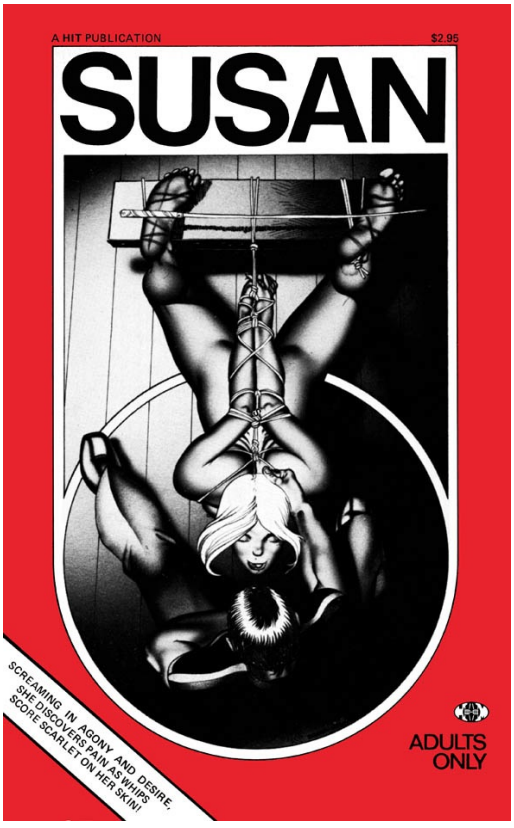


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by F.E. Campbell

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illustrated by The Bishop

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CHAPTER ONE

The Handcuffed Innocent

"I'd judge that none of it will be easy for you," said the pleasant young man. He beamed at Susan across the desk, and added cheerfully: "We absolutely refuse to do a selling job. The decision must be yours."

She returned him a troubled smile and shifted awkwardly in the expensive chair. "The sum you have mentioned would mend my life," she admitted. "Repair all my bridges . . . ."

"It would also burn the one that counts." He raised a quizzical eyebrow. "How old are you, Miss Carmody?"

"Twenty six." She grinned ruefully. "You're thinking about being old enough to know my own mind?"

"Exactly." The nice young man nodded in agreement. "We ourselves prefer you at twenty six rather than sixteen. But ours is a business bias." He motioned deprecatingly. "Some of our customers have an eye for extreme youth. However, with you there is no problem. You are eminently marketable."

She wished he would give her more help. His casualness was disarming and probably honest, but she needed a hand to grasp. "Are all the . . . all your clients as frightened as I am?" she asked forthrightly.

"Naturally." He was unperturbed. "I'd be damn skittish myself in your shoes. At this stage it's the main factor."

Susan wanted to match his mood. Either she should get up and go or start considering the incredible as a possibility. No one was twisting her arm. But perhaps that came later!

"It's hard for me to accept the . . . the medieval bits–"

"The restraints?" His grin shared her concern. "We started out without them, but it didn't work. I'd say that nine out of ten, once they've stepped over the line of no return, immediately want to turn and step back again. It aborts the whole issue. You understand?"

Susan's words dripped doubt. "But handcuffs, and chains . . . and leather things!"

The nice young man nodded understandingly. "The other alternative is drugs. But they're out – absolutely! Customers don't buy zombies. Believe it or not, to most of them your mind is more important than the rest."

The thought was surprising. She had never considered it. An evaluation of her breasts and other feminine attributes was to be expected. But that her speech, her thoughts, her reactions, should be a part of the package to be sold was both intriguing and frightening. It suggested a loophole.

"If there is communication of that sort, why can't I be accepted as I am? I can give my word. I can be instructed?" She eyed the nice young man with an anxious hope.

He laughed. "You really don't know, do you – you haven't experimented."

"Am I that naive?" She flushed. "I thought I knew all about sex. That's what it's all about, isn't it?"

"Here, catch –"

Startled, Susan grabbed at the shining object tossed across the desk. She had scarcely digested the handcuffs before the key followed.

"Put them on. You can hold the key. You're quite safe."

Susan was piqued by his evident amusement. Almost angrily she fumbled her hands into captivity. Feeling foolish, she held them up for inspection.

"Tighter. You're cheating."

Using a hand and a knee, she contrived two more wicked clicks before the metal bands were snug upon her wrists. She clutched the tiny key as a life belt in mid–ocean.

"And what does that mean to you, Miss Carmody?" She suspected mockery, but had come prepared to accept the incredible. She examined the shining chrome by which her hands were joined: striving to convey an intelligent interest in what she had done to herself. Her voice was studiously casual. "It just means I feel silly," she admitted. "Is there supposed to be something else?"

"There is something else. Take my word for it." The nice young man's grin was a infectious as ever. "First, you can get the feel of being a semi–prisoner. Not really earth shattering, is it?"

"No, I suppose not." She tugged testingly.

"The trouble about an interview like this is I can't guarantee anything. But wear those pretty things while I do my best."

Wear them! Susan knew panic. Suppose the key . . . Feverishly, she sought to insert it in one of the tiny holes. With her hands so closely linked it was well neigh impossible.

"Free yourself," he encouraged. "It's not easy, but you can do it. You may have to use your teeth. When you're satisfied the key is honest, put 'em on again."

He spoke commandingly.

She felt hot and foolish and inept. The nice young man offered no help, but sat and watched her efforts with unabashed enjoyment. She did indeed have to use her teeth to get the first cuff loose. Having rid herself of the metal bond she had no wish to again accept their clicking compulsion. She looked him in the eye and said so.

"As you wish." His diffidence was infuriating. He had the air of a man who had come to the end of an interview.

"Alright," Susan fumed. "Don't be so damn superior. You act like a 'no sale' sign. What am I supposed to say or do! I don't want those fool handcuffs – they make me feel like an idiot."

"But you will wear them if we are to talk."

Susan was half out of her chair when she remembered the money. And all else . . . this was not a battle of wills. She was being tested. For so huge a sum she must expect things she would not like. To go back now to square one was absurd. Sheepishly, she slipped the metal band around her wrist.

"The one extra click that makes them too tight please, Miss Carmody."

His smiled with evil.

Cautiously and with curiosity Susan obeyed. The chrome held venom. With both wrists hurting she held them up for inspection. "Am I being punished or just kept aware of my status?" she inquired acidly.

"Neither." The nice young man was again businesslike. "We take this business approach with you to avoid trauma. For the present I will continually urge you to reconsider, go away, forget it – no helping hand! We early on discovered the damaging effect on the merchandise of precipitation."

"I'm the merchandise?"

"Yes. It was common at the start for girls to be overwhelmed by what they had done. Panic and grief rendered them unattractive to our clients." He grinned reminiscently. "They had to be carried away screaming. It profited no one."

Susan found a frightening mental picture all too easy to conjure. "But there are screams in this somewhere," she challenged.

"For about fifty percent," he admitted. "It's the luck of the draw."

"Why can't the . . . the customer and I just talk first?" Susan had the feeling of trying to stem a tide. "That auction business . . . it's out of the Arabian Nights."

"Granted. But it doubles your price. Figure it yourself, Miss Carmody: at that point few girls are in a mood to give a sales pitch."

She groped for solid ground, suspecting he would dissolve it from beneath her feet. "It's not . . . not the way it is in books, is it? I mean . . . a block I have to stand on, and being stripped, and . . . and being chained or tied so I can't make a fuss?"

"Precisely that. What better way?"

She could think of none. The hurt of the handcuffs was quietly insistent. The metal things on her wrists were like an intermediary offering to relieve her of decision, offering to make her amenable. Looking down at them as they nestled against her taut tummy, and twisting her hands against them in tentative wonder that this was happening, she no longer saw them as silly, she ceased to feel absurd. The handcuffs belonged. The nice young man's insistence that she wear them gained credibility.

"May I have a few days to think this over?"

He was still the nice young man, but his voice was firm. "No. We have found that too a mistake. You will seek advice. You will talk. You will make enquiries. At the end of it all you will be no closer to a decision than now. But somewhere in that time you will probably embarrass us. We do not want that."

"You mean I must stay here now?" Once more, panic ruled. Susan lifted her chained hands. "You want me to give you the key and I'll be a prisoner?"

The nice young man laughed at her earnest anxiety. "Not if you don't want to. Unlock yourself and leave. I actually suggest this course. But if you decide to market the merchandise, it must be tomorrow."

He laughed again.

He was probably being clever, allaying her natural fears. Baiting his trap with a specious freedom her first and most urgent need denied. The money would buy one liberty and rob her of another. She must choose. Slowly and hesitantly she fumbled the small key. Her wrists hurt. She would have to use her teeth again.

"If you like you can spend a bit of time with one of the girls." He dropped the tiny inducement with uncaring diffidence.

Susan was glad.

Susan found herself glad of an excuse to stop. She palmed the key and looked at the nice young man hopefully. "You mean a girl who's . . . who's taken the plunge. Who . . . who knows what it feels like?"

"Think it might help?"

"It almost has to. I'd like that . . . please?"

His grin and the alacrity with which he rose was reassuring. It was in keeping with top floor of the prestigious office complex housing the hushed and plush: 'Winthrop Investments' whose interests spilled into strange channels beyond the austerity of stocks and bonds. Susan felt better. Another girl might quiet the butterflies busy in her middle. She held out her chained hands and the key.

The nice young man took the key and told her cheerfully. "You wear them now for real. They're your credentials. You'd feel odd without them. Trust me?"

What else could she do! Susan shrugged. If she was to balk at every oddity she had best go home and nurse her crisis. The loss of the key was like a small blow, a loss as though her clothes had been torn. She quelled panic by tugging at her handcuffs and realizing she could do almost anything with her hands except separate them. She managed a smile of acceptance and walked meekly beside the nice young man through a different door and along other heavily carpeted avenues than those by which she had entered. The key he inserted in the door a door like all the others – was large and heavy. The sound of the lock was impressive. "I'll be curious as to your impressions," said the young man.

Susan walked inside. The door closed behind. The lock turned.

The room was a pleasant surprise from the prison she had expected. It spelt solid comfort. The rugs

were lush. On one of them before a fireplace lay a girl, She was naked, save for an insecure loincloth that might have been a pinafore. Her hands were tied behind her back, her ankles were trussed. She had been asleep, but now humped herself awkwardly up on one hip to view her visitor. Without selfconsciousness she said: "Hi. My name's Marie."

Marie nodded.

Susan conceded that without the handcuffs on her own wrists Marie might have been a shock. She was in any case startling. A beauty, bound and smiling brightly. A beauty who suggested casually: "You can untie me if you like – if it will make you feel less awkward."

Again the suspicion of a trap. If the girl was tied it was because Someone wanted her tied. To free her would incur enmity. Instead, Susan said cautiously, "I think we're supposed to talk to each other."

"I expect you're tentative," said Marie. "Sort of hovering? Wondering if it's all crazy?"

"D'you blame me!" Susan retorted with asperity. "Look at you! I wouldn't want to be fixed like that."

