watched them bound. She was not going to jeopardise her sacrifice by quibbling. She was surprised how well adapted this item of male attire was in robbing a girl of the use of her hands, she had never been more tightly tied.

A second major hurdle loomed. She was cringingly averse to being draped over a man's back like a sack of potatoes. It would be more humiliating than the caning itself. It was reminiscent of the Victorian stereotype of lifted petticoats and lowered drawers. In hopeful appeal she looked pleadingly at Amatar Moghere. But her hope died at birth. Mr. Moghere was beamingly intent on her discomfort, shame would be an integral part of it, he would relinquish nothing. Resignedly she lifted her joined wrists and allowed herself to be hoist like a carcass in a butcher's shop, her hands were securely gripped, somewhere at the back the cane sliced and whirred, her

bottom dissolved into flame and fire.

She had not been gagged. She could not request it, but ardently wished she had been robbed of the ability to scream. She had found relief in screams, but after watching Rannah's stoic acceptance of pain she felt certain that in this company she would gain much merit by remaining silent as the cane cut her flesh. But could she do so! Clenching her teeth she thought of Yasin and of her love. With every ounce of her being she resolved to neither wriggle or kick nor make a sound beyond the panting gasps that no heroics could control. In her blazing agony she lived only to do credit to her lord. She wanted desperately that he and his daughter be proud of her.

The cane cut and sliced forward in the relentless twelve. That night she belonged to Rannah and Rannah belonged to her. Mohammad Yasin had other things to think of. Stacie Blair took her burning bottom to her Lady's bed and, for a little while, was happy. But the tidings were both unexpected and bad.

"It has all gone wrong," Rannah mourned. "My father is angry."

"Because of Suzie . . . ?"

"Moghere refuses her. The poor girl failed to please."

"She's lucky. I wouldn't want to belong to him as a plaything."

"If that was all it wouldn't be so bad," Rannah looked at her slave girl pensively with love. "But it isn't all. My father's deal has been rejected. To cap it all. Moghere doesn't want Suzie, he wants you."

Stacie froze. To be taken away and used as a carnal toy! It did not bear thinking about. She was frightened.

Rannah laughed at her dismay. "Do not fear, slave girl. My father adores you. Amatar Moghere can find his women elsewhere. There were many hard words. It is finished."

"And poor Suzie?" Stacie had a vivid sympathy for the pain stricken girl who must now be quaking in her chains.

Rannah made a gesture of helplessness. "I know it is cruel, but my father intends to punish her. I can half sympathize with him. Surely she need not have been so unutterably clumsy," she looked mischievously at her love. "This can be an opportunity for you. Our Master will leave on business tomorrow. Suzie's punishment will be left in my hands. If I do not want the kurbash again and the skin stripped off my back I had best make the child howl and bear some marks. It can be you who places them on her skin. Would you like that, slave girl?"

"No!" Stacie was appalled. "I will make you, beloved."

"I won't!"

"I will whip you until you do."

They looked at each other and laughed. In the midst of all else their love set them apart, between them all things were joyous. The slave girl shrugged. She was

suddenly excited. Why not find pleasure in the inevitable! Rannah's compulsion would absolve her from guilt. "Very well, my Lady, I will whip Suzie. Is she to be tortured too?"

"You would like to torture her? She would be delightful." Stacie found herself considering something that a month ago would have been pure fantasy. To have a naked girl writhing beneath her whip or her hand. What power! What omnipotence! Her loins flamed. She saw Suzie's doe eyes pleading, she heard the screams . . ."I will have to do what you tell me, my Lady."

"You are an outrageous humbug," Rannah declaimed laughing. "You can hardly wait, so you place the guilt on me to keep your little conscience clear." She was suddenly serious. "Would you like to whip me?"

"Oh Rannah! Don't tease."

"I am not teasing, You saved me from being whipped today. Saved me the shame of baring my body for the stripes before that black ape. I owe you much. Honestly, slave girl, I would be happy to be whipped by you."

It was another vista, the opening of another door in Jedrah. Rannah's voice was soft, her eyes aflame. With one seductive hand she was lightly tracing her finger tips across the hurt bottom that had been striped before their visitor such a little while before. For the slave girl it was an intensity of sensation before which she was powerless, her wounds multiplied the potency of her mistress's touch, she shivered deliciously. "You mean it, don't you!" she was breathless.

"Of course I mean it, silly. You shall tie me and strip me and whip me. It will be my gift to you."

Intriguing! Whether it happened or not, both were savouring its contemplation: wicked little girls whispering. "When I have you tied I will run away," Stacie said dreamily.

"That will be good! When Yousef drags you back and throws you at my feet you shall enjoy fifty with his kurbash."

"I would die."

"But happily, beloved."

They laughed together and made love, Stacie's whipped skin flaring her into new ecstasies as they rolled and hands sought and found. When they lay quiet again Stacie said quietly, "I'm going to do it. I'll do both if you'll let me . . . I'll whip Suzie and I'll whip you. I feel as though I've let you seduce me. You've made me want to do it."

"You have always wanted to. I have simply made you look at yourself. Tell me: When I was whipping you, did you not long to have me tied as you were tied and the whip in your hand . . . ? come."

"Yes," Stacie grinned sheepishly. "But that was wanting revenge."

"I think we all seek revenge," Rannah mused slowly.

"Revenge for having been born a girl. Girls in Jedrah know so much of whips, the whips men hold and use on us. Why wouldn't we dream . . . !"

"If you could choose, would you be a man?"

The mistress's hand stroked a hard nipple, her little finger searing the curve of the breast with its lightest touch. "We are so inconsistent, we women. No, I would not be a man. They have only strength, who of them would ever know what you and I have now! To be a girl is worth ten thousand stripes upon our skin."

"That's about the number I can expect to collect in my life as a slave girl," Stacie snickered in happy melancholy.

"More! Far more, little slave girl. I promise." Hungrily they feasted.

In the middle of the night Stacie felt her wrist handcuffed to the bed by hands made dilatory by love. It was a postscript to her day.

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A new day does not always sustain the enthusiasms of the day before, trepidation infused erotic excitement, Stacie found herself shivering with both. She knew Rannah was immensely enjoying her anxiety.

But she was not the only one who trembled. In the middle of the floor of the familiar chamber Suzie stood naked, her hands tied behind her back, her feet still chained. She had the appearance of someone who had been waiting a long time. Stacie's heart and conscience were smitten by the welcoming light that irradiated the girlish features when she beheld their entry. If only the poor child knew!

The feminine radiance slowly dimmed as Rannah broke the news. As though to modify its bleak message she untied the small hands so that their owner stood chafing her indented wrists as she absorbed the edict of Mohammad Yasin.

"But I've been punished! That awful thing they did to me yesterday. My behind's still on fire." Appealing eyes sought her visitor's. "It's so terribly unfair."

Rannah grinned at her slave girl. "You see, Stacie. It is as I said, for women nothing is ever fair. We will always feel abused."

Suzie was groping as Stacie had groped, she looked at the Lady Rannah pleadingly. "What does your father want done to me now?"

"He wants you whipped, properly."

Suzie digested the statement. "Properly means terribly, doesn't it?"

"Yes."

"And . . . how . . . how many?"

"That is none of your concern." Rannah's voice asserted authority.

Suzie twisted her nakedness unhappily. "Am I to be whipped in front of all those awful black men?"

"They are gone." Rannah paused to gather her full enjoyment from the bomb she was about to drop. "It will be Stacie who whips you."

Suzie ceased all motion. Her bafflement was obvious.

"Why? I've never hurt her?"

"Because it's my wish. If her hand is laggard as mine was with you she shall herself receive two for one from me."

Suzie flashed a protest of despair. "All this whipping! It's so . . so hard to take . . . to understand. What good does it do!"

"It tells that you belong to Jedrah, that you had best forget the past."

The scared and naked girl was unappeased. "But why me! There's Wendy and Jane and . . . and you!" she looked at Stacie accusingly.

Rannah was amused. "If you fear discrimination I will have the other two brought here and tied and whipped as you are whipped. Would that make you happier?"

"No."

"You have only to look at Stacie. Does she not bear enough marks to suit you?"

"I'm sorry. I'm just scared."

With swift grace Rannah stripped and pirouetted. The kiss of the kurbash had left vivid weals and the evidence of broken skin. The marks were lividly beautiful but frightening. She stood naked and proud, displaying herself. Beside her the quivering white girl seemed slight and pitiful. "You will not ask why I bear these," she ordered tersely. "Be thankful that I too know pain."

We humans are strange in our seeking for balances and justifications. We need eternal reassurance that it is not us alone who an omnipotent and callous fate has chosen for its sport. Suzie brightened perceptibly at the visual evidence. As she watched Rannah resume her clothes her eyes held reverence, the kurbash wounds were worse than anything Stacie bore.

Suzie was contrite. "I'm sorry, I suppose I'm a sissy. But it's all so . . . so impossible. I know you're trying to help. I think what you're saying that because a man's business deal went wrong a girl has to be whipped and I'm the girl. . . ."

"A girl in Jedrah," Rannah approved. "You begin to understand you are a woman. Come, we will fasten you."

Suzie was resigned. Sight of Yasin's daughter's striated nudity had told her more than a thousand words might have done. As though eager to make amends for a fault she had not committed she offered herself helpfully as her wrists were strapped to the bar and then lifted to stretch her taut. She flushed as she made her pitiful request. "Could I be gagged please? I'll scream so terribly . . ."