"Tied, you mean? Or naked?" Marie seemed unprepared to concede anything unusual in her condition.

"Yes. It's awful. Aren't you hurting?"

"I hadn't noticed it until you mentioned. I suppose I am, a bit. Want to untie me? You can, y'know. We won't he punished" Marie's wriggle against her ropes seemed more in sensuous enjoyment than distress.

"Punished!" Susan felt she was learning fast. "You mean girls who . . . who . . . come here . . . get punished?"

"Of course!" Marie's exclamation was pure amusement. "How else can they run the show."

"But what for? Why?"

"To make us obedient and sensible – nice saleable merchandise. I've been sold several times. I'm very saleable."

It was a silly game. It had to be! "What are you tied up like that for then?" Susan felt she had scored a point.

It gave her some more confidence.

The nearly naked girl twisted herself into a more comfortable position. "I expect it was for your benefit," she informed blandly. "From the feel of it I must have been tied an hour or two. I went to sleep."

"My benefit! That's ridiculous!"

"Well, not really. Winthrop Investments lean over backwards to get us girls in the right frame of mind. Those handcuffs surely leave you with some sort of reaction, and I'm an object lesson for you. Don't tell me I've been tied up here a couple of hours for nothing?" Marie giggled. "You don't trust me, do you. You're not going to untie a single knot?"

"Why should I!" Susan complained. "I think you're enjoying yourself. For heaven's sake start telling me something that makes sense."

"Ever hear of a bellwether?" Marie cocked an amused eye. "That's what I am. A bellwether is a male sheep or goat with a bell on its neck who leads the herd to slaughter. They follow him because he looks happy. They give him a carrot or something after every delivery, so he's on to a good thing."

Marie was a pet. Susan was amused. The analogy was the reverse of reassuring but it was honest. She felt better. Holding up her captive hands, she asked: "If I untie you, will you get these things off me?"

"I can't dear. I don't have a key, so I suppose I'll have to stay tied." Marie sighed in mock dolor, then added: "They're hurting, aren't they – too tight?"

"Yes." Susan was suddenly contrite. "But I'm being a beast. I'll untie you. I always thought

handcuffs made a girl helpless, but they don't. I don't see any sense in them – except to make us feel ashamed."

"Try wearing 'em behind your back sometime." Marie's voice was unfailingly cheerful. "Here, I'll sit up as best I can so's you can get a good go at the ropes."

Susan found her task unexpectedly difficult. The knots were strange and severe, and always in the least accessible place. When her hands worked, their tendons swelled against the metal wristlets to impose additional pain. On the brink of anger she realized she was being taught a lesson. But when she peeled away the ropes, the weals on the prisoned skin evoked a gasp of outrage. "You were hurting more than me – I don't think I like this. It's cruel."

"I'm afraid I'm used to it. Thanks a lot, darling. What's your name?" Marie got to her feet, her fingers busy massaging her ropemarks. "It's not cruel. I like it."

"Like it! That's absurd. How could anyone like . . ?"

"Well, I do. It's addictive, y'know." Marie's eyes twinkled. "I guess that's why they picked me for this job. Say, you really are green – I mean, not a bit with it, are you?" She moved gracefully to the impressive bar and busied herself with bottles and glasses. "Let's have a pair of bracers, then I'll get down to the nitty–gritty."

Susan was not a drinking girl, but she clasped the glass gratefully in her chained hands. She gulped greedily and thought of questions. Marie insouciantly rendered them redundant.

"D'you like my breasts, Susan?"

"They're lovely."

"And my pubic hair and my puss?" Marie lifted her tiny pinafore and spread her legs.

"That's lovely too."

"You're not a lesbian." Marie deplored.

"Oh, I'm sorry! I should have been . . . well, more–"

"It would have been nice if you had," Marie admitted without reproof. She giggled. "Going to be damned amusing for you if you get purchased by one – a les', I mean. I'm one. We're terribly demanding."

Another vista. Marie was probably a mine of them.

Docketing the picture of a lesbian owner, Susan prompted: "You said you'd been sold several times?"

"Sit down and be comfortable," commanded a suddenly serious nudity. "Here's a lesson number one." Susan gulped again and sat.

"You're awfully beautiful naked," she ventured sincerely.

"I wouldn't be here if I wasn't, and neither would you. Owners mostly keep their girl naked. It makes us nicely available and easy to handle," Marie grinned confidingly. "You have to remember that once we've had our money and delivered ourselves – actually it works the other way 'round, they pay after delivery – Winthrop Investments have quite a stake in us. They keep us comfortable. Look at this room. But they take no risks. In the time before the next auction they sort of get us accustomed to captivity. And besides, they can't afford to take chances with us. We might be dishonest or we might panic. Either way we'd run."

Susan saw Winthrop Investments with a new clarity. "We're slaves. Kept in a pen awaiting sale?"

"That's about the size of it. It's a bad time for some – the waiting and suspense. But for others, the ones like me, it's exciting. We get hot twats thinking about the handsome Arab who's going to buy us." Marie giggled. "Wouldn't you know it, I got purchased by a woman."

"Why on Earth?"

"Oh Susan, are you really that innocent? She was a lesbian. A middle–aged widow who wanted a lady's maid she could whip. She taught me how to give her pleasure. When I was a good girl she'd

give me some too. When my tongue wasn't in my work I got whipped. The job was very habit forming. When she wasn't using me she kept me in a cage."

"You're kidding."

"No, honest, I'm not. Susan, think about it. These customers . . . they can't be ordinary or they wouldn't spend all that money to buy us. You're thinking of being bought by some male who wants to screw the ass off you. But he can buy that cheaper elsewhere."

Susan thought about it. Marie's emphasis had the ring of truth. It made the incredible comprehensible. Winthrop Investments began to assume a recognizable proportion. "But this . . . this . . . whip –?" She shivered in silence.

"Well, it's cheap and efficient and it keeps us in line," Marie explained reasonably.

"It's barbaric."

"O.K. Susan. Suggest something else."

Susan sensed an abyss. "Why can't we be told – I mean given orders or something. Then we do them and . . . and . . ."

Marie made a wry grimace. "It's that 'and . . . and . . .' bit that's the sticker. There's things you don't want to do, and there's mistakes you make. Every time I tugged at a snarl in Madam's hair when I was brushing it I got three with the cane across my bottom. For impudence I got six."

"She didn't put you in a cage, not really?"

"She did. And if she was mad at me she tied my wrists and elbows as well."

"Is that why you came back here?"

"Gosh no! She sold me to some banker chap who had a lovely room with two marble columns. He'd tie me to one on Monday and the other on Tuesday and on through the week. He used to get the darndest erections from fingering the ropes where they cut into me. He knew about ninety–nine ways of tying a girl – naked of course."

"But didn't . . . didn't he . . ."

"Hell no, never! He said it spoiled the artistry. To that guy the most beautiful thing in the world was me tied to one of those bits of marble. Sometimes he'd come and talk to me. That's all, just talk."

"But that's awful!"

Marie refilled the glasses and winked over the rim. "Fact is, darling, I got to like it."

"Now I know you're kidding."

"O.K. so it doesn't make sense. But there you are: you're a girl tied naked to a pillar. You can't move. You're helpless – and there's a man. That jackpot's just got to crinkle you somewhere. With me it was right between the legs."

Susan was incredulous. "That's erotic?"

"As hell! Not the first hour maybe. But after you've got over the shock. It's a real dilly of a situation. He can do anything he likes with you. This guy had a thing about painting my nipples a bright red. He insisted on doing it himself. But on Wednesdays they were black. I got so I looked forward to it." Marie watched Susan's bafflement with amusement, and added: "It's not as silly as you think. You're owned, and controlled, and in the power of someone who's going to do things to you. That's a pretty powerful stimulant. When a girl's naked and helpless it's sexy as all get out. That's the way it is in bed, isn't it? We lay palpitating while the man does things."

"But there's an underlying cruelty . . ."

"There is in all things sexual. The only difference between love and rape is a state of mind" Marie waved a careless hand. "Back in the jungle the boys used to bat us around to make us lay still. The instinct is still there. My number three explained quite frankly that the noises I made when he whipped me were those of an endless orgasm he could prolong forever. He used to get the most wonderful erections. I was sorry when he ran into money troubles and traded me back in."

The handcuffs on Susan's wrists were now very real. She understood their relevance. She was annoyed to discover a quickening of her breath.

"And now you're up for sale again?" she asked, puzzled.

Marie sipped happily. She seemed a remarkably free and astoundingly cheerful slave. "Here, let me fill that." She moved with an entrancing grace. "Goodness knows if they'll sell me again. Like I said, I'm filling a useful service for them as I am. They put me up at each auction but always buy me back in – don't cost 'em a cent. But if my price got high enough I expect they'd let me go."

"This pain you talk about . . . the whip, I mean. How can you bear it?"

"You can't." Marie giggled reflectively. "But you're always tied or chained or something, so what are you going to do about it."

"But injury . . . your health?"

"Poor darling! You are bothered, aren't you. They knew you would be, so there's a small demonstration at this point. I'm not wearing this bit of nonsense 'round my hips to keep my pussy warm."

Susan was mesmerized. Curiosity held her. Had she been able to flee she would not have taken a step. She gulped her drink and watched as Marie tossed away her loincloth, and with feminine provocation, twisted and protruded her bottom for inspection.

"I was caned this morning," she said simply.

Susan beheld beauty. She tried to quell the reaction but it persisted. The round soft curves of Marie's derriere proclaimed a number of exquisitely etched scarlet lines, at sight of which an unfamiliar lump rose to the throat of the handcuffed neophyte. If Marie had been female before, she was doubly feminine now.

"I wasn't caned terribly hard." Marie's words were pure apology.

"But why were you caned at all?"

"Because I got in a fight with one of the new girls. I'm supposed to know better. But they keep us all chained in one lovely big suite and we get on each other's nerves, it's the suspense of waiting for the auction." Marie chuckled. "You like the look of them, don't you. Go ahead and cop a feel."

"But they must hurt terribly."

"You really haven't been caned, have you. No they don't hurt now. They're tender: don't mind if I wince."

It was absurd. It was indecent. Probably it was unkind. But Susan knew she had to obey. The striations on the lovely skin drew her fingers as a magnet. "There's ridges!" She exclaimed, amazed. "It's . . . it's swollen under the stripes – your flesh. You poor dear."

"There's always ridges when they're fresh," Marie said informatively. They go before the marks do. Aren't they lovely."

"Don't say that. They're . . . they're . . ."

"But it's what you're thinking."

"Yes. I don't understand."

"Don't try to. Just accept. It's one of the mysteries."

"But I could never . . ." Susan groped for words.

"Yes you can, silly. You'll have to. Besides, you may come to like it. You're looking at eight. Believe it or not I never screamed."

Marie sensually patted her own bottom and straightened up. "I won't put that bit of stuff back on," she said casually. "I'm supposed to be nude. I wore it just to delay your shock. If you think you've had a good look at my bottom I'll sit on it again."

The naked slave girl draped her slender curves negligently within the overstuffed chair. She was obviously oblivious to exposure. Susan wondered if the separation of the lovely legs and the blatancy of a dark' bush of pubic hair was deliberate. She suspected it was. Marie was wedded to her work. Susan's world took another tilt into the improbable.

"You said they kept you chained together in a suite." The doubtful recruit had a great need to pin things down.

She sincerely wanted to know.

"Sure they do. Would you sooner get bunged into a cell?" Marie nestled into the upholstery and grinned derisively. "The chains are to get us used to what we now are, and to prevent us ganging up on Natalie – Natalie's our jailer. But even with all the radios, the T.V., the books and all the luxury we get awful cheesed off at each other. Maybe being naked does it. Wherever a girl looks she sees boobs and cunts and pubic hair. We get hungry as hell for a man. Even when we're punished, it's Natalie who does it. She's a real doll with a cane."

"What, on the new girls – the one's waiting?"

"Sure. Why not. They act bitchy too. So they get their rumps roasted." Marie grinned in retrospect. "It's gorgeous to watch 'em the first time. They can't believe it's happening – and do they howl!"

Susan absorbed Marie's zestful accounting of her state. Between the nice young man, Winthrop Investments, and this nakedly uninhibited female, she was more lost than ever. "I don't think it's for me," she said slowly and with a sense of loss. "I'd be better off in prison."

"You won't get screwed in the slammer, darling. But you'll probably get the les' bit."

"There's other things . . . I certainly wouldn't get whipped"

"I wouldn't bet on that," Marie said complacently. "Mind you, I've got a sort of vested interest in your decision. I've failed to sell you, I'll get whipped myself."

"No!" Susan was aghast.

"Well, why not. If I've done a lousy job? Trouble with me is I don't take things seriously enough," Marie mourned. "But don't feel bad about it. I'll only get twenty with one of the lighter whips."

"I don't see how you can . . ."

"That's the point, darling. If I can, you can." Marie's laughing eyes turned serious. "Look, I'll tell you honestly I believe you can take it. You'd adjust to whatever you happen to get auctioned to. You're not the hysterical type they want to avoid. But, hell, I'm not going to tell you what to do. It'll be the same with you as the rest of us – how bad d'you want the dough."

Susan told the enormity of her need.

Decisively, Marie took handcuffs from a drawer and chained her own wrists. Laughingly, she explained. "When someone comes we must be in restraint or we're punished. I'm going to ring the bell. See you tomorrow."

In the office the nice young man unlocked her handcuffs. He, too, said: "See you tomorrow, Miss Carmody." Susan walked out into the sunlight.

But she had found no answer.

CHAPTER TWO

The Startled Slave

None of them were heart's desire.

It was very lonely and wickedly shaming to stand upon the block and stare back at the faces assessing her body and her mind. It was not that the room was huge or the assembly large, but the sparsity of numbers emphasized her intent. They were there, not to pass the time but to buy a girl.

They were nameless and without identity. Tension was electric.

Natalie staged it well. She led each palpitating package to her fate draped in immaculate white which when the trembling girl was positioned, she whisked away to expose in one explosive moment the nakedness offered for sale. A nakedness made doubly potent by the crossed wrists bound savagely behind the captive's back.

There had been briefings and a rehearsal. There had been the caning of bottoms. Susan shrank from the moment when she must turn under the blandishments of the auctioneer. She was ashamed and strangely disturbed by the ten red weals her own derriere had collected in the course of initiation. She had become heated in the course of an argument with Natalie. She had spoken her mind, and then had been obliged to place her wrists in clamps which held her bent while her nude seat was viciously striped with a limber cane. She remembered her screams with a disbelief she could have made such sounds or that a cane on female flesh could hurt so bitterly. The incidence of her discipline had been carried out with an efficiency and neat dignity well in keeping with the hushed decorum of Winthrop Investments.

Susan stood erect with breasts firmly out-thrust and feet sufficiently separated to give no refuge to her sex. Her bound hands helped. Their imposition of helplessness and their tug upon her shoulders made her femininity exquisitely vulnerable. Winthrop Investments had pointed out their right to expect cooperation on the block and their intention to punish any girl who failed to give it. Susan saw the logic of this and was determined to do her best, wryly aware that part of this resolve emanated from her striped behind.

The bidding was to be by numbers, but the units and the currency was hidden from the girls. Winthrop Investments explained it was better for their state of mind they should not know their price. They were to enter their slavery in anonymity and innocence. In a flash of amusement, Susan wondered if the rope upon her wrists was to save the vendor the cost of a pair of handcuffs when she was passed across the counter.

The bidding was solemn and ritualistic and sadly without joy. The raised digit, the barely perceptible nod. Even the auctioneer beat a muted pitch. It was hard for a girl to follow the staggered pathway to her fate. But, with every sense alert, Susan soon became aware of the woman.

She was a handsome creature. There were other women present, but this one took her place among the males with an easy assurance of power. She was one of the few who exhibited animation, viewing the proceedings with an amused and sardonic eye. An eye which, when rested on the bound girl, left her doubly defenseless. An eye that read the mind as piercingly as it priced the curves of breast and belly.

To Susan it was a revelation that a woman might buy her. During the time of waiting, Marie and Natalie had spoken of it as commonplace. Beneath the discipline and direction of Natalie she had come to gauge its possibilities and to recognize that a female hand could be as heavy as a male. Bound as she was her fingers could touch the topmost weals spanning her flesh from hip to hip. She wondered if a man could have hurt her more. Without illusions as to the nature of the men who would pay to possess her, Susan considered now her reaction to a wholly feminine slavery. Her prisonment with the waiting girls in the past days had evoked only bitterness in all of them. Women were more cruel to women than most men would be. True, suspense and the irksome chains had frayed tempers. But still . . .

She had found the chains of interest, not liking them as Marie so obviously did, but in the manner in which they affected her responses. She had discovered that a chained girl was a very different entity from the same girl walking free. Some burned with resentment, others with shame. In some it sparked fear, or humility. There had been one only who had shared Marie's erotic enjoyment of the shining metal by which she was confined.

The fetters had been changed daily. Today the wrists, tomorrow the ankles. The most shaming had been the neck. But Winthrop Investments had wished them to sample servitude and aided their indoctrination by providing costly manacles of exquisite beauty which were none the less heavy for their craftsmanship. Each girl should approach the block with a knowledge of what she had become. It was a knowledge dark and deep and female.

Of equal interest had been Natalie's lecture. Susan had felt inadequate in the realization of sophistication in some of her fellow slaves. The dissertation on dominance and submission took her into an uncharted land. She understood its plausibility. It answered murky questions in the mind, but at the same time prompted anxiety. It seemed inconceivable that the girls stood naked on the block should be bought for aught else but their submission. Yet visibly half the prisoners were cut from other cloth. What would happen to them! How possible was it for a maiden to adjust! She was unsure of herself, inclined to neither extreme. Presumably those out there on the floor made their bids secure in

some knowledge of their own. Perhaps this trading in girls was little different from trading in horses. A shrewd buyer assessed temper along with weight. But before and after the auction they would be bound. This was the crux of Natalie's message: they would be bound, bound, bound. Their bonds might be diverse, but for them freedom had become an abstract memory. They had best get used to it.

Susan's tied wrists hurt, but she neither noticed or cared. She turned obediently to display the reverse side of her charms, and was a little miffed by the failure of her striated bottom to evoke comment. But then, most of the other girls were striped too. She was entering a society in which whipped girls were taken for granted. When the hammer fell she sensed an atmosphere in which she found a feminine pride. She had sold well. She felt certain her price had been high. She was guided; trembling, from the block.

She had been purchased by a woman.

Her final delivery was effected with Winthrop Investment's usual know–how. By devious ways she was led to the garage where the Mercedes waited. Led by a leash upon her neck which she detested, her hands left bound at her back, she was lifted into the spacious trunk. Her ankles were tied and then joined to her wrists so as to bow her back in total helplessness. They apologized for the gag, explaining the journey would not be long, though demanding silence and immobility. Susan mouthed the rubber ball with its compelling strap. She was totally impotent. Before the lid was slammed she saw the smiling and complacent regard of the woman to whom she now was in thrall.

"Her name's Leonie," said the woman. "She's my daughter!'

Susan would have preferred freedom to introduction. She had lost the gag and the rope joining hands and feet, but had been placed standing with ankles still tied on the center of a plush carpet in a lush room. She teetered unsteadily. The leash still hung from her neck. Mother and daughter surveyed their purchase with glowing satisfaction.

It was as though she was a kitten. She was handled as such by the impish teenager who ran exploring hands up and down the tied nudity in a breathless ecstasy whose excitement reached out and touched its victim. The child was only slightly shorter than Susan, she was perhaps fifteen, but her seeking hands were knowing and very wise. She was careful to aid her captive in the matter of equilibrium. When her tactile need was done she dashed to her mother and throwing her arms about the maternal neck exclaimed:

"Thank you. Oh darling, thank you, thank you!"

"Our name is Wakelyn." The woman volunteered the information over the top of her child's golden head. "You can call me Thedra. It's actually my name."

Once more, Susan felt a fool. This situation belonged nowhere. She longed to say something but had nothing to say. For her, the ropes said everything.

"You'd better untie her ankles, puss–cat, before she falls on her face." said Mrs, Wakelyn practically.

It was a good feeling to have the ropes peeled away. It was also an opening gambit. "Thank you," Susan said with sincerity. "That was hurting terribly."

"Ropes do." The tone was dry. "Puss–cat, get us all a drink. Your new pet can probably use one." Her glance was actually friendly. "You'd better understand the set–up Susan. You belong to Leonie. I bought you specially for her."

Susan said: "Oh," and felt ridiculous. Then added, childishly, "I do hope you'll be pleased with me."

"Feeling sorry for yourself?" The wise eyes glinted amusement.

"Mostly I feel strange . . . and a bit silly," Susan admitted. "It's being tied, and naked, and not knowing what's required . . ."

"Expecting a man, weren't you! And a hard phallus?"

"Yes, I suppose I was." The admission was oddly shaming, as though longing for the fate denied. She felt herself flushing. "It wasn't that I wanted . . . I mean, it seemed . . . obvious."

"Disappointed?"

"No."

The question and the monosyllable cleared the air and formed a bond.

"You're Puss–cat's first. She's wanted one for a long time. But don't worry. I won't let her murder you." Susan kept a respectful silence. No doubt her function would become manifest. Leonie's excitement washed over her in waves.

"I've spoiled Puss–cat rotten." Thedra Wakelyn's statement was less factual than reflective. It held no apology. "I've spoiled her deliberately and I'm pleased with the result. I've shared the indulgences; she's understood them step by step. I've piled them on and she's had to cope. It's the theory of rolling with the punch. It's been damned interesting."