"No, you may not be gagged, child." Rannah was firm on the point. "The female sounds a girl makes beneath the whip please me, they are potently erotic. Yours are delightful. I may rape you when we are done."

There was a rapport between them, three members of a club whose insignia was the wound of a whip. Suzie teetered on her toes, her girl's nudity appealing and inviting, her bottom a rampant scarlet and purple from Moghere's caning.

When the whip was placed in Stacie's hands by her smiling mistress she felt like a novice at a banquet whose speech must be the keynote of the function. It was a beautiful and wicked thing, supple and heavy and balanced, wonderfully tapered. At the feel of it she would have gladly fled the room, yet the blood was coursing madly through her veins in an unfamiliar excitement. Suzie's slight pale loveliness was waiting, beckoning.

"I will allow you only one error, slave girl. A second tender-hearted stroke, and I'll thrash you until you both scream. Understood?"

"Yes, my Lady."

The naked girl whose back was about to be whipped looked apprehensively over one shoulder. Rannah found herself a chair. The stage was Stacie's. She knew not how many strokes she was to deliver on the innocent flesh, she dared not ask, she dared ask nothing . . . she swept back her arm and struck.

It was a blow worthy of Yousef himself. It snapped across the beginning of Suzie's back above her hips and curled to bite her concave belly. She writhed so that the frantic rattle of her ankle chain was continuous, her head was thrown back so that her hair was wild, but she did not scream. Consciously or unconsciously she was striving to join the Stoic Club.

But it was upon the girl with the whip that the potency of the occasion was to be most vividly and indelibly impressed. All her life Stacie would remember that first sweeping impact of her lash upon the skin of a bound female. After it life could never be the same again. Absurdly she remembered the whispered confidences of a grubby little girl who had explained graphically the srcin of babies. It was a landmark in self discovery. Her sex flamed demandingly. Rannah laughed in understanding. Suzie gasped and fought her bonds.

There was the white back! Hers to etch with stripes, to paint with scarlet lines. Aflame with a great need Stacie struck again and ridged the responsive flesh high under the shoulders so that the thong's tip buried itself in the curve of a breast. As though hypnotised she circled the furiously plunging nakedness to view her work. Entranced, she bent and kissed the crimson weal beneath the engorged nipple. As she straightened up her eyes were close to those of the girl she was whipping. In neither was there either hate or love, only a great wonderment in what was happening. It was quite spontaneous that each should smile. Stacie went back to once more wield the whip, Suzie made no plea.

It was exciting to watch the lines spring up across the swaying back. Gradually Stacie knew that it had become most necessary and urgently desirable that Suzie scream. The crazily plunging girl was moaning and sobbing in erratic gasps, but the true cries that would touch Rannah's heart and loins had been denied: now Stacie

desired them too. Pivoting on her toes she cut the tapered leather down across the swollen bottom that after its ordeal yesterday should have been inviolate.

Suzie screamed most satisfyingly. Again and again the young voice pealed out its desolation at the violation of her flesh. The cries were never the same. Screams of fear, screeching bursts of anger, shrill paeans of pain. Stacie plied her whip across the young back and livid rump to evoke more and more of them in wider and wider ranges of anguish. Experimentally she sliced the soft thighs and discovered new and edifying sounds . . . When Rannah held her hand and took away the whip she was, for a wild rebellious moment, quite bereft.

Stacie was drunk with ecstasy, dazed with the violence of emotion engendered by what she had just done. She allowed her mistress to gently lead her to a seat, together they watched the lovely sweat-drenched, white body fight its terrible battle with its pain. Then the grip on her arm was firm, she was led to the room where she shared Rannah's bed. In a wild tumultuous abandon they feasted upon each other in their own demanding love. It was a long time before they returned to the naked girl who was hanging by her wrists.

With Mohammad Yasin absent, the two girls returned to the lotus land of their adoration of each other Stacie wore her handcuffs as a bride might wear her ring, her ankle chain was set aside until the return of the master. Yasin would insist on chained feet, but for Rannah and her slave the handcuffs were sufficient and infinitely pleasing. Suzie's punishment had been enough for the moment, the day before Yasin was to return she would be whipped again so as to shockingly proclaim upon her skin the badge of his displeasure. Rannah judged that to be enough to save her own skin harmless from the kurbash.

They had both known and cherished the knowledge of what they would do. Each found herself intriguingly obsessed by the thought of the act they would perform. They rolled it over in their imaginations and knew their concern with it and their determination to go through with it as being purely erotic, a sensual carnality to delight them both. Over a lazily long drawn out breakfast one day Rannah mischievously took their dream into reality.

"You know what we will do today, slave girl?"

Stacie's nostrils flared. She knew. For very sure she knew!

"Yes, my lady."

"It is I who should call you that today."

Stacie considered the proposition. "No, please! I am not the one who owns a slave girl." She was quivering with nervousness and with love. "Can't we just be two girls exploring their femaleness?"

Rannah nodded. "Yes, that is good." She grinned intimately. "Neither one of us . . . ever before . . . ?"

"I'm shivering with fright," Stacie admitted. "I think I'm . . . willing to renege."

"Don't be absurd. You'd be heartbroken if I forbid."

"You're still terribly marked by that awful kurbash."

"Don't start getting noble, slave girl, or tomorrow you may find yourself naked with Yousef. Surely that should deter sweetness and light."

"Yes, my lady." Stacie gave herself over to the game. "You wish me to make you scream?"

Rannah gave more attention to the question than the questioner had anticipated. "Yes . . . I think I would value that. There is an inborn resistance in me to making a noise: I think it will be so even with you, I will long to be proud and haughty. Break me of it."

"How many strokes, my lady?"

"I do not care. Whip me as much as you wish, but make it last throughout the whole day. I insist on that, it is an order. One of my last. Once I am tied you must pay no heed to any order I many be foolish enough to give. That too is a directive as of this moment. Understood?"

Stacie trembled with happiness. "Yes, my lady."

"There is a thing I have learned, slave girl. I have never known a woman fail to scream when her breasts are whipped: I think it would be so with me." She smiled amusedly at Stacie's anxious eyes. "I will not forbid you to whip me on those two nice things we wear in front, but if you do not I will be grateful."

The idea that a girl had be whipped both front and back sent Stacie's heart pounding again, it invoked incredible possibilities. "You have never whipped mine, my lady. I will not whip yours." It was a promise easy to make. Thoughts of marring the roseate buds of love by whip wounds was frightening, either Rannah's or her own.

"It is true I seem already well whipped, slave girl. But with the skill you have acquired I think you can place your own lash between the others. They are mostly on my back, so you have my bottom and my thighs." She smiled archly, "and any other places you may discover . . ."

Stacie blushed furiously.

They laughed in genuine amusement at her carmine admission of her thoughts.

Awkwardness was inevitable. Stacie felt the world upon her shoulders as they walked to the fatal room. Rannah seemed determined to enjoy the awful experience. She would do this through the words and acts of her slave. Stacie knew herself an instrument and longed to acquit herself with distinction. The strangeness of what they were about to engage in set them to trembling. They laughed about it and made fun, but tension was there. Rannah had ceased to order or direct. She had become passive and very feminine. Stacie sensed the reins had been passed into her hands, there would be no more help, no directives, no decisions other than her own. She felt proud and scared. There was an amused glint in the mistress's eyes that would take note of all she did.

Rannah stood meekly. She presumed nothing. She waited. "Strip naked!" So easy an

order to give, so potent. Slowly and deliberately Rannah removed her clothes. "Go stand beneath the bar."

The girl to be whipped inclined her head in subservience and obeyed the order. She moved with a touching grace.

When the moment came to strap Rannah's wrists to the bar the atmosphere between the girls was so charged that Stacie felt sure sparks must surely arc between their fingers, it was an intensity of something shared beyond any previous experience. Rannah's eyes were dark sardonic pools in which she feared to drown.

"Put your wrists against the straps."

How beautiful the obedience! But it was precise, it assumed nothing, it demanded orders. The dark eyes bent submissively and watched while their owner's wrists were circles by the wicked straps and buckled tight. Then came the moment when they were eye to eye and breast to breast. The scent of female musk was heavy from them both. They acknowledged it with small female smiles. Stacie longed to cast aside the straps and take her love to the consummation of the fire she knew was devouring their both. But she believed such feminine weakness might be unforgivable. She had no wish to spend time on the morrow in this place with Yousef. Breaking the compulsion of the eyes she turned to the wall and touched the switch. When her former mistress balanced only on her toes she turned it off. "You are the most beautiful thing in the world, Rannah," she said with innocent simplicity.

It was a good feeling! Stacie felt it welling within her loins and in every crevice of her being: She owned a girl! The naked body of a lovely female being was hers! She could do what she liked with it. Under a sudden compelling impulse she found the ankle chains and locked them fast upon the helpless ankles of the girl who stood bound upon her toes.

Rannah frowned and kicked, then smiled delightedly at the clatter of the links and kicked again. "I have never been chained," she admitted. "There is a strangeness . . . I shall learn much today."

Stacie found the whip. They had already agreed that the one she had used on Suzie was best suited to their need. She seated herself before the tractioned girl and allowed the thong to play back and forth between her hands. She was thrilled to observe that Rannah found it hard to divert her eyes from the thing with which she would be scored.

"You should be made to wait for your whipping. It is de rigueur, is it not?"

Rannah sighed; her eyes sparkled. "That is according to your pleasure, Miss Blair," she said demurely.

Again the surge of lust! Stacie too was learning. Why should submission in a girl make you long to whip her! It should be the reverse, but it was not! To whip her or to feed upon her! The more douce she was the greater the hunger she aroused. The dark eyes watched her discovery. They had made it themselves long ago.

"I think I will make you ask for your whipping," Stacie decided.

"Of course, Miss Blair. But you must tell me when."

"Why not now? Don't you want to get it over with?" How wonderful to play with this gorgeous girl!

"My whipping cannot be got over with, Miss Blair. It is to last all day."

"Don't call me 'Miss Blair'. It sounds sarcastic. Call me Stacie. And you can ask for your whipping to begin whenever you like. If you leave it too long I'll simply whip you harder and faster."

"You're doing this beautifully, Stacie. You've got me all hot and wet. I don't know why you were nervous."

"Well, I was. Terribly! If I'm doing everything right it's because I love you. Isn't it nuts!"

"No, it isn't! It's delightful. You've got me in the most awful female dither I've ever been in."

"Ask me to start whipping you then. That will cure your dither."

Rannah drew a deep breath. She was uncertain how long her lovely state of euphoria would survive the first blows of the whip. She was reluctant to relinquish her sensuous glow. But she was also femininely curious: about herself as much as about the girl who held the lash. "Please start whipping me, Stacie. I want you to," she requested firmly.

The quivers were gone, they were replaced by a deep content. She owned the girl she loved, owned her utterly. How great and incredible this privilege! To whip the slender loveliness all day long in a nirvana of sensory delight scented by their own secretions and the sweat of agony.

It was past midday before the Arab girl screamed. Stacie did not mind. The sinuous writhings which the whipped girl substituted for the pealing of her voice were beautiful to watch. In them was all the pain of being a woman and all the sensuality of being loved. To see Rannah whipped was to be given a too intimate vision of all womankind from the beginning of the world.

It had begun with the compelling impulse of three swift and awful slashes as hard and as fast as Stacie could make them. She knew not why, but they happened. They had been waiting for their victim all her life, it fell to Stacie to make them real. While the successive blows fell the tied girl held statuesque in shocked immobility. She absorbed their impact as though breathlessly receiving a gift long promised and overdue. When they were done she trembled and gasped and shook one foot against its chain. The nerve tremors beneath her skin were far more eloquent than screams.

Of the two, it was Stacie who panted the hardest. In a strange need for reassurance she dropped the whip and went to where she could kiss the lips of the girl who could deny her nothing. With a great hunger she clasped the slim nakedness with all her strength and welded her moist lips to those dry from the gasps of agony her whip had evoked. Frenziedly, she cast away the small covering she wore and rubbed her own nudity against that of the girl who could herself make only the smallest motions of response. Sex to sex they moaned their own strange penance.

Stacie had gone away and stayed away long enough to cool the hot blood racing through her veins. She was afraid to stay with this palpitating heated flesh for fear of freeing it from its bonds or whipping it in a frenzy of lust beyond control. She wanted neither of these, so she went away and left her love suspended by her wrists and seeking to bear her weight upon her toes. No word had been exchanged.

When she returned the glint was back in Rannah's eyes; the toes were firm upon the floor. "I won't do that again," Stacie said, her words more a threat than an apology. She laughed at her captive. "You talk about me radiating sex, but what about you! I can feel your heat ten paces distant. The way I'm going we'll never get through the day, I'll let you free for sure."

"And keep your appointment with Yousef tomorrow?"

"Would you give me to him . . . honest?"

"I would not want to, but I would do it. I will not spoil you with indulgences. Today is important to me, I'm not sure why, but it is. So keep our pact, slave girl."

"I'm not your slave girl today," Stacie reminded indignantly. She curled the whip around the chained legs twice. "Must I teach lessons too."

When the gasping was done, Rannah managed a penitent:

"Forgive me. It is so easy to forget. Always punish me when I do . . ."

Stacie kissed her captive and promised. She whipped her intermittently through the morning. Rannah did not scream.

It was in the afternoon Stacie got the idea. She supposed it unsporting and unkind and a lot of other things. Grudgingly she was compelled to give credit to Yousef. She found a cord, circled her prisoner's narrow waist, looped one slender foot below its shackle and tugged it back and up as far as it would go, then tied it there. She found a cane.

"I know what you are going to do," Rannah said without accusation.

"Am I too cruel?"

"You could never be too cruel. But if I fail to scream do you intend to continue beating the sole of my foot?"

"What other way can I make you scream?"

"You could separate my feet and whip up inside them . . . perhaps I would scream."

Again Stacie clasped the tied girl and held her tight and found her lips. Rannah was pivoting on one foot, her other raised invitingly and waiting, snared helpless for the cane. "You don't have to scream, Rannah. I like you as you are."

"I must scream. You must make me. It has to be that way."

"How silly we are," Stacie said sadly. "I love you."

"You are weakening. Do it quickly. Now!"

Stacie found the cane and with all her recently acquired skill slashed the poor raised sole from toes to heel.

Rannah screamed. It sounded like the jubilation of release.

After that she screamed often. Stacie hurt her cleverly and cruelly and with female skill and cunning.

That night their love was as violent as their day, But, once more, Stacie Blair was handcuffed to the bed.

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The plane coasted with little sound to the courtyard wall.

The two helicopters sank to earth within the courtyard itself. Within minutes the entire staff of Mohammad Yasin's house was safely locked away or struck down senseless if they resisted, among these latter was Yousef. It was a very easy victory.

When the bedroom door was thrust violently open and the light switched on, Rannah and Stacie sat up in bed, startled from their sleep of repletion, both were naked. Blinking in the strong glare it was several moments before they recognized Hamid Boshan. He had gone military. His uniform indicated some sort of rank, his ribbons might have meant anything. His white-toothed smile was the easiest thing to recall.

"And so we meet again!" he exclaimed as though he had invented the phrase.

"Go away," said Rannah. "Can't you see we've got no clothes on."

"Very lovely ladies," Mr. Boshan acknowledged. "You come with me please."

"It's the middle of the night. We want to sleep. There's a hotel in the town. Get out of here."

Mr. Boshan sighed. Walking over to the bed he struck Rannah on her cheek knocking her sideways. He dragged her from the bed, pushed her on the floor and locked her wrists behind her back with handcuffs. He then turned his attention to Stacie.

"You are not trusted, eh," he chuckled as he indicated her fettered hand. "The keys are all the same." He unlocked the cuff from the bed, thrust her on her face and re-locked the metal band behind her back. His strength was prodigious, frightening. The two girls looked at each other askance. "In my country we deal properly with lesbians," said Mr. Boshan. "Your cunts are made for men to fuck. You will find out."

It happened too quickly for them to adjust. With their hands locked behind their backs they could not resist. Two soldiers appeared with guns. They were prodded from the room. "It is nice you have no clothes," approved the officer in charge.

In the courtyard were three other naked girls. They too had their hands behind their

backs. They were joined by a long chain and metal collars round their necks. Wendy, Jane and Suzie were as lost as was their former captor and her slave. It took but a minute to add Rannah and Stacie to the coffle. They shook their heads angrily at the confinement of their necks and their linkage with the other girls, but it was a beautifully simple arrangement. All five girls were neatly controlled. Where their leader went the others must follow. From somewhere Mr. Boshan had produced a longish riding crop, with a flash of white teeth he demonstrated its quality on Wendy's rear. She gave a startled yelp.

"If you do not obey I whip you 'till you do," he explained amiably. "We walk now to the plane. You make no noise if you please."

So easy! It was infuriating. The machines employed may well have been the entire air strength of the emerging nation, but they sufficed to effect the efficient kidnapping of five naked girls. Within ten minutes all were airborne.

The girls sat on a long bench against the fuselage of the transport plane. They were quite helpless, any rebellious motion immediately snubbed their collars against their companions on the chain. It was best to keep still.

"My father will kill you," said the daughter of Mohammad Yasin.

Mr. Boshan acknowledged the tribute to his importance. "Alas no. Your father is a reasonable man."

"Where are you taking us?"

"Where else but to my country! Mr. Moghere will make good use of you."

"You mean he'll fuck us?" Stacie asked inelegantly. "You will be whipped for such impertinence," Mr. Boshan said importantly. "But not here in the plane. We will do it properly."

"You mean to tell us that black gorilla has used his damn Air Force to kidnap us all?" Jane demanded furiously.

Mr. Boshan sat very still, his teeth ceased to be on view.

"Gorilla? Our beloved leader?" His voice was cold.

All five girls cringed. They all approved the word, but not its consequences. "He is insane to do this thing!" Rannah affirmed.

Mr. Boshan's teeth reappeared. "Five kidnapped girls will have disappeared. Who will know or care?" he asked pleasantly.

"Do we have to be chained together like cattle?" Stacie asked.

"It is the way your forefathers chained us not so long ago," Hamid Boshan pointed out reasonably. "You but pay a debt."

"What's going to happen to us? What do you want us for?"

"Four of you will become Mr. Moghere's handmaidens. One of you has a

bargaining function."

"We're slaves?" Suzie laid it on the line.

"You are correctly concise," the officer's English was beyond criticism.

Five female heads turned back and forth to its fellows on the chain that made their common bond. Ten hands tugged at five handcuffs. "You will never be free again," Mr. Boshan explained helpfully. "You will be properly whipped for disobedience."

The plane droned through the night.

They stood in a line before the King! How else could it be described! Stacie thought bitterly. Five naked girls joined by a chain and collars about their necks, their hands linked behind their backs, they stood for inspection before their conquerer.

"Five cunts all in a row," intoned Mr. Moghere. No one spoke.