"Oh, Mother!" Leonie's rebuke held pride.

"They caned your bottom, eh! Was it your first time?"

"Yes. I was considered impudent."

"Damn thoughtful of 'em. Saves us doing a lot of explaining. Hurt you more than you ever dreamed, eh?"

Susan nodded ruefully. "The pain was so awful it was a shock. Something beyond anything I've ever known." She paused awkwardly. "I'd like to say – to promise I'll obey without that sort of persuasion."

Thedra Wakelyn laughed. "You poor kid! But You're not a kid, are you! I have your dossier, so I know your age – It's just right, by the way, for what's intended."

They stood and surveyed each other. The ropes burned Susan's wrists. She wondered it she should draw their attention to the fact she was still bound. But the speculation died as her youthful owner held a glass to her lips. Evidently she was not intended to have her hands. She drank gratefully, aware of their admiration of her breasts. Breathlessly, she asked;

"Intended? Am I to be told?"

"A touch of sarcasm there." Thedra Wakelyn's rebuke was without concern. "I expect Puss–cat will cure you of faults. And, by the way, I'll borrow you from time to time."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean –" Susan glimpsed pitfalls. She tried to look flattered. "I think that would be nice borrowing me, I mean. Thank you."

Mother and daughter exchanged smiles. "I have to rush, darlings." Mrs. Wakelyn exclaimed. "Take her along, Leonie. She's all yours." With cool deliberation she reached for the naked girl and kissed her lips. It was a firm mature kiss without self consciousness. Her lips were warm. Her hands made a tracery of sensation across the taut breasts. One frankly explored the captive sex, and laughed at what it found. "I'm pleased with you," she said gaily, and left the room.

"Isn't Mother super!" Leonie glowed. "Here, Susan, finish your drink. I'll hold it for you. You're not going to get untied, y'know. Oh jeepers, I'm so happy!"

To be leashed and led by a child! Or was that the right appellation. Leonie Wakelyn was both child and woman an impish sprite, somehow formidable: a force. Susan, sheathed in shame, followed the direction of the delighted hands tugging at her tether.

"Isn't this the most gorgeous fun!" said the child called Puss–cat.

It was a mansion. It bespoke wealth. It was in a city but was not cramped for space. Susan made these deductions as she passively followed where she was led. They passed a single servant, a maid formally attired. Her casual but curious glance sent the blood surging to Susan's cheeks. There was a cruel humiliation about her plight.

And yet, it was so very innocent. So innocent.

"This is my room, darling." Leonie giggled. "You'll share it when I wish." She led her captive to the huge four poster bed, and tied the leash high on one of the posts. "I want you standing while we talk. You can try and get loose if you want."

"I can't possibly –"

"Don't you want to try? Go ahead, I won't punish you."

"I've already tried," Susan admitted sheepishly. "It's no good. I can't do a thing except hurt my wrists. Is there . . . is there any special way you want me to stand?"

"Oh just sort of at attention. Stick your breasts out and keep your legs apart so's I can see your pussy."

Leonie grinned impishly. "I bet you're wondering?"

"Well, yes. I . . . I –"

The young eyes glowed. "You want something to call me, don't you! And you're scared?"

"A little." The leash on her neck was a constant irk. "You'll call me darling. And that's what I'll call you too. It's much the nicest thing for girls. And it's going to make you feel so funny . . ." Again the giggle. "Being my slave yet calling me darling. Being hurt and having to say: 'Thank you, darling." Asking me for your punishments and tacking a 'darling' on the end of the sentence. Oh, Susan, we're going to have the most marvelous times."

The captive tensed her nudity and looked askance at the radiant moppet. "I expect we will," she managed uncertainly. "But . . . but the hurting and the punishments? I don't understand."

Leonie gazed with pensive eyes upon her captive. "Mmmmm! Poor darling! I expect you're all at sea. It's terribly simple really. I adore whipping girls. So Mama bought me you."

Simple indeed. At face value it required no comment. But Susan had to try. "You spoke of punishment?" Her query trailed into a void.

Leonie provided instant animation. "But of course! You're bound to do all sorts of things wrong. And I'm going to set up rules. You'll be getting yourself punished all the time."

"But I don't want to be punished. I'll do whatever you tell me!"

"Hmmmm! Not quite the same thing, darling. You do understand, don't you. I want to punish you, so I'm jolly well going to. I'm terribly happy about it."

Susan cringed. She was utterly at the mercy of this amoral child. Leonie's gay innocence was daunting. How could she counter it. How well would she bear the pain! But, from a child, it might be bearable! It might! But the hope was faint. She squashed her natural instinct to retort that she herself was not happy about it at all. But punishment had been mentioned often enough that the memory of Natalie's cane counselled caution. Meekly, she asked: "In what ways will you punish me'!" Then added pathetically the out of context: " . . . darling?"

She was kissed and hugged in a whirlwind of heated adolescence. "That was so terribly sweet, Susan." Leonie's regard adored this grown up doll tied helpless for her pleasure. "You're not being silly about this. I'm so pleased. Because if you are, I'll tell you what will happen to you. Mostly I'll cane your bottom and whip the rest of you. But I'm going to practice all sorts of tying up. I've thought of some of the cutest ways. And you have to be helpless. Oh, and that reminds me –"

Susan stood, her mind awhirl, while eager fingers explored the ropes binding her wrists. Leonie's absorbed excitement overflowed so that she herself became aware of a strange communion. She was owned, she was adored, she was going to be hurt for the edification of a fifteen year old moppet. It made no sense, but when the fingers rose to the rope leash around her neck she shivered – not from cold and not from fear . . .

"They tied you beautifully, darling. So cunning . . . You haven't a hope, have you! I've memorized the loops and the knots. I think the secret is to always tie you just tight enough so it hurts a teeny bit. Is that right?"

She really wanted to know.

"I expect it is," Susan conceded ruefully. "But, darling, don't look to me as an authority. When I first got into . . . into this, I didn't even know I'd have to be tied at all."

"Poor darling! Are you very unhappy about – what you've done? Tell me you're not?"

The captive faced her ebullient mistress frankly. "I'm frightened, Leonie, that's all. I think I could be happy about . . . about you. But I'm only a girl and I'm naked and I'm tied so I can't do a thing, and you want to . . . to . . . to give me a lot of pain."

"I suppose it is a bit of a bind," the cheerful child acknowledged brightly. "I won't beat you right away. How about a nice bath and I'll make you pretty and we'll eat a little?"

"I can't do that with my hands tied." The plaint was instinctive. Susan tugged at her bound wrists fretfully.

"But, darling, I'm going to do them for you. I'm your hands."

The naked prisoner wryly reflected that neither the score of whips or the brand or irons could have more graphically emphasized her new slave state than this grooming at the hands of a girl eleven years her junior. She followed where the youthful hands tugged the stricture on her neck and stepped into the bath at Leonie's command.

Her first reaction was irritation at being made wet and uncomfortable. She was afraid to ask for the removal of the rope around her neck. It dangled at her back, absurdly, and got as wet as she. Susan well understood its utility: by it she could be controlled by one of Leonie's small hands. There was also the nagging thought of the ropes upon her wrists: they would get wet and they would shrink – they were tight enough already! Yet she dared not speak. She stood naked in the steam, held obedient by fear and curiosity.

Her soaping was thorough and very wise. Nothing escaped. Her breasts and sex were laved lovingly. She was made to part her legs to give the slippery fingers full play with that which is partly hidden at their junction. They rubbed and gouged far beyond the need of cleanliness.

"Feel nice, darling?"

Susan admitted that it did. Why lie!

"I'll make you feel lovely, y'know, in between your punishments."

"Thank you."

"Tub's full. You can sit down."

"My hands? The rope?"

"Don't worry, darling. Mumsie bought us lots of rope. I'll cut this lot if it shrinks too tight and I can't undo the knots."

"Thank you, Leonie."

The child's glance was shrewd. "It's difficult for you to call me 'darling', isn't it! It will come easier after I start punishing you – for not saying it, I mean."

"I will try, darling. Honest!" Susan was sincere.

"And you mustn't worry about being damaged" Leonie snickered. "You heard what Mama said. If I go overboard, I'm in trouble."

"In what way darling?"

"That's better, you're doing fine. Why, she'd whale the tar out of me for one thing – or bung me in the cage. She loves it too, y'know."

Susan had not known. It was food for thought. She remembered Mrs. Wakelyn's banter about borrowing. Impulsively, she wondered.

"How old were you, darling, when you first . . . when you came to know about enjoying these . . . things?"

Perfumed water and loving fingers comforted. "I don't know, Susan," the teenager admitted. "It's always been there – and with Mummy too. She's always whipped me and put me in cages and . . . and . . . Oh, such lovely ways." Again the snicker. "I'm so glad we're like this."

"But don't you think her doing these things made you want to?"

"We've talked about that. Mumsie was curious too." The young voice turned meditative. "But we neither of us believe it. We were just lucky. It's something in the genes."

"But why me? Why not a girl of your own age . . . darling?"

"I'd have thought you could figure that, Susan. The Law has the darndest name for what we're doing to you: Sequester. Isn't it cute! You've been sequestered. It's sort of like kidnapping but less violent. But for anyone to do it to a girl of my age the lid would go off. I expect we could manage it if we really wanted to, but Winthrop Investments wouldn't do it for us."

Susan was succumbing to the sensory enjoyment of what was being done to her. The ropes were indeed shrinking, but she did not care. "Wouldn't the lid go off if the . . . the police found out about me?" she asked mischievously.

"Not unless you wanted to sign a complaint, darling." Another vista opened. Leonie was wise, and she herself was beyond the hope of rescue. An unlikely release could become effective only if she willed it so. Leonie summed it up:

"You're here because you want to be darling."

Nimble digits were unashamedly playing with the captive nipples. Susan's shamed protest died under their cunning. If she was to have the pain she might as well enjoy the pleasure. She relaxed and listened.

"These gorgeous breasts!" The youngster's voice was slurred with contentment. "A teenager wouldn't have them, and she wouldn't have your lovely thick black bush." A hand was spared to fondle the submerged pubic curls. "But think how pussy wetting it is for me to have a real live grown up. I mean, darling, think of it: you're my mother, you're my teachers, you're my favourite movie actress – and you have to do just what I tell you. It's . . . it's . . . my spine's all goosey."

It made sense. Susan understood the fulfilment of what was, for most, a waft of fantasy.

"When I cane your bottom I'm going to be remembering the way Mumsie canes mine."

She was to be surrogate for all the females this nymphet had longed to discipline. Susan was shocked by her own comprehension. It was so simple: all you needed was money. She had been purchased at a great price to be Leonie's whipping girl. "I've been caned only once," she said slowly. "I hated it. I've never been so terribly hurt in all my life. And I screamed . . . I hated them too. They made me feel so . . . so . . . nothing – just a loud noise."

She was kissed and fondled, a doll to be comforted. "They really did beat at you," Leonie acknowledged. "I'll only do it that hard sometimes. And I love the screams; you simply have to scream, y'know. I make all sorts of cute noises when Mama stripes me. I think if a girl was stubborn and gritted her teeth it would make me want to hurt her more until I cured her of such . . . well, it's silly and sort of defiant. Wouldn't you see it that way?"

"It might be pride, or shame."

"Are you going to try it?"

"I might have if you hadn't told me. Now I won't."

"Mama makes the loveliest sounds –"

The naked girl tensed under the ministering hands as disbelief melded into conviction.

"Oooops! Oh damn, I wasn't supposed to tell you."

"You mean, you . . . you! Your mother!"

"Oh shit! Look, Susan, be a dear and don't say anything. You were bound to find out sooner or later. But Mumsie wanted it later – the authority and respect thing . . . you know?"

"And if I let it slip?" Susan felt only amusement.

"She'll half cut my bottom off. Then I'll do the same to you."

"I won't say a word," Susan promised. "I can see she wouldn't be pleased."

"I'll be ever so nice to you, darling." Leonie's voice held no trace of wheedling or hypocrisy. "If you turn out to be a good slave I'll let you have a go at me sometimes as a reward. If you love someone it's gorgeous either way." The bright eyes twinkled. "I bet you're thinking you'll escape. Well, you won't! There'll be a long chain and a shackle on your ankle and the key will be in another room. Think of it, darling, you'll be frustrated to death."

The child was a force, a bundle of warm sexuality, loving and cruel. She was a new dimension of the female mystique. For the naked girl, whose wrist were now hurting a lot, the process of being groomed before the huge mirror and the nibbling of sandwiches held by demanding fingers was a journey into an erotic Kingdom in which she was slave and Leonie, Queen. She had no rights. Leonie held them all.

"The ropes are hurting."

"I can see they are, darling. I'm going to untie you." Leonie laughed at Susan's obvious relief. "Poor dear. Don't get your hopes up."

It was Susan's first glimpse of the simplicity and totality of her thralldom. She looked down in helpless impotence while her ankles were loosely bound and then the slack absorbed by a cinch between which left each slenderness tightly encircled. Leonie produced a short whip with much the air of someone about to present a gift.

"Can't move, darling. You just have to stand?"

"Yes, I'm helpless." Susan was wary, even of words.

"When I untie your hands you'll be held only by your feet. You can fight or try and get loose. If you do I'll use this whip on you until you decide to be sensible."

"I'll be sensible. You don't need that whip . . . darling."

"I expect you will be." The young voice was calmly judicial. "But, just to make sure, I'm going to give you one stroke – so you'll know."

"Please don't. I promise –"

"Silly girl. It's for your own good" Leonie's chuckle was pure delight. "Take it and be thankful. You can thank me later."

The naked captive stood and quivered, trembling in a sensory anticipation both fearful and excited while the leash was taken from her throat.

"Can't have that hanging down and getting in the way, darling. Lift your hands."

Obedience was instinctive and prudent. The lash fell instantly. A band of fire spanning both cheeks and curling far around one hip to snap its final impact upon her belly. Susan yelped in surprise, in shock, and in agony. Twisting in her pain she would have fallen if soft young arms had not steadied her.

"Just one for now, darling. Was it a zinger?"

"It was awful. Oh, please."

"Hold still. I'm going to give you your hands."

Despite agony and fear, the moment was precious. The peeling away of the deeply bedded cords had its own awfulness but the repossession of hands and arms were pure joy. Until release Susan had not realized how greatly her shoulders had been taxed, their pleasure was part protest as she fingered and massaged the weals upon her wrists. Leonie was standing in pert rapture, watching. Susan felt no animosity towards the child. Buy why, why, why!

"You're simply delicious, darling." said the youngster with the whip. " Aren't you going to try and escape?"

"How can I!" Susan tried to make it whimsical.

"Hmmmm! I think I'd try the knots on my ankles." Leonie smirked. "I expect a girl would collect twenty or thirty strokes while she was tugging away."

"I'm not that foolish. Twenty or thirty would kill me."

"It wouldn't. Girls are beautifully made for whips. We always survive." The assurance came with sweet reason.

"Well anyway, I'm still your prisoner. May I sit down before I fall?"

"No, you mustn't. I'm going to cane your bottom."

"But . . . but . . . !"

A small sweet hand pointed admonition. "Hold it, darling. You're about to tell me you've just been whipped, and also that you've been a very good girl. Right?"

"Yes." Despite herself, Susan cringed.

"So this will be a first lesson, darling." The moppet's tone was dulcet. "First, you don't have to do anything to get punished. Second: it doesn't matter how much you've been whipped you can always be whipped some more. And third: you've forgotten to call me darling several times and you're just a teensy bit argumentative."

"I'm sorry." How bitter the humility!

"I'm sure you are, darling. Now. I'm going to pull this chair away from the wall and you're going to hop over it."

The chair was a sturdy structure, bespeaking intent. Susan doubted anyone had ever sat in it for purposes of repose. Feeling shamed and foolish she made the several hops without disaster.

"You bend over from the back, darling."

Susan watched her wrists bound to the front of the seat. The heavy oak was well supplied with rings for such purposes. Its back was sufficiently high that her bottom was now impudently reared. The binding of the thin rope was immensely competent and executed with panache.

"Now I can untie your feet. See how it works, darling."

Susan saw how it worked. She could have wept at the ease by which this intriguing child could dispose of her person. Suddenly she was overcome by the humiliation of what was being done to her, and her own meek acceptance. In panic, she wished she had fought and risked the whip. Even defeated she would have salvaged pride. But now! Knowing it too late, she implored:

"Darling, please don't cane me. I'm frightened. Give me a little time."

The slash was savage. Screaming, Susan believed it more cruel than Natalie's. She was shamefully aware of her legs and feet kicking in a frenzy of protest at the pain.

"That's much your best answer, darling," Leonie said composedly . "Much better than arguing. Besides, if I kept refusing you I'd feel a pig."

Susan moaned and tested her helplessness. For the purpose of caning her bottom it was total. Her wrists remained firmly tied. Her lower half, draped from the chair-back could indulge in all the motion it wanted without lessening the exposure of her bottom one whit. She could feel the formation of the scalding weal across her taut skin. That she should receive others of a like severity was an enormity beyond belief.

"And now your little tootsies," Leonie purred happily. "I love to watch them kick, but I want to have them fastened nicely apart so your puss peeps out behind. You don't mind, do you, darling?"

Susan did not answer. She was still panting in shock. She longed to fight but it was too late. The youngster's cheerful assumption that she would not mind having her bottom caned into a sickening agony was infuriating. Now she was to lose her legs. Miserably, she felt the busy fingers and the rasp of rope. Tied as she was she could partly watch as her ankles were cinched to the side of each back leg. She harbored no doubt of the visibility of her sex from the rear. Suppose the cane struck it! But perhaps that was the idea.

"Please don't cane me. Oh, please don't!"

It was a small plea. But it was all she had, The happy nymphet answered it by fingering the displaced labia and tugging at its coy curls. "It's a beautiful pussy, darling. Here, I'll pull it back all I can. Maybe if I'm clever with the cane, I can give it a nick or two – I think that 'ud be super."

"But it's so cruel." Susan was close to tears.

"Not really darling. You'll get used to it, Besides, if you act nicely I'm not going to do it too hard. I've got a different idea I want to try. Nice gentle swishes one after the other without any pauses . . I say darling, your pussy's gorgeous. I'm sure I've got it back at least an extra inch. Your lips are sweet."

Susan could move only her head. She could see just enough of her youthful owner's activities to keep apprehension at a peak. The back of the chair bit unkindly into her groin. Most of her weight rested there. The ropes robbed wrists and ankles of their function. She was exquisitely postured for the moppet's pleasure. Her bottom burned.

"Darling . . . ?" The captive voice trembled.

"Yes, Susan dear?"

"Please talk to your mother. This isn't . . . it isn't . . . oh, darling, I never expected anything like this. I never thought . . . I'd like to ask if we could –"

Once again the whirring cut punctuated her sentence. The limber length bedded itself thunkingly across the inviting flesh. Susan's scream was instant and unfeigned. Her youthful owner's voice came cheerfully.

"You needn't have had one that hard. But as long as you keep complaining, it's much the best way to answer you. A cane across our bottom is such a help to a girl. It always helps me make up my mind."

"I can't stand the pain. I just can't."

"Poor darling. You want to go back to Winthrop Investments and be sold to someone who won't beat your bottom?"

Mischievous fingers played lovingly with the scalding ridges the cane had created on the stretched flesh. Leonie cooed with content.

"That's the whole goosey gorgeousness of this, darling. You're a prisoner, a captive, a thrall, a slave . . . Such lovely names! You haven't a hope of escape. It frightens you. Bit if I wasn't hitting you with this cane you wouldn't get the proper feeling half as well."

Desperately, Susan fought for her flesh. Words were her only weapon. "Darling, I know I'm a slave by choice. I want to be a good slave. Honest! Please help me. I don't get any of the erotic sensations you do."

A hot hand clasped the back-thrust vulva testingly, a finger entered. "Fibber! You're wet." There came a girlish giggle. "It's lovely having a pussy."

The bent tied captive had not been unaware of sensation. She had refused to consider the burn of her wounds as its source: ascribing it rather to the thrust of the chair within her most secret fold and her muscular contractions evoked by the cut of the cane.

"I'm wet too, y'know, darling," Leonie consoled cheerfully.

As the cane found her again and again, Susan ruefully remembered the moppet's use of the word: 'swishing'. Any one of the strokes that now seared her seat could have been borne. But a steady torrent of them fired a cumulatively unbearable blaze. They bit the bent derriere steadily with the inevitability of raindrops on a wet day. There was no escaping them. Worse still, there was no knowledge of their cessation. Would their sexual gratification of a spoiled teenager continue for minutes or for hours! The fact that her body and her flesh could probably absorb the punishment in no way eased Susan's fears that her nerves and spirit could not. She relinquished control of instinctive sounds and allowed moans to be interspersed with screams. Every muscle and sinew she possessed was in revolt. The cords bit and held her relentlessly.

"I'm so happy," said Leonie.

Inadvertently, perhaps, the child had found and imposed a neat psychological ordeal. The steady

swish of the cane imposing its continuous flare of agony would normally have invoked heartrending cries and appeals for mercy. Susan longed with every fiber of her being to make them but was deterred by the certain knowledge of blows so far beyond her ability to bear which would surely follow. Each fresh stripe made her certain she must cry aloud her fear of injury, of unconsciousness, of despair. But what was the use! She was prey to pubescence. The cane tip neatly nipped her sex. She screamed in desolation, knowing she would not die.

"I wish you could see yourself, darling, you're luscious."

"Please give me a rest, darling?" The broken words were interspersed by gasps. The simply request was all the naked girl dared make.