"That is what you are," Mr. Moghere explained pleasantly.

"Cunts! You know the function of a cunt?" He looked up and down the line.

"You will answer when spoken to," Mr. Boshan went down the line of female flesh, striking vigorously with the riding crop. "You will also address our Leader as 'Sir'."

"Yes, we know, Sir," five female voices responded in pain. "Good!" Mr. Moghere surveyed his recent acquisitions with satisfaction. "If it were not that it would cheapen our association I would address you in no other way. Cunt! It is a most satisfying word. It is really all you are: slits in female flesh." His eyes roved and settled on Rannah. "You have been remarkably whipped, I do not understand?"

"Need you understand! I have been whipped, that is enough," Rannah's voice was bitter and angry.

"Ah, but by whom?" Mr. Moghere's eyes were alight with interest.

"I think, Sir, it is a lesbian indulgence," Mr. Boshan dropped tentatively.

"So!" The Great Man's eyes roved up and down the coffle.

"We will deal with lesbians. But I believe one among you mentioned the word gorilla?"

The silence was intense. No one but Mr. Boshan looked at Jane. Jane wept.

"So!" the head of State looked pensively at the slight figure of the naked girl. "Perhaps fifty with the sjambok may alter your opinion of me."

Mr. Boshan was prudently conscious of waste. "Fifty will kill her, sire."

"Very well then, twenty-five. She can come to my bed when it is done. She should be most grateful."

The white shoulders shook with sobs, the girl's head bent so that she saw only the floor. Jane knew herself lost.

"Perhaps someone else would wish to mention the word, Gorilla?" The omnipotent eyes scanned the coffle of girls.

"I could call you many things, you black bastard!" Rannah exclaimed with bitter vehemence. "Send us home before more harm is done."

Mr. Moghere sighed. "I had hoped to find love among you," he said sadly. "Cannot you curb your lips." He looked at his henchman, "Can this daughter of the desert stand twenty strokes?"

"She has been sorely whipped already, sire. I would not take that risk."

"Ah! Well, we will find ways to tame the bitch. And this one, the one of my delight," he looked squarely at Stacie.

"I think she could endure a moderate number with the sjambok, sire."

The brown eyes and the beaming smile focused on Stacie.

"You have a choice, girl. Give me your cunt freely and with love or ask for the sjambok."

"The sjambok, sir."

Stacie shrank inwardly, her courage would not last long under the hide whip. For the moment they were finding a frail refuge in the courteous exchange of words beneath which lay torture, rape and perhaps death. These civilities would not last: in them was bathos. Five naked girls were being used for the entertainment of a black despot. Yet she sensed that somewhere in this scene were pathetic cross purposes. Mr. Moghere's comic opera mention of the word love had not been in satire. If one of the five chained girls could have brought herself to reach out and touch him with affection she would probably be treated as a Princess. Did his surface buffoonery condemn him utterly! How rational was their loathing! Stacie did not know the answer, she only knew her choice of the sjambok had been instant and instinctive.

A silence lengthened. Amatar Moghere examined his five captives pensively. They found no comfort in his scrutiny.

"This is the young lady who comes from influential sources in the United States, Sire. She has a similar potential for possible advantages as has the whelp of Yasin." Mr. Boshan seemed anxious to conserve expendable female flesh.

"I am not prepared to keep the skins of too many of these wenches inviolate for too long," Mr. Moghere said irritably. "The other three . . . can they be available for a man's pleasure?"

"Immediately Sire."

Decision was swift then. "I leave for New York tomorrow," Moghere said decisively. "I will explore possibilities. You will deal with these absurd creatures as I shall direct. I have thought of an ideal way for them to spend the time until my return. For now,

put them away for the night."

The cell was bare except for two pails, one held water. The two soldiers who had been their escort withdrew, leaving Hamid Boshan to view his prisoners dismay with an amused eye.

"You're not going to leave us chained like this!" Rannah demanded.

"And why not?" his voice was bland.

"There's no need. We can't escape, that door would hold an army."

"You do not wear the chain to hinder escape, you wear it because too many others in the past have worn it too."

"Can't you forget that!" Wendy demanded hotly. "There were a lot of white people who weren't getting such a good deal at that time either."

Mr. Boshan nodded appreciatively. "Very well then, you are chained because you look very pretty chained and because the chain will keep you most uncomfortable. For our Leader and myself this is enough."

"You'll take these handcuffs off us, won't you?" Stacie felt sure she knew the answer.

"You will wear your handcuffs, and for the same reasons."

"But we can't do anything . . . ! We're so damn helpless!"

"What did you have in mind to do?" Hamid Boshan inquired pleasantly.

"Well, at least you can handcuff us with our hands in front instead of behind our backs!"

"I will bid you ladies good-night." With a fine military salute their mentor departed. His passing was heralded by substantial thuds as the bolts were shot home in the slammed door.

"The dirty sons of bitches!" Suzie summed it up for all. It was an abominable night. The floor was hard. Between the handcuffs on their wrists and the chain that linked them together they could move but little. The only virtue of their metal collars was that they were loose enough that they could turn their necks without dragging at their partners. Jane wept piteously in contemplation of her sentence with the siambok. One by one they fell asleep striving to comfort her. Stacie was uncertain whether she too might not feel its bite.

The U.S. equivalent would have been a Prison Farm. In Narousse it was called 'The Estate'. It belonged to Mr. Moghere as did most things in the emerging nation. It absorbed the five captives with remarkable dispatch. Under the watchful eyes of their armed and uniformed male escort they were released from handcuffs and coffle. Each was tossed a scanty slip of a sheath like garment and a ragged straw hat against the sun. They were taken to a smithy where heavy medieval irons were riveted on their ankles, the links of the chain so heavy that the heart of each girl sank in hopelessness as the hammer pounded the rivets flat upon their liberty. Hobbling

awkwardly they were taken to a field and presented with a hoe.

Stacie wanted to sink to the ground and weep. Everything was wrong. There were no bright spots anywhere. The sun was hot, the field enormous, the rows of young cane waiting to be hoed were endless. At each end of the field a soldier with a rifle sat beneath a tree. A female wardress as massive in her way as the Great Man himself sauntered from prisoner to prisoner to check their work. She carried a slender, smooth and shining cane. Her manner was jocular, her English erratic. She seemed a very happy woman.

"You run any time you want, girl," she told Stacie with a vast chuckle. "Don't let them things on yo' feet bother you none."

On her next round she was more earnest. "You work damn hard, if not I whip your arse."

Or later, as the friendship ripened: "My name's Ermie. But you call me 'Miss'. One thing I gets from you white bitches is respect. I can cane your cunt as well as your arse." Ermie passed on her way laughing hugely.

Stacie assessed what she could see. About thirty girls, save for the new arrivals they were all of various shades of black or coffee. All were hobbled, all wore the same dress and hat, all worked steadily under Ermie's watchful eye. The place was undoubtedly some sort of prison. Perhaps it was the place where girls were sent after their rejection of Mr. Moghere's favours!

She was a millionairess hoeing sugar cane under the hot sun of an African plantation. She was nearly naked, her feet were brutally ironed. How easy to scream hysterically in anger and frustration at a fate so utterly improbable. Who in her former life would dream of her being where she was! None . . .

She supposed she had best apply herself to the punishing labour. Her hands would become blistered and calloused, her back bent. How easy it was going to become to long to offer her body to Moghere for release from pain and degradation! She wondered miserably if that day would come, and how soon. As she plied the hoe Stacie realised the virtue of the heavy chain and anklets. For the work she was doing they impeded nothing, even completely free her progress down the row would be slow and shuffling. They implacably inhibited escape, even if the soldiers and their guns were not there it would take her an hour to shuffle a mile, perhaps longer, by which time her ankles would be chafed raw. But it was their mental effect that was most potent. The knowledge there was no key was frightening, the burred rivets mocked all normal possibilities of being rid of them. And then their weight . . . ! Their weight was a constant reminder of a hopeless slavery, a servitude in which frightful punishments always hovered, and which might go on and on for the rest of her life. Her eyes brimmed.

"You ain't do so good, girl," Ermie's voice held stern reproof.

Stacie looked up, startled. The wardress was pointing to a lusty weed the hoe had missed. She pulled it up for exhibit.

"I'm sorry, I'll watch more closely."

"Best give you help, girl. You bend over and pull up that there dress."

Why protest! Stacie obeyed. The slash across her buttocks was cruel and awful, but it was alone. She rearranged herself and wondered if she should offer thanks for her 'help'.

Here was another kind of slavery, grim labour and swift grim punishment with nothing to look forward to . . . ever! With deep shame, but with increasing urgency Stacie wondered how long it would be before Mr. Moghere returned. She knew she would not again choose the sjambok.

"A commendable diligence, Miss Blair."

Startled, Stacie looked up from beneath the wide straw.

Hamid Boshan was giving her his whitest smile. Sweaty and tired she felt a million miles removed from his immaculate presence. "You are enjoying The Estate?" he enquired politely.

Sarcasm, bitterness and anger were tossed aside. Stacie's pride went with them. Passionately she desired no fencing with words, no saving of her face. Instant surrender was her most ardent wish.

"I'll do whatever you want." She managed a pale smile. "I'll be a good girl."

He nodded thoughtfully. "A great change from yesterday!"

She prayed he would not be stubborn and make her crawl.

The frightened girl searched desperately for the right thing to say.

"You have given me time to think. Thank you," she said humbly. "I needed The Estate to make me understand what I am."

"And what are you, Miss Blair?"

"I am a captive and I am a slave. I belong to a man." He laughed his pleasure.

"You have found out all this while using your hoe?"

He was playing with her! Somehow she must reach him.

"Please, Mr, Boshan, I was a slave when you first met me in Jedrah. If a girl is a good slave it is hard for her to exchange masters overnight. I was a good slave to Mohammad Yasin. I would wish to be a good slave to whoever owned me." She contrived a warmer smile, "I am only a girl, I am as afraid of the sjambok as I was of the kurbash."

"Yet yesterday you chose it. Had I not intervened, your back by now would be sadly cut."

She sank to her knees in the soft hot soil. "I owe you much. A thank-you seems so little. Yesterday I had pride, today I have none. I will yield my body to you gladly."

He sighed, looking down at her, his smile departed. "I can take your body now, and

I can leave you here in the sun with your hoe."

"I am a slave. If that is what you prefer . . ."

For a long time they held their pose, the proud erect man and the kneeling subject girl. Hamid Boshan said no word, but suddenly turned and strode away. In utter desolation Stacie scrambled to her feet and retrieved her hoe. For the second time that day tears found their way across her cheeks.

The two soldiers wore wide grins and carried no guns.

They picked her up bodily and carried her to the smith. In a daze of chaotic emotions she watched the hammer and the punch beat back the stubborn rivets and free her feet. When the clanking metal fell from the anvil to the floor she knew a thrill of joy, but also guilt. Rannah's feet were still ironed as were the others, they still hoed the long rows beneath the sun . . . Was she a traitress! She did not know . . . Stacie Blair was lost in an ocean of bewilderment.

"Rest after Labour is a pleasant thing," said Hamid Boshan.

Stacie wholeheartedly agreed. It was infinitely good to kneel on the rug and sip the drink. It had been equally good to take the bath and fasten round her hips the scanty thing that was her total garb. Mr. Boshan's premises were palatial. It was cool.

"You are exceedingly good in bed."

Stacie tried not to blush. She was neither naive or shy. She had been possessed before, both as a free girl and as a slave. What they had done together was not new. It was these casual references between pedantic speech that were disconcerting. Her reply was genuinely sincere. "You are very good yourself, Mr. Boshan."

"You will call me Hamid. I will call you Stacie. Why should we not be friends as well as make love. This small idyll we now enjoy may be short lived."

"Will Mr. Moghere take me when he returns?"

Hamid shrugged. "Who knows! He was much enamoured of you. Certainly of the five you are his choice just as you are mine."

"Why me?"

He laughed and gazed down at her with amused affection.

"You truly do not know?"

Laughing in her happiness at release she shook her head.

"No, honestly! What is there to know?"

"Has no one told you of your gift! You are a slave, the role fits you like a glove. In slavery you are totally natural, you glow. That night I first sat next to you at Dinner I had an erection the whole time."

Stacie was delighted by his frankness, from him it did not offend. Perhaps it was the

greatest compliment he could pay. She found it puzzling that he should tell her what Rannah and Yasin had said too. "But I only accept the inevitable," she protested. "How else do you expect me to behave!"

"Oh, I am sure the whip has had a part in it," he conceded. "Perhaps too it is the knowledge of what you once were. It has a piquancy . . ."

"How are the mighty fallen . . . !"

"Yes, there is that. It is a human trait regardless of color. But also this . . . this acceptance, as you call it, triggers something within that causes you to exude sex in a degree I have never previously known." He grinned ruefully. "Our Leader confirmed your effect on him too, no man is safe with you."

"Aren't you safe with me now?" She twinkled at him mischievously.

"Only for a little while. I can feel you already undermining my defences."

"You mean I'm a sexpot?" she pouted.

"Good Heavens no!" Hamid's denial was emphatic. With you it is beautiful, but I have no name for it."

"Hamid . . ." Stacie's tone was thoughtful, "will Mr. Moghere allow my father to ransom me?"

"I do not think so. Your greatest value is in the seeking of advantage. The tables are turned, Moghere may offer you to Yasin for value to be received."

"And if Yasin will not play the game?"

Mr. Boshan looked sad. "You must not allow what I tell you now to dwell in your mind, it may not happen. But it is known Yasin adores you . . . Some pictures of you being tortured might speed his compliance."

Stacie had a hysterical need to laugh or scream. What an infuriating irony! "I am only a girl," she said unhappily. "These men who trade empires . . . surely they are not going to part with kingdoms for a slave."

"I would," Hamid said simply.

She rose and replenished their drinks. When she knelt before him to offer his glass she kissed his hand.

They sipped in silence for awhile, happy with each other.

"Hamid, the other girls . . . What of them?"

"They will serve their time in the fields. When The Leader returns they will be grateful for his notice."

"Hamid, why am I not chained?"

He laughed at her earnest features. "Must I tell you that too! You make love much

better without them."

"You trust me . . . to be free?"

He shrugged indolently. "Go. Run if you wish."

"In the middle of the night I might."

"I know what you are angling for," he told her shrewdly. "You wish to be chained. Not ironed as in the field, but daintily. Am I not right?"

Stacie's blush was answer enough.

"And you protest you're not a natural slave!" Hamid laughed at her.

"I suppose it's silly," she acknowledged, "but I've got used to them, handcuffs mostly. I'd always choose them if I am allowed to." She laughed back at him. "But in some ways it's not silly at all. When I wear them I know where I am and what I am. I'm not thinking should I run or later. And it's the same with everybody else: I'm handcuffed so they don't have to worry about me. It's a bit like a bride wearing her ring."

"Allright. I'll chain you, but not now. Come, finish your drink. There is a thing that we must do."

• • •

The flogging of Jane was shattering. Stacie had supposed it forgotten, a thing easily set aside in the absence of the Great Man. But Hamid had been given a directive. In spite of Stacie's pleading it was an order he would obey, in fact he had no choice. He himself was not as concerned as the girl he had rescued from The Estate, but he would have willingly forgotten the punishment had he been able. Stacie understood his obligation and ceased to pester him for a reprieve he could not give.

"Can I go to her, Hamid?"

"Why?"

"To give her what comfort I can. To tell her I've been whipped and lived."

"The other girls will do that. Your Arab girl is a walking testimony to a girl's survival after the lash."

"Does she know it is to happen in the morning?"

"I have thought it kindest not to tell her."

"How . . . how are they kept at night?"

"I suppose you want to be chained with them to show sympathy. It would teach you a lesson if I ordered it."

"But Hamid, how? Perhaps it's better than I think."

"It's probably worse!" He kissed her lightly. "Stop worrying."

"But how . . . please, I'm curious."

"Just an open shed, lots of fresh air. The girls sleep on the ground in rows. A chain passes between their legs above their irons. It is locked to concrete at each end. They are not tightly held, but they are quite safe. None has ever escaped."

She pictured herself among the line of girls, seeking rest on hard ground, the metal heavy on her ankles. She shivered. "I'm lucky! Oh, Hamid, thank you!"

"We are both lucky," said Hamid Boshan. "Let us hope it lasts."

In the morning he broke the news. "You will have to watch."

"Why?" She was uncertain whether she wished to witness the flogging of a girl.

"These things are ceremonial. They are done with a flourish. Everyone must attend and witness her punishment and understand why it is done. It has a salutary effect. Behaviour improves amusingly."

"But her crime . . . how can you justify?"

Hamid grinned. "That is simplest of all. At the least the girl is guilty of lèse-majesté. We will call it Treason. In Narousse it will be understood."

Stacie did not argue. It was a force in motion, she could not halt its momentum. She made no protest when two soldiers appeared to escort her.

"It is best," Hamid assured. "They will return you in good order when all is over. They will even tie your hands."

"Can't I be handcuffed?"

"No. The cord they will use is made here. It is coarse and will hurt your wrists. It will be appropriate."

"What about clothes?"

"As you are. There will be breasts of all colours around you." Hamid grinned cheerfully. "But none as fine as yours."

Stacie crossed her wrists behind her back and allowed herself to be tied. Hamid was right, the cord was indeed prickly. It was also very tight, she had best not struggle. She walked between her proud escorts as though she herself was going to the scaffold.

There was a natural slope that was the Grandstand. At its lower centre stood the post. It was stark and grim and cruelly lonely. Stacie shivered.

The audience was conglomerate. It sought the best view it could find. But there was privilege, the front row was strictly reserved. But it appeared she was the most privileged of all. Her escort took assured possession of the front row ccntre, the post was no more than fifteen feet away. She felt foolish in her prominence, her hands

bound and her breasts bare for all to see. She was suddenly glad of the two soldiers, there were hostile glances at her white skin and pink tipped breasts.

The Estate was there in force. Ermie marshalled Rannah, Wendy and Suzie to where they would enjoy an unobstructed view. They had been delivered in a jeep. Their heavy irons precluded walking. Their wrists were tied as were her own. They exchanged pathetic glances, but could not wave a hand or exchange a word. All three looked tired and grubby and scared. They wore their prison dresses and straw hats. In that they were far more fully dressed than she.

It was a long wait. Stacie wondered how Jane was facing it. For the victim it was a time of pure terror. She remembered her own journeys to the fatal room in which she had received her pain. The wait ended with the advent of a jeep that came to a jerky halt beside the post. It contained a driver, an officer and Jane.

It all became very official. Jane, stony faced and wide eyed, was made to stand. Her feet were still captive to the irons, but they were her only bond. The elevation of the vehicle placed her in the prominence needful that she be viewed by all. Stacie saw her tense and stiffen at the order to strip herself, but after a moment of hesitation she obeyed and stood white and naked for interested inspection. Her pubic hair was shamingly in evidence as a black patch upon a field of white.