"Don't be a silly Susan. I adore your bottom."

The steady snickering slicing of the air and the terminal splat. The constant tossing of the captive head with its hair now disarrayed and damp. Susan was in a world beyond dreams and beyond reality, a world of pure pain from which came a peculiar communion with an erotically aroused adolescent. The desperate captive heaved with all her strength at her bindings, hoping by the evidence of her anguish to touch the mercy of a child. If only she could topple the chair to which she was bound! It might impress . . . It might!

A stroke died, and a second . . . An eager hand with probing fingers entered a bruised and swollen sex. Leonie possessed a female wisdom beyond her years. She used it cunningly.

The orgasm was instant and explosive.

Susan moaned in the betrayal of her flesh.

The music of the cane resumed its beat.

CHAPTER THREE

The Thongs of Thedra

When forced to lay upon it, the floor becomes an enemy. Susan could not recall so close communion with a carpet since childhood. The chain from the metal collar round her neck was too short to allow her to stand. After all, she was not supposed to stand, she was supposed to sleep. Its anchorage to the ringbolt in the floor mocked her constantly. She was free of all other bonds, but still as much a captive as she could ever be.

Naked through the night she had longed for covering. The air was warm, but to sleep bare upon the floor was a humiliation as well as a discomfort. Her glowing bottom exuded heat enough, but found no comfort no matter how she turned. Yet she had slept. The ravelled emotions and the physical pain of the day past had exhausted her. It seemed fitting enough that her introduction into slavery should be capped by a night chained beside her owner's bed.

The admonitions had been clear. If she chose to make a disturbance she would be thrashed. The slumber of the beauty upon the bed was sacrosanct. She must respect it. The chain about her neck was to keep her captive, not to rattle, If she wanted to test its links she could wait 'til morning. After her adventure with Leonie's cane throughout the day, Susan had no wish to toy with trouble. To hear the quiet female respirations from the comfort of the bed was as tantalizing as it was intended to be. The need to wake the sleeper was irrational and compulsive but must be borne. Temptation to steal a covering was constant, but that too carried the penalty of pain. Now, the light of early morn and the irritation of the metal collar and its weight of chain brought wakefulness to the naked girl an hour before its time. Susan lay in her humility and pondered.

The woman in the bed was Thedra Wakelyn. Leonie's dominion had ended with the night. The youngster, replete with her incessant caning of feminine flesh, had been sent about her affairs by a Thedra whose word was obviously law, and best obeyed. A woman who had examined with delight the striated bottom of the maiden she had purchased earlier in the day.

"The poor darling, she's been dying to have a girl of her own to cane and do as she likes with. I should have bought her one ages ago." Susan paid the tribute of cautious silence.

"She's done a beautiful job on you, Susan. I bet you thought you were dying?"

"Yes."

"That all you have to say, just 'yes'?" Thedra kissed her lightly. "I bet now you're put out about the handcuffs and the collar?"

Susan was blushingly conscious of both. The shining metal bands held her wrists at her back, the weight of the metal circlet on her neck was a tantalization bespeaking her slavery. "You don't need them on me," she offered diffidently. "I'd be obedient without them."

"Up to a point, dear," Thedra said reasonably. "But give you a glimpse of freedom, or tell you to touch your toes for a swishing . . . that would be different. Believe it or not: you'll be much happier chained."

Susan had already digested this sad solace. For a slave girl, decision would always be a painful privilege. She pulled at the tight chrome and managed a wry smile of acquiescence. Because of the older woman's gaiety she found it easy to ask: "Is that my life: to be hurt for Leonie's pleasure, and kept chained?"

"Is it so bad?" There was mischief in the question.

"It's not what I expected. If I'd known I'd never have sold myself."

"You'd probably be regretting the sale by now no matter who bought you."

"But I'm . . . I'm . . . a, a sort of whipping girl?"

Thedra laughed at her captive's quaint struggle for expression. "In a way. I may have a go at you myself. But we'll never injure you, y'know. You're too damn costly."

Susan took her plunge. "Please don't punish me for this or feel hurt. But can I go back to Winthrop and you get your money? I don't think I'm the girl you need. I can't stand the pain."

Thedra's eyes glowed. "O.K. no punishment. But you can't go back. Winthrop wouldn't take you unless they had a more profitable sale in view. And anyway, I don't want to part with you. As for the pain . . . pouf! You're doing fine, darling. You're going to be terribly surprised at how much pain a sweet little girl can absorb."

Susan's face betrayed her desolation. Thedra kissed her again.

"There are compensations, darling."

It was then the impossible had happened. The unthinkable, the outrageous, the unspeakable. Susan had watched, uncomprehending, as her owner blithely stripped as naked as the slave.

"Aren't I nice darling!" Thedra examined herself as though with fresh discovery. "I was terribly lucky with Leonie. The darling didn't mar my figure at all. I'm not sure she didn't improve my breasts. Like 'em?"

"You're very beautiful, yes, your breasts: they're lovely."

Susan had uttered the tribute in rapt sincerity before two joyous hands had thrust her own nudity back upon the bed and the avid mouth began its feast within her sex. Strong arms had gripped her thighs with practiced skill.

"No! Oh no! You . . . you . . " Susan's protest had been instinctive. She struggled wildly. The handcuffs hurt. She lay on them, twisting frantically to no avail.

The lips, the teeth, the tongue possessed her utterly. Susan was not a lesbian, nor was she innocent. She had made a female experiment with a girl as curious as herself, but it had quickly ended in shamefaced withdrawals. She had not tried a second time. Now, on her back upon her owner's bed, her wrists paining their protest against the steel, and her legs strangely impotent within the firm embrace of the lovely creature who fed upon her flesh. She found herself within the dimension of a new discovery. Perhaps it was her scalding bottom, her helplessness: or was it an unsuspected need of human touch that did not hurt! But gradually her struggling merged into responses of which she was at first ashamed and then uncaring in a conflagration of sensations as vivid as her captivity.

After the Mistress had wiped her wet lips upon the softness of the now quiescent thighs, she raised herself and looked down lovingly at the chained girl who dared not meet her eyes. "It was good, wasn't it." She stated it as a fact, not a question.

"It's left me terribly ashamed."

"You silly thing! You loved it. Darling, you must drop all that nonsense. If you indulge yourself with prudery I'll whip it out of you."

The handcuffed girl was annoyed with her own response. She was well enough aware the Earth had not stopped revolving because of what had happened on the bed. Also, she was tinglingly conscious of the ecstacy her flesh had found from the vibrant tongue and warm soft lips. Perhaps had she not been chained and made helpless it would have been different! But she cast the hypocrisy aside. She was glad to have been captive and absolved from blame. Hesitantly, she asked.

"Is this what you really wanted me for:"

"Would you prefer to accept a man's seed a few times a day?" Thedra's voice had turned serious and intent.

Despite herself, Susan smile. "No, I suppose not." she admitted. "Described like that you make it sound messy."

"Well, isn't it?"

The mind of the beneficiary of Lesbos provided a montage of memories of hurriedly applied towels, of stains, and surprising odors. By comparison the act just consummated emerged immaculate. Sheepishly, she grinned up at the lovely creature whose chains she wore.

"There's a mutuality about either one, darling . . ."

The lazily drawled sentence was loaded. Susan's composure took a jolt under the impact. Her startled eyes widened. Thedra laughed.

"You taste sweeter than honey, darling. And believe me, I'm a gourmet. Now you try my flavor. It's nice." Thedra flung herself upon the bed beside her captive.

Susan tensed. She could not name the emotion that forbid response to Thedra's expectant invitation, but at that moment its inhibition was total. "I can't." she said wanly, and heard her own words as those of a small child confronted with all the interdicts of society.

For a minute, Thedra lay still as though awaiting an amendment. Then, languidly, she got to her feet and shook her head admonishingly at her shrinking slave. Without a word, she went to a drawer and drew therefrom a whip. "Oh well, I suppose —" In amused resignation she allowed her broken sentence to hang electric in the air.

Susan's bondage was too fresh for good judgment. She was still governed by precepts of a life renounced. Within these precepts she now found a contradictory understanding of why her Mistress should now whip her: she was a slave: she had refused to obey.

This logic sustained her for the first few searing cuts, but dissolved under the persuasion of cunningly dealt blows. After the first had sliced her belly she instinctively turned, but the handcuffs holding her arms rendered her vulnerable either way. Seeking the protection of motion, she twisted and contorted, but the thong took advantage of every exposure. Scalding in pain and humiliation, she gasped urgently: "Alright, I'll do it! I'll do it! Stop . . . oh stop."

"Feel better now, darling?" Thedra was amused by the defeat of conscience. "I'll go on whipping you if it will make you happier."

"No, please!" Susan was replete with stripes, her wrists were burning within their steel circlets. Shamefaced, she surrendered: "I was silly. She looked up piteously at the beauty with the whip: "Forgive me . . . I . . . I . . ."

"I'll expect a good job, darling."

"Yes, I'll . . . I'll try."

"I really think I should whip you more. You sound so doubtful. Will it really be your first time?"

"Yes, I'm sorry."

"Nothing to be sorry about, darling. I think it's gorgeous. I've bought a virgin. Aren't I lucky?"

Susan grinned dubiously. "I'm not sure. I mean, I don't suppose I'm adept. Please be patient with me. May I have the handcuffs unlocked. I think I'll need my hands?"

"No. You don't need your hands, and the cuffs stay on."

"Well . . in front then?"

Thedra laughed. "Believe me, darling, you just don't need hands. I'm sure it would be nice for you to have them free, but that's forgetting you're a slave."

It was true. Even with the handcuffs and the metal collar she could forget her status. The physical experience of Thedra's lust, the closeness of the perfumed female, and the arousal of her own flesh! Chains seemed superfluous. But afterwards. There would always be an afterwards. That was where the chains mattered, so that she could not run or fight and get herself punished. The handcuffs were her friends.

"I'm sorry." The apology was also an invitation.

Susan was surprised to discover that her Mistress's boast was true. Thedra's flavor was as exquisite as the rest of her.

When her musky journey had run its course Susan remained kneeling between her owner's thighs. She was too emotionally drained to want more than to rest her head within their intimacy. The two women had remained thus for a long time, sharing a solitude in which neither was lonely any more. When, much later, the chain, from the ringbolt had been locked upon her collar, Susan had not demurred.

Now, in the light of morning, it was hard for the chained slave to be unabashed when confronted by a Thedra vibrant and eager for a new day. The loosening of the chain from her collar was pure glory, it was a relief to stand. But sight of the gleaming shackles Thedra now proceeded to lock upon the ankles, hitherto untramelled, quenched joy until the Mistress matter-of-factly explained.

"They're stainless steel, darling, and shockingly expensive. They're a lovely snug fit."

The twin clicks supported the statement. Looking down at her joined feet, Susan was forced to admire the quality of her new bonds. She supposed she would be able to daintily walk but certainly not run. The shining bands around her ankles were wide and chaste in simple severity. The links were heavy.