There was then a proclamation and the crime and sentence. The officer read it out in three different languages, none of them English. While this was taking place Ermie made her preparations at the post. The dreaded sjambok was draped in coils from her belt. At sight of it a great sigh billowed through the assemblage. Jane took one quick fearful glance and turned away.

They lifted her down, the jeep was driven away. Jane hobbled to the post and for a moment faced it, savouring the last of what small freedom she possessed. Ermie must have briefed her on what she must do, for without instruction she embraced the pillar as though in love with it, clinging and pressing as though wishing to weld herself to the timber itself. Even her fettered feet were as snug on each side as the length of chain would permit.

Ermie enjoyed herself and took much time, she shared top billing with the naked girl she tied. She looped and tugged with an intent precision worthy of a better cause. At the end of her performance it seemed improbable that the girl to be whipped could even twitch a single muscle. Cords held her at wrist and elbow, at waist and ankle and knee. Her breasts had been thrust inward and flattened against the wood.

Stacie realised, with a thrill of thankfulness, that perhaps there was mercy in the post and the bindings. No matter how terrible the whip it could not wrap around the slim nudity nor could it cut the pert and lovely breasts. Ermie knew what she was doing. No one would thank her for a corpse.

There was now a roll of drums. It was faintly comic, but terrible in its progression toward the act of cruelty. Stacie squelched a desire to giggle. At the staccato sound Jane strained to look back over one shoulder, but quickly she turned her face to the post, pressed one cheek against it hard and closed her eyes. Ermie gathered the soft hair and tucked it down within what was left of the cleft between the captive breasts. She shook out the sjambok so that it fell limply as an extension of her arm.

How describe the sjambok! Or the method of its wielding, or the cries of the slender

girl whose back it cut! The sjambok was designed for use on oxen, yet a girl named Jane must receive it and absorb it and perhaps live. The white back was heartbreakingly lonely tied to its post. Jane's screams did battle with the African day and were lost with all the other agonies of girls on a continent that had known too many such scenes too many times. The word flogging was correct, this was a whip beyond whips, an awfulness apart.

Stacie was thankfully glad her hands were as painfully tied as they were. Had she been free she would have leaped at the swinging arm and held it down. She and the other captives would have fought if given liberty. How strange a condition to be grateful for cord and chain! How wise the centuries had been in using them! Their discipline took command when reason lost control. Deliberately she hurt her wrists by twisting to reaffirm her impotence.

The rhino hide on female flesh had a sound exquisitely its own. It seemed too that the screams were screams apart and different from those other screams by which a girl pays tribute to the thong. They spoke not only of pain but of a life crying farewell to hope.

The watching girl with her bound hands twisting against the rough fibers of Narousse cord judged Ermie to be withholding a part of her great strength. From the first response of blood beneath the lash it had been evident the sjambok could kill. Stacie recalled books in which its lethal capacities had been stressed. Sentences in which the victim's back had been 'Cut to ribbons' recurred often. Now before her eyes was the visual truth. Memory brought cringing fear of how she had brashly and with unconscious bravado stated a preference for Mr. Moghere's sjambok rather than his bed. It could so easily be she who was tied against that post!

But, of course, that was the motive for this ritual exercise!

There would be few in the assemblage who were not vicariously flinching in the same knowledge of vulnerability, half of them would also be carnally excited. Stacie was ashamed of herself, she knew her pubic hair was wet. What was the magic of a whipped girl that did this to almost everyone! The connotation of endless orgasm . . . perhaps that was it! Jane could not writhe, but her head had taken on a frantic life of its own, her cries were avowing some strange homage to a pagan god.

Why speak of weals and scarlet lines and tender ridges of bruised flesh! Ermie's sjambok scorned them all, the sjambok dealt in wounds. Even used with compassion its etchings on the skin would leave their mark for life, blood was implicit in each cut. The small white back and bottom became latticed by the successive impacts. At the eleventh stroke the screams died. Jane fainted.

But Narousse was equal to the emergency. No fiery liquor, no pungent aromatics beneath the nose. Two soldiers each with two buckets of water appeared with commendable dispatch. With evident amusement one of them emptied one of them over the naked girl tied to the post. It took two more deluges to bring Jane back into a world she wished to leave. Her body was soaked and glistening. Stacie wondered if it was true the whip bit more cruelly on wet skin.

It was measure of Jane's loss of hope that she did not plead, she uttered no lucid words at all. Returning from the void in which she had found a small respite she moaned to find herself still bound tight against the post. Stacie did a quick count. Fourteen more strokes! Was the helpless girl counting them too! Hamid had been

right: fifty with the sjambok meant death. There came a fleshy thunk as the strip of hide once more sought and found the sacrifice to Mr. Moghere's hurt pride.

Twice more Jane found unconsciousness and was shocked back to punishment by the drenching cold. At the end of her twenty five strokes her head again fell limp, but no one cared. The crowd slowly dispersed, the three captive girls were driven back to their Labour in the fields, Stacie's escort turned her about the marched back from whence she came. The pathetic wounded flesh of the white girl tied to the post was left in lonely agony. No doubt sight of its condition would serve as a useful warning to all!

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Mr. Moghere was prepared to cut his immediate losses and enjoy himself. He was in the position of the merchant who, unable to sell his produce, eats it, thus nimbly turning loss into pleasurable profit. His seat was comfortable, his potation cool and satisfying. The view which absorbed his interest was beautiful, it was unique, it completely gratified his sense of what was right and proper. Always on his return to Narousse from foreign lands he felt a comfortable sense of belonging. After all, most of the emerging nation belonged to him! This too was as it should be.

The slow pendulum motions of the two naked girls was pleasantly hypnotic. The key by which it might be endlessly renewed was the slender whip with which he idly toyed. A single slash on torso or limb provided a momentum that sustained itself for a surprising length of time, a small miracle of dynamics for which Stacie and Rannah were supremely grateful. As yet their skins bore only a few of the thin red lines.

"You find it an interesting position?" Amatar Moghere inquired politely.

It was cruelly functional, neat in its simplicity. The wrists of each girl were crossed and bound behind her back, from them she was suspended from the ceiling, he roes a couple of inches from any possible contact with the rug. The cord was long enough to provide the twist between the bindings of their hands and the ring in the ceiling high above. Their shoulders were cruelly and quite incredibly wracked and close to dislocation.

"We'll do anything you want," Stacie said tonelessly. "No we will not!" Rannah declaimed as vehemently as she was able.

"An interesting divergence of opinion," Mr. Moghere commented affably.

"Please don't keep us like this," Stacie gasped. "If you let us down we can talk."

"We can talk now. You are not mute."

"We can't stand this. It will kill us."

"I assure you, dear ladies, it is not fatal. I recall one reluctant damsel who hung thus for two days and then came to my bed and performed commendably."

"I'll go to your bed now, Sir," Stacie wanted no heroics. "Stop it, slave girl, you'll do no such thing!" Rannah's voice was a definite command.

Mr. Moghere thoughtfully slashed the Arab girl's legs. The heavy irons had been taken from the trim ankles. Rannah kicked out at the sudden pain, but made no sound.

"Black bastard, if I remember right?" the ruler of Narousse inquired pensively.

There was no answer. Fear was vibrant in the air. This time the thong curled round soft thighs. "You will answer when I speak."

"Do you wish me to say you are not a black bastard?" the Arab girl asked sardonically. "I can tell a lie."

Mr. Moghere cut a belt of red round the slim waist. The pull of the whip gave fresh impetus to the nudity turning on its cord. "You are a black bastard," Rannah declared without emotion.

Stacie was desperately afraid for the maiden who she loved. Rannah might invite herself to be cut to pieces before she would surrender her provocations. The Great Man had seated himself again, and slowly sipped as he watched Rannah's whip marks deepen their crimson. "I can understand your father not wanting you back on my terms," he said bitterly. "You are a vixen with a shrew's tongue, Tomorrow the sjambok may knock some sense into you."

"Oh please no!" Stacie's exclamation was involuntary. "And do I not recall a young woman who stated clearly her preference for the sjambok as compared to myself?" Mr. Moghere's voice was deadly with sarcasm.

"Yes sir."

"But have you changed your mind!"

"No, she has not!" Rannah's voice was firm.

"Have you changed your mind?" Moghere repeated quietly.

It took more than Stacie's normal store of courage. But Rannah was the essence of her life. If her Lady was to know the hide upon her flesh then so should she! Besides, there was the question of obedience . . ."I belong to the Lady Rannah," she said softly. "I am her slave. No, sir, I have not changed my mind."

Mr. Moghere nodded understandingly. He was enjoying this play of fears and motives. "I should whip you both now. But I prefer the more ritual affair tomorrow. You shall have your twenty-five each. Your little friend still breathes lustily after hers today. She will share my bed, the next night will be yours. I am more than equal to the two of you. Did you know a maiden is doubly passionate when she lays upon a back cut deep with many wounds!"

To talk and talk! And of such frightfulness! To hang like this in agony at the mercy of a black buffoon. Stacie longed to weep, but feared to show tears to the mistress she so loved. She hung silent awaiting the next stripe of the whip and thinking of the sjambok and the awful post.

Mr. Moghere sat and surveyed his prizes. He felt quite secure. Yasin would yet come to terms. Certainly when he received the photographs . . . ! The two girls swinging

on their cords were quite extraordinarily beautiful. They made a picture of unique appeal. He resolved to enjoy the aesthetic treat quite often. It was one more of those perquisites of office of which he so heartily approved. He rose and replenished his glass and took the opportunity to slash each round bottom as he passed.

It was a frightful way to be tied, the strain upon the naked shoulders was appalling. Such suspension was a torture, it could be called nothing else. Stacie mused miserably on what she might have done or said had Rannah not been hanging beside her, a prideful hawk watching its young. She felt certain she would have begged and abased herself. But even so it might not have saved her from the sjambok. It was evident their captor approved its use and its effect. Could a naked Rannah survive it and retain her pride! Probably she would! But Stacie was not so sure about herself. Cold fear clutched her at Moghere's next words.

"I gather you and our good Hamid Boshan found each other mutually agreeable while I was gone?"

"Yes sir." What was the use! He knew everything. "You rejected me. I am chagrined."

Nothing she could say would be right, but she had to try. "The training on the farm you sent me to made me see how silly I was, sir."

"An unusually rapid conversion!"

"Yes sir."

Mr. Moghere beamed. "You will be happy to hear that Mr. Bashan's execution was painless. He was a soldier before the firing squad."

Horror on horror! Stacie was shocked at the instant welling of tears. She had a vision of the smiling white toothed face of the man who had been kind to her and with whose body she had found a strange affection. It was the death of a brother, of someone loved without passion. He had died because of her, because of his desire for her. Had he known of his risk! She might never find out. She sobbed chokingly in a fresh desolation.

"You are a black bastard," Rannah said bitterly. "That was fratricide. He was your man. He respected you."

"He fucked the woman I had chosen." The Ruler's voice was bland.

"You killed him for that! For pride! You can penetrate my slave girl and I endlessly, we can't stop you. You men are absurd!"

"I am a man and you a chattel, remember it."

"Lower us then, and show your manhood. I'll spread my legs for you. I may as well do it first as last."

"Why the change of heart, bitch?"

"Why should we hang like this! Enough's enough."

"Excellent! You do not like the pose I have arranged for you. But you will hold it, and I shall continue to use this whip on you. You are both quite beautiful as you are now. I will not forego the pleasure."

"Very well, enjoy our bodies. But when you tire of us allow our fathers to ransom us. You can only gain."

"I will make myself another drink," said Mr. Moghere. When Amatar Moghere finally left them alone the two naked tortured girls hung motionless and moaning. Neither made pretense of bravery or anything else save despair. Both were well marked by the slender whip, mostly on their legs and thighs for, as Mr. Moghere pointed out as he slashed at them, it was a pity to waste the backs and bottoms that the sjambok would slice on the morrow.

"The swine will leave us like this all night," Rannah deplored.

"Then we'll be half dead when they tie us to the post. He won't want that," Stacie clung to hope.

The hope was justified. Two soldiers lowered their feet to the rug and removed the cord, but the hurt wrists remained tied as they were. The two girls, not caring about their nakedness before the men, sought each other's eyes in thankfulness and gasped and panted with the pain of shoulders and arm sockets returned to normal. They could not struggle to free their hands, their arms were lost to them in numbness. Even the dreary cell with its two pails and its chunks of bread seemed a blessed haven. They ate and drank as best they could without hands, then slumped against the wall in painful weariness. Each felt a devastating sense of total captivity. They were lost without hope.

It may have been one hour or two before the men returned.

One held a length of chain, the other a padlock, both were grinning hugely. They also carried a heavy rug they threw upon the floor.

"For sleep. Very nice," said number one.

Number two placed his chain across the heavy mat and waved invitingly to Stacie. "Please to lie on back."

Glimpsing possibilities, none of which she liked, Stacie obeyed. Her hands were tied so that she could dispute nothing. But the crossed wrists at her back made the laying down awkward.

But it was not awkward for the men. They knew what they were doing. "Come," said number one to Rannah. "Now you on top . . . other way round."

Rannah was as helpless as her slave. With a shrug and a sardonic grimace she did as she was bid. The chain was brought up on each side, a heavy foot exerted its weight on Rannah's back, the chain was pulled and cinched and padlocked. The slenderness of the two waists were made as one, stomach flattened on stomach, two nudities were welded as a single entity.

"And a pleasant lesbian goodnight to you both," said Mr. Moghere from the door. He held up a key. "See. I put it on this hook in the passage. If you can open

your door you may reach it." He gave them one of his broadest smiles and slammed the door. They heard it lock.

"Oh Rannah . . . !" Stacie's mind was a whirl. For the moment she was conscious only of the heat of her beloved's flesh. The chain hurt, her hands and arms hurt, she felt the welling of an irrepressible giggle. Rannah's furry sex was before her eyes, its pungency vivid to her senses. For that moment only the intimate closeness mattered.

They fed avidly. The last meal of the condemned! The surge of lust that drives men to the prostitute in times of ultimate travail. Mankind has always turned to its genitals when faced with that it dare not see. Tomorrow the sjambok, tonight their love. Before morning Mr. Moghere's inspiration might torture them, the chain was brutal. But for a little while they wallowed in ecstasy. The hurt of their tied wrists did not matter, the hurt of the chain could be forgotten, but not their need. Flesh of each other's flesh, blood of each other's blood, they found surcease in the wiry hair and within the swollen lips of woman.

"If Jane lived I suppose we can," Stacie said after a very long time.

"We will live, slave girl. You and I will outlast that black pig."

"I wish I had my hands, I love you so."

"You have your lips, child. Use them. I am on fire."

"I have never called you darling, Rannah. May I?"

"It is you who are the darling, but yes . . ."

"And tomorrow . . . with our cut backs, our wounds bleeding on the sheets . . . Can't it be?"

"Of course, slave girl. We will not be the first or the last to have our backs sliced by the sjambok."

"Moghere will . . . he will . . . fuck us?"

"It does not matter, child. We have been pierced before. What does one more matter!"

"I wish I had my hands. I want to hold you. Damn this rotten chain!"

"Slave girl! Be just with Fate. We could be in worse condition. I would not want still to be hanging as we spent the afternoon."

"Darling . . ." Stacie savoured the word with joy.

"Darling Rannah, do you think we might turn, that you might take me for a little while?"

They laughed, their helplessness was comic. They struggled and achieved. Rannah moaned with pain and then with ecstasy. After a long time she asked dreamily: "Can you free your hands, slave girl?"

"No, I have tried and tried. What about you?"

"No, the bastards have me foxed, damn their rotten souls! With out hands, this awful chain might not be so bad. If we are to sleep, it must be on our sides."

"How can we sleep, my Lady. I keep thinking of that post and one of us tied to it with the other watching."

"Stop thinking. Use your tongue. What have I got a slave girl for!"

Stacie used her tongue. While she sought the clitoris of her mistress she remembered her father's house in New York: the world was crazy, insane. Yesterday Mr. Moghere was addressing the United Nations.

"If we ever got back to Jedrah, my Lady, would you still chain me and whip me?" she asked dreamily.

"Of course, you are mine. Get on with your work. Must I do it all!"

Stacie Blair, formerly of New York and Cape Cod, graduate of Vassar, applied her tongue to the sensitive bud of flesh within the vagina of an Arab girl whilst she herself moaned in delicious anguish from the contact and friction of a similar attention.

The door burst open.

"Get them out of here," said Mohammad Yasin.

It was all kaleidoscopic. She heard Rannah's desperate voice: "The key, the key!" Then suddenly the pain in the small of her back was gone and the Narousse cord was cut swiftly from her wrists. Stacie could not use her arms, they fell limply at her sides, but she was free! Gloriously incredibly free. Mohammad Yasin picked her up and carried her from the cell.

A grinning and supercilious Yousef met them in the passage. He gave the impression of having dealt with a herd of yapping curs. He held a revolver. "The stairs, Lord." Then to Rannah, "My Lady, let me help . . ."

The leaping strides! The power of a man! Stacie thrilled.

She was consumed by joy in Yasin's arms. He was leaping up with her in his grip when Amatar Moghere appeared at the head of the stone steps. He was pointing a gun. Behind them was an explosion, the barking of a .45. A look of utter astonishment crossed out the beaming smile. Mr. Moghere fell sideways and over the rail, Yasin scarcely paused.

There were other shots, other eyes that suddenly went blank. Stacie heard what seemed a war cry from a jubilant Yousef. Mohammad Yasin strode out into the night carrying a burden who wished she had her arms to clasp around his neck.

"The dogs, the yapping mongrels!" She heard him mutter the words in fury. "We should kill them all . . ."

Suddenly in the plane Stacie did not care. Narousse was gone, and with it Moghere and all his kind. But her conscience still functioned. "The girls . . . those poor girls . . ." Her eyes implored.

"We have not time. There is an Army . . . they have planes . . ."

Gently she was placed upon a seat. Rannah was there.

They held each other in a great thankfulness. The engines roared . . .

Stacie Blair was not tied, she was not chained, she was free!

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A single sheet of paper, a few words scrawled by a feminine hand. Stacie wondered how often such scraps had collapsed a world. She had but one hand to reach for it, the other was handcuffed to Rannah's bed. She gazed up at Yousef's sombre face in mute question.

"Read it, lady."

So few words! 'Obey Yousef: it is my order. He will explain what you need know. Forgive me.' It was signed: Rannah.

Stacie restrained her free hand from striving to cover herself. Yousef had seen her naked often enough. She sensed a greater concern. She proffered him the missive. "You have read this?"

"Yes, lady."

"I will be obedient."