"You can have a bath if you want. Water won't hurt them. They're a nice compromise in which you can do all sorts of things."

Thedra followed up her cheerful assurance by producing the key and unlocking Susan's handcuffs. Once more the captive was irradiated by wonder as she stretched her arms and rubbed her wrists. "Thank you. Thank you, Thedra," she said with sincerity.

Captivity is also a state of mind.

A relative freedom made it almost fun. They shared giggles as Susan learned to walk with chained feet. It was quaintly frustrating but painless. When she was ordered to 'go to the bathroom' she did so as a child might do. The swirl of links were a hazard, and she made the discovery of being compelled to sit on the edge of the tub in order to bring her joined feet over into the water. Soaping up herself, she re–discovered her cold metal collar still firmly locked upon her throat. She had forgotten it was there. She realized that, in the forgetting, there was a significance not to be ignored. She laved her scarlet stripes, curious as to their color and sensitivity. For the moment, fear was gone.

"We're having lunch with Adrian Foyle." Thedra's announcement was studiously casual. In a laughing response to Susan's blank incomprehension, she added: "He's that charming youth who booted you in at Winthrop's. He's not as young as he looks."

The captive heart leaped. Lunch was normal. Lunch was civilized, and the nice young man had been very nice, indeed. Did slaves have 'Lunch.' Were they allowed to meet eligible males! Her surge of thankfulness was checked by reality. Her exclamation was both protest and plea: "But . . . but, I'm naked!"

"Not really, darling." Thedra's laughter thrilled mischief. "You're wearing chains. And there's that lovely collar."

"But with a man!"

"You are a slave, y'know darling. You do forget so easily, don't you? Want me to help with the cane?"

"Oh, Thedra, must everything be decided for me by the cane or a whip?".

"No better cure for prudery, love, You're scared the dear boy will get a look at your pubic hair. If I make you bend over for a dozen you'll realize he's entitled to."

Susan recognized truth: Twelve slashes with the cane and she'd probably agree to anything. But her shadowed features won a concession. "O.K. we'll cover little Fanny. I've just remembered a darling Chastity belt. It's just perfect." her mistress offered brightly.

The humiliation of being grateful for such an absurdity sent the color flaming to the captive's cheeks. But when the harness for the confinement of her loins was taken from its drawer she knew a small relief. It was beautifully fashioned of leather in a chaste austerity. Susan stood quivering as it found her flesh.

Like all slave bonds it was tight, it became a part of her! pressing itself into her groin and cupping the fullness of her lower lips. Its belt round her middle accentuated her hips and would impart to them a wanton motion as she walked. Its fullness was generous above the apex of her thighs. No pubic curl peeped slyly from its fold. Its crupper strap bisected her bottom in modest pain. The padlock at her back snapped shut with a finality denying freedom. Loving fingers tugged testingly and, satisfied with their work, withdrew.

"It's beautiful, Susan. I like it. Go to the mirror." Reluctantly the wearer of the chaste device agreed.

Surveying her nudity she found an inordinate comfort in this imprisonment of her sex. Her Mistress's view that it mattered not at all whether a male saw her vagina or not was a slave ideal she had not yet achieved. As she now said: "Oh, Thedra, thank you!" she meant it with sincerity. When she walked she blushed again at hips which were now endowed with a lasciviousness all their own.

"Come here, Susan."

The expensive slave eyed the jewelled trifles uncertainly. They were exquisite. But where?

"Stand still while I tease them hard."

Susan obeyed, her breath quickening as practiced fingertips provoked her nipples to a demanding response. "These don't hurt, darling, but I've got some that do. You'll wear 'em instead if you mess with these."

Susan gasped as the tiny particles of brilliance–gently nipped her rosebuds and clung tight. No pain, but she knew they were there. They would not fall off. Another trip to the big mirror made her aware of a new eroticism, both in her external appeal and within her libido.

"I told you, darling. Nakedness becomes you. You're almost overdressed."

Like a small girl testing the budding evidences of being female, Susan fingered her belt and the carved triangle of leather strapped fast upon her pubes. Almost lovingly, the exploring digits rose to cup her breast and to tentatively test the anchorage of the adornments on her nipples. "Do you think he'll like me?" she asked impulsively.

"My, we have come a long way, haven't we?" Thedra mocked. "I forgot about the belt. It makes a girl juicy. It's put you in heat, darling."

The captive managed only to look sheepish. It was true! Her loins were aflame. Moreover, there was nothing she could do about it. She wondered what it would be like to have an orgasm in the middle of lunch. Mortified, her eyes sought those of her mistress. They laughed in unison at a shared vision.

Adrian was unperturbed by nudity. Perhaps he had seen much of it, perhaps he was a gentleman. He examined Susan's with frank approval but without ostentation. His "nice to see you again, Miss Carmody," was impeccable. They clasped hands. If he was surprised by the absence of shackles on her wrists he did not say so. He noted the linkage on her feet, and nodded as though in confirmation of a thought.

The normalcy of lunch defeated the orgasm. Seated at table, the most intimate part of Susan's anatomy was lost to view. Its rebellious tumescence quieted sympathetically. Its owner managed shy conversation.

"This isn't a follow up," Adrian explained as he trickled mint sauce over his lamb chops. "We don't pursue purchasers or their purchase. But Mrs. Wakelyn is an old friend, so I'm privileged."

"He put me wise about you, darling. "Thedra chuckled. "Our Adrian has a keen eye."

He was still the 'nice young man'. After the first shock of his presence, Susan felt only three quarters naked. The impersonal regard of the maid who served was harder to endure. The fact that the woman was not shocked was choking in itself, another evidence of slavery.

"I felt sure Mrs. Wakelyn would be good for you, Susan."

The girl with chained feet was lost in a welter of improbable contrasts. Impulsively, she used a fingertip to trace one of the vivid weals where Thedra's whip had curled across her ribs the night before. Her voice held mischief.

"Even with these?"

His glance followed her finger with approval. "Shakespeare got in a bit somewhere about a girl who 'wore the marks of whips as rubies'." he mused reflectively. "It applies to you."

"Yesterday I would have given the Earth to go back home."

"But today you would not?"

Susan flushed at the unintentional admission he had found implicit in her statement. Without nudity and chains she might be enjoying this interlude . . . perhaps she was enjoying it anyway! She took the offensive.

"I'm enjoying what we're doing now," she conceded. "But, have you the faintest idea how much a whip hurts a naked girl?"

"He doesn't need to, darling. The question's academic," Thedra chided gently. "But you know, and I know. That's what counts . . ."

"The purpose of my visit is to suggest a change."

Adrian allowed his words to hang suspensefully. Susan tensed. Thedra Wakelyn smiled benignly at both. "And I'm going to make a profit," she chuckled.

"Ordinarily," the young Mr. Foyle continued, "we do not consult the subject. You can be bought and sold at the will of your owner. But this is a special case." He beamed reassuringly, "A very special case."

Susan looked askance at the amused woman across the table. "You're going to sell me . . . already . . . ?" Apprehension flared.

"Better the Devil you know than the one you don't, darling?" The warm feminine voice was vibrant with understanding. "Cheer up. You're not in disgrace."

"Didn't Leonie like me?"

"The little baggage liked you too much. In fact she's locked in a cage right now for being vulgarly importunate. As for me, I adore you."

"Then why?"

"How would you like to be a free woman again?" Mr. Foyle's soft query was like a small bomb.

Susan's wail was one of genuine distress. "But I can't! The money's gone. I can't give it back."

"Suppose you didn't have to?"

Susan sat very still. Her mind raced. Visions of freedom jostled incredulity. Her bafflement, mirrored on her face, prompted Adrian's further amused explanation.

"The fact is, Miss Carmody, there was a chap at the auction who saw a possibility in you. He was not authorized to bid at that time, but has since convinced his superiors to make Mrs. Wakelyn an offer for your, er, person. The offer is contingent on your willingness to be a party to the service they require of you."

"What do they want?"

"I think the word 'courier' would cover the assignment. There would be danger. At this moment they wish you to deliver something in London."

"England?"

"Yes. Make a nice trip for you. Everything paid."

"But then . . . I wouldn't be a slave. I could, well, just walk away and not come back."

"In theory, yes. But it would not be advisable. There would be penalties."

"I'd be caught and . . . and . . . punished?"

"Yes." Adrian Foyle's cheerful face sobered. "Within the framework of what is required of you, you would be very free indeed. In fact, Privileged. But step beyond your terms of reference and retributions would be swift and certain."

"I'd be no good at cloak and dagger."

"That's why they want you. Believe me, they know."

"But I've no experience. What if—?"

"Forget it. Your problem is yourself."

"You mean confidence?" Susan asked doubtfully.

"More than that, Miss Carmody." The pleasant male voice was serious. "For instance, at this moment, your feet are chained. You are naked, a metal collar is locked upon your neck. These things rob you of decision, relieve you of responsibility. We propose to take away these nice safe guides and replace them with a frightening freedom."

"I'd be done with chains and being tied up, not whipped?" Susan could not keep elation from her voice.

"Not entirely. I expect there would be interim periods."

Humor flickered briefly. "You mean, after I returned from a . . . a job, someone would lock me up again with a collar and chain?"

"Yes."

It was too preposterous! Adrian's simple affirmative evoked a picture purely ludicrous. Susan's indignation burst its bonds. "I'd be a retriever: locked in its kennel between hunts!"

Her outburst drew chuckles. "That's apt enough," Adrian admitted. "Wouldn't have put it just that way myself. Let's say you'd return to the fold."

Susan pounced with logic. "But that's crazy! If they trust me to go abroad all alone, why couldn't I be trusted here?"

"It's not a matter of trusting, darling," Thedra intervened. "These periods when you're . . . well, sequestered. They'll keep you in balance. Besides, you're a very real asset, y'know. I expect they'll find other functions for you as well as popping billet–doux here and there around the world."

"You mean they'll use my body!"

"I'm afraid a body like yours is bound to be utilized, one way or another," Adrian reasoned. "Actually, y'know, your loveliness is what this whole business is all about. Beauty sets a girl apart, she can never be exactly like the rest."

Susan resumed eating. It was useless to sit and stare in disbelief. It would be foolish to reject hastily.

Memory of the previous day when Leonie's cane had cut so relentlessly at her nakedness, and Thedra's whip had compelled obedience were still vivid. Just suppose . . . but a word hovered in her mind. She pounced on it.

"You spoke of danger?"

"Smart girl! That's the nub of course. No pretty secretary is going to take the job. It has to be someone, well, dedicated."

"Or coerced!"

"If you like. It's an honest offer. You can reject it."

"I won't be angry, darling. I'll be flattered. And adore whipping you." Thedra's voice mocked softly.

An irritable motion elicited metallic clinks from the chain between the captive's ankles. Susan flushed in chagrin at her helplessness. She suddenly longed to cry. It would be nice to lay her head on Thedra's shoulder and quietly sob away her frustration. She acknowledged, whimsically, that Mr. Foyle's immaculate shoulder would also be acceptable. She thrust back the tears by demanding: "Is this thing you want me to do outside the law? Could I be arrested?"

"You might be arrested. But not for any reason you'd suppose. The danger I spoke of would come from what we might describe as 'the other side.' You'll be briefed on how to avoid attention."

"I might be grabbed . . . kidnapped?"

"Yes."

"Then I'd be punished?"

"That's not quite the word."

In a flash, she understood. "I'd be tortured! For information? That's it, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"But I wouldn't know anything . . ."

"That's correct."

"Not much of a prospect for a girl!"

"Not looked at negatively, as you are doing. I can only tell you the risk is light. Its degree is largely dependent on your skill," Adrian shrugged deprecatingly. "I have to ask you for a bit of optimism. Competently handled, you are being offered a most attractive and exciting alternative."

"You might never be whipped again, darling," Thedra insinuated.

Susan faced her owner. "Do you want me to say yes?"

"I suppose I do." Thedra said reflectively. She motioned to her guest. "We're sort of a family. I know where you're going and what you'll do. It dwarfs what you'd do here. I can easily buy another girl for that little minx of mine to cane and play with. If you face the . . . responsibility. If you can cope with that I'd like you to say yes."

"But I don't want to go away from you!"

The spontaneous exclamation surprised even the girl who had uttered it. Susan blushed in a realization of what she had said, and its implication. Adrian's proposal had precipitated a discovery she had not been ready to recognize. Sheepishly, she gazed from one to the other of her companions.

"It need not be forever, darling." Thedra's eyes glowed.

"I can buy you back."

"But all that money!"

"Don't worry, pet. I'll manage. Won't I Adrian?"

"Mrs. Wakelyn can manage anything," said Mr. Foyle.

"Very well then," said Susan decisively. "When do I start?"

CHAPTER FOUR

The Tale of Torture

Susan's breasts burned importantly. In the bra of each there nestled a fold of aluminium foil. She had not been told what the folds contained, nor did she ask. She was thankful her mission was not drugs. She settled herself comfortably in her window seat and, for the first time, felt a touch of the pleasurable excitement Adrian had promised. She watched the runway recede beneath the wings as the plane abandoned its pod. It was her first journey across an ocean.

It was not first class. Ostentation must be avoided. That was one of the first precepts. She was a reasonably pretty girl going about her affairs. She could flirt, or be cold and distant as she pleased. There must be no false spectacles or wigs or any of that nonsense. Be herself.

Susan thought of them as 'They'. The cautious eyes and sober tongues had little in common with her 'nice young man'. Adrian Foyle fraternized with an easy familiarity. But these men were different. Again, the word 'dedicated' came to mind. They worked with a purpose of which she was now a part. Along with the mundane briefing they had told her of what to expect if she played them false. Her assurance that she would never willingly betray them had been heartfelt. She was still a captive. But her prison had no bars.

Above the clouds, her mind returned with a nostalgic inconsistence to Thedra. Thedra Wakelyn had placed upon her a hand she would forever feel. Watching the canyons and pinnacles of mist, Thedra's slave reviewed her brief slavery and wondered at its impact upon her psyche. She wished her former owner beside her now in the vacant seat. Even the impish Leonie could now be seen in an irrational glow of nostalgia. An amused recollection of their last moments together played itself over and over in Susan's memory.

"Don't laugh, smarty pants."

The flushed and petulant teenage features had peered through the silver bars of the cage, to which small chained hands clung as though longing to tear them asunder. Leonie's face betrayed reproach, shame, and frustration. "I'll get you in here one day," she promised dourly.

Susan had been in an expansive mood, the excitation of freedom was heady stuff. "One day I'll come and visit and let you put me in there just for fun," she promised, then added: "Providing I have your word you'll let me go in time for dinner."

"I'll never let you go," the naked Leonie had asserted vehemently. "You think you're getting away now. But I'll keep after Mama until she buys you back again. You'll see! I bet those people won't want you always."

There had been an earnestness about the caged teenagers features and her voice, to place a check on Susan's exuberance. The child might know something. Anything was possible. "What do those people call themselves?" she asked winningly.

"If you don't know, I'm not going to tell you," Leonie affirmed stoutly. "They're nasty. I wish Mumsie didn't have anything to do with them."

Susan's heart quickened. She had learned something. But hope Of further insight was quenched by the captive's sulky addition:

"I shouldn't have said that. I'm not supposed to tell things. Promise you won't fink on me?"

It was an easy promise to make. In uncharacteristic humility the youthful prisoner had edged her nudity round so as to display her small tight derriere to the curious eyes of her former slave.

"See what I got for putting up a battle to keep you," she declaimed plaintively.

The scarlet bars were vivid on the youthful skin. There were a lot of them. Leonie's fight for her convictions had cost her dear. Susan had felt a surge of sympathy for the vibrant child, but confined

her response to: "How long do you have to stay in that cage?"

"All day," Leonie sniffed. "Gosh, I wish you weren't going."

"Do you get caned often? That must have hurt terribly."

"Course I do! That's why Mumsie and I wanted you. We still want you. Don't be fooled by how she seems, she'll get you back. You'll see."

"Just so you can cane my bottom all day long? It's not much to look forward to, is it?"

"You'd get to like it. I know you would!" The young voice held all the rings of conviction.

"But how could I! It's such a beastly pain. After the first couple of blows I just can't stand it." Susan felt a need to convince this engaging moppet of a fact of life.

"You're new. That's all the trouble with you. I like it, at least I do if Mumsie doesn't hit me too hard. She really laid it on though when I argued over you. I've got a sore fanny to sit on."

The nymphet in the cage had twisted back into what comfort she could find. "Please, darling, say you'll work like crazy to get back to me. I'll make you happy. I promise."

"By keeping me chained and hurting me everyday?"

"Don't be silly, Susan. You keep harping about getting your bottom caned. It's no big thing. 'Sides, you know how I can make you feel good"

"Oh that!"

"Oh, Susan, you know we'd have the grandest times. We would! We would!"

Some of the child's sincerity had slipped through the bars and touched her heart. Susan wondered if indeed she could become addicted to daily punishments rewarded nightly by ardent lips. Uneasily, she realized how the Wakelyn mansion might come to seem a warm feminine haven when compared with whatever hazards lay ahead.

"I expect you are having troubled thoughts, Miss Carmody?"

The quiet male voice jolted Susan back from reverie. One of the two empty seats now held a man. Instead of dismay, her small thrill of excitement was faintly pleasurable. This was the beginning. She loaded her voice heavily with ice.

"My thoughts are my own, and they're my business." His appearance was gravely attractive: solemn! Too meticulously dressed to be ordinary. He was absorbing her tart retort with polite amusement.

"Our world is overtaxed, Miss Carmody. Even our thoughts are jostled and exposed."

"If you have a seat, I suggest you return to it."

He sighed. "Please! Our journey is tedious. Let us amuse each other with conversation. We could discuss those small treasures warm against your breasts."

Susan's cheeks flamed. But her heart plummeted. Her adventure had scarcely begun, yet already she was delivered to the enemy. He was strangely similar to those for whom she worked. Her 'our side' in this nonsensical charade. Instinctively, she used woman's finest weapon.

"If you touch me I'll scream!"

"Of course." His voice was warm in agreement. "But can we not say the battle has been joined: let us enjoy a quiet skirmish."

Susan felt silly. He could not assault her here. He was one of those men who seem eminently civilized. Curiosity quenched her fears. Her breasts tingled at thought of his knowledge of them. "What have we to talk about?" she asked cautiously.

"Your employers. And, if you wish, mine."

"Let's start with yours. Who are they?"

"A group deeply involved in something they believe in."

"That covers mine too," said Susan firmly. "Let's think of something else."

Susan felt sure he was laughing at her. But what did it matter! The enjoyable excitation was still at work. She scrutinized him more closely. Not bad! Not bad at all!

"There is a possible difference," her companion continued suavely. "One of our associates is a man named Ducros. He's a specialist of sorts. You're not likely to meet him under his real name. When a meeting does take place he will wish to study you, assess your temperament. He has found these appraisals most helpful in his work."

"And what's his work?" enquired affably.

"Mr. Ducros is a torturer."

Should she laugh! The man in the next seat was not American. Different nationals laughed at different things. She parted with a small sideways smile and sardonically suggested:"Do tell me more."

"Quite often in Man's higher endeavors loyalties conflict," the quiet voice intoned. "When this happens communication is emotionally blocked. Mr. Ducros clears away the impediment."

"You've just said something awful, and made it sound like going to the doctor for a pill. I suspect you're clever at that sort of thing." Susan's pulse was racing. "You're giving me a message, aren't you?"

He smiled warmly. "You have a proverb: 'If the cap fits . . .' How simple it would be for you to now retire to the privacy of a restroom and on your return here hand me those trifles you wear so near your heart."

"I suppose it's impossible for you to believe you have the wrong girl and that I don't know what you're talking about?"

He did not bother to answer, but continued pleasantly. "Mr. Ducros never fails in an assignment. His prior study of his subject enables him to achieve our goals infallibly, sometimes with astoundingly little damage."

"I may not be maimed for life?" Susan asked brightly. He refused to be drawn. He was a man with a purpose.

"Maiming is rare," he continued conversationally. "Mutilations and disfigurements are more common. Disfigurement is particularly stimulating to the female tongue."

"I may lose a nose, or an ear?"

The solemn features relaxed. "You do not take me quite seriously, Miss Carmody. A little credence but not enough. Mr. Ducros tells me this resistance to reality often sustains female subjects right through the binding or strapping process to the point where she is stripped. It appears that, for many of your sex, reality begins only when she has lost her clothes."

Feeling she had nothing to lose, Susan introduced a note of practicality. "Why doesn't he let the girls take off their own clothes themselves before they get . . . well, fastened? Their things must get all torn."

"A most feminine thought." The male voice approved. "It is the very disaster you have discerned which makes the act of callous stripping by male hands so very potent. The lady sees her treasure rent and torn at the same moment the cold air embraces her most cherished secrets and exposes them to painful persuasion."

"That's as close as you have come to calling a spade a spade."

"Thank you. My hope is that by the end of our delightful conversation reason will triumph."

"But you know it won't! You're just trying to frighten me half to death. Will you stop now or must I hear more?"

"Mr. Ducros has known cases well wherein a female subject has become cooperative even before

completion of the stripping process. Nudity has strange significances for women. Men are less concerned by being bared. Though, even there . . ."

"It's nice to know all I need to do is take off my bra."

"Humor sustains us, Miss Carmody. But not after the rope bites the wrist and the strap is buckled around the ankle."

"I'll remember not to laugh."

The male eyes glinted, perhaps not entirely with amusement. "Mr. Ducros will aid your resolution. His