"Thank you, pretty lady."

"Yousef! There is something wrong, what is it?"

"Our Master is dying."

Yasin dying! They had spent days and nights of love before he had flown to Geneva and left the slave girl to his daughter, Rannah. Stacie tried to comprehend the unacceptable. She pulled absently at her cuffed wrist. "How . . . ? Why?"

"An assassin, at Geneva airport. A cur of a student from this land. He had the usual profession of a noble cause. The guards shot him down before he could fire a second time. It is done."

She might believe it tomorrow, but not now! "And my Lady . . . she has gone to him?"

The grave inclination of the head, so much a part of him.

He made it now. "Our Lady will stay with him until the end. She will then do all that must be done. The time of her return here is with Allah."

A naked white girl chained to a bed! Surveying her the muscular solidity of an Arab torturer! Both sharing a common grief. How typical of Jedrah!

"My Lady says for me to forgive. I don't understand. What have I to forgive, Yousef?"

He shrugged. "That too is with Allah."

Yousef unlocked the cuff from the bed and clasped it round Stacie's free hand so that her wrists were joined in front of her. "It is as you usually wear them, I believe," he said drily.

"Thank you, Yousef." There was a strangeness she could not penetrate.

"All will be as usual now. In two hours you will attend me. Is it enough time for your female needs?"

Puzzling! But what did such things matter now. Stacie followed an instant hungry impulse. "Yousef, have the meal with me . . . It will be very lonely."

His eyes kindled. "You do me honour, lady. But no, it is not possible." He turned and went away.

The naked girl threw herself upon the disordered bed and wept violently into her chained hands.

Stacie ate little, she sat with ghosts. She used the time in the female arts, wishing to look her best but not knowing why. She presented herself punctually. "It is time, Yousef." She held out her locked hands and eyed him questioningly.

He used no key, but led her to the room she knew so well. "Am I to be punished, Yousef?"

"I know not the name of it, lady. Make your own."

She let him tie her as he had that day long ago before she had been ringed. During the methodical progression into this fresh travail Stacie thought idly of the rings in her flesh and of how much a part of her they had become. She was no longer conscious of them, they had ceased to be painful, they could be slid back and forth within her providing an endless delight to Rannah and to the man who lay dying far away. Even the circlet through her nose no longer shamed, she had learned to eat and talk with its weight upon her lip.

"You are going to hurt me, Yousef. Why?"

"Such questions are forbidden, lady. If you persist I must gag you."

She accepted the incomprehensible. Somewhere a truth would emerge. She drifted into pain and more pain as her arms were drawn wide and her legs stretched until they were taut and horizontal and threatened to split her loins asunder. She knew this man better now, but still she blushed. "Yousef . . . Am I . . . am I open . . . ?"

She had made him smile. "No lady. It feels so but it is not."

"Are you going to whip me?"

"You wish me to, pretty lady?"

"Of course not. But are you?"

"Yes. You may remember, lady, last time we did not finish."

Stacie remembered. Ten strokes with the cane on the sole of each of her feet. "I fainted . . ."

"It does not matter. We have much time."

He threw away his loin cloth, he was immensely male. "It is no longer forbidden, lady."

"I would give you more pleasure free."

"It pleases me as you are."

He clasped her with one arm and guided himself within her between the ringed lips. She was suspended at precisely the right height.

"Tortured and fucked! It excites you," Stacie accused.

"It excites you also, lady." He used both arms and pulled her very close.

"If you cane my feet I shall not be able to walk, Yousef."

"I will carry you, lady."

"I am frightened. I don't want to be lame."

"They will heal. The cane is slim, it breaks no bones. But first I use the whip as I did before. It will make a lesser outlet for your distress."

Stacie watched the scarlet circles form upon her strained thighs. The lash met itself as the blows rapped down. She made sounds she could not name as she looked without hope at the bands on wrist and ankle. She could not move. Only her head . . .

"And now your cunt, lady."

She moaned without protest. She tried to see the impacts but could not. They cut at her in surprising ways and angles. Yousef changed position often. Her moans when he next impaled her were the same by which she had expressed her pain. But they were not of pain. The swollen labia welcomed him.

The whipping of her feet took all afternoon. Nature was cruel and denied her oblivion for the first strokes. She became a panting breast-heaving organism dedicated to screams: pealing screams that denied and denied what was being done to her but availed her nothing. After her feet had been beaten five times each Yousef asked in curiosity, "Is it bad for you to have no bribe to offer?"

It had been fifteen minutes since the last stroke. Stacie had regained a weak control. She smiled in new wisdom. "Fuck me, Yousef."

"I could refuse."

"Yousef . . . please!"

It was nearly an hour before he struck her foot again. During the times when she fainted Yousef went away and let her hang. Coming back to awareness by herself her first thought was always of the strokes yet to be borne. When her mind was not in a turmoil of agony she thought of Mohammad Yasin and of her love and of why Rannah had given her to the torturer. But she concerned herself little with reasons. It was all a part of the flowing stream of sensation and sentience that began on the day of her seizure from the plane. There was a pattern. If it pleased her Lady to order her feet beaten so that she would not walk it was no more than a part of the mosaic. She looked from side to side at the foot beyond the tight anklet. She could not see the sole, but the rest seemed little changed. It was impossible . . . !

"It grieves me that there remain but four strokes," Yousef mourned. "In agony you are more beautiful than a man's dreams."

"Give them to me quickly and have done, Yousef. I wish it."

"Alas, lady, you will faint. I can only strike when you are conscious."

"I will not faint, Yousef. I promise."

He struck the four swift blows as hard as all the rest.

Stacie stayed in the world, but saw it only through a mist of throbbing agony. After a long time and many screams she asked: "Is it done?"

"It is done, lady."

"Yousef . . . please . . . please . . . please!"

He coupled her fiercely. She screamed again. It was a cry of victory. They were both of Jedrah.

The afternoon had fled when he loosed the cords and the bands. Stacie allowed her nakedness to curl limply on the rug Yousef had thoughtfully provided. Apart from her beaten feet it would take her system minutes to revive her shoulders and her legs. She grinned up at her torturer. "Nothing works, Yousef. Give me a minute like this."

Stacie did not examine her feet. She was afraid to look.

When the time came she tried to rise, but fell back panting, her eyes wide in realization that her feet were lost to her.

A stone chamber without light save for a candle flickering on the floor. On her limbs were chains. "I am more chains than girl," she protested as Yousef locked the collar on her neck.

"You are a woman!" It was an accolade.

"I am a captive chained in a dungeon, Yousef."

"You will stay here while your feet heal."

"For days and days . . . ! And chained . . . !"

"You are exquisite, lady. Wear them always." He locked her in . . . alone!

Stacie examined herself in the dim light as she rested on one hip on the stone. She was fettered at wrist and ankle, neck and waist. All the chains led to rings bedded in the stone. They could not be to keep her captive: one would have sufficed. They were to punish. Or because she looked erotically lovely in them. She grinned ruefully. It did really matter. She was a naked girl chained in a dungeon and that was that! Hesitantly she grasped a foot, pulled it toward her and looked. What she beheld once more unleashed her tears.

She never knew the days, he would not tell her. But he came again and again through each one of them to allow his manhood to pay homage to her flesh. His visits held away the ghosts and kept her sane. She moved only to the rattle of chains. Even in their lovemaking the links sang their laughter on her limbs. They knew this dungeon time ephemeral, and so made terror delicious and fear a fantasy.

Thus is the nature of man. Sometimes in the night she wept.

When Rannah released her, Stacie's joy was such that she spoke not of her feet, but bore their pain as she was led to the room in which they shared their flesh and their love. Hours later across a dinner table the slave girl forgot the crusts and the apple of her dungeon fare. Her eyes were alight with splendour.

"It is in the past," Rannah said sombrely. "Let us not dwell on it." She looked with amusement at her slave girl's eagerness. "We will speak only of you and me."

"What becomes of us, my Lady?"

The Lady Rannah made a little moue of sadness and shrugged her shoulders at Fate. "I will carry on where my father stopped. His death has made me one of the richest women in the world. I must keep the jackals at bay. You, beloved child, will go back to your parent."

The silence was tangible, it seethed with ghosts. "You know I will not go."

"I will deliver you to him neatly trussed in a crate."

"I'll come right back."

"Then you will be chained in the dungeon as I found you today."

"You're teasing me, Rannah."

"Not entirely. You were bastinadoed and chained by my orders. In rejecting liberty you must contemplate these things. They could happen again. They will! Firstly you will earn punishments, and secondly you are so damnably erotic you invite them . . . I am only human."

"I don't care! I'm your slave girl. Don't let's talk of anything else."

"You see! You are incurably impudent. You will be forever striped."

"By you, my Lady . . . please! Yousef . . . he's a man . . ."

"I love you beyond bearing. You know it, child."

"I adore you, my Lady. Beat me and keep me chained." Rannah sighed. She fumbled in her bag and produced a small square box. "This is yours, slave girl."

Stacie moaned in ecstasy as she held the silver handcuffs up to view. "Oh, darling! They're gorgeous . . . and different."

"They are made for you alone, of silver. Put them on."

"I can't. You must."

The bands were wide, they encircled the chafed wrists snugly and made but a single locking snap on the captive flesh. They were joined by only two silver links.

The chained slave girl knelt before her mistress and wept in gratitude.

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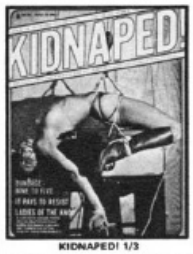
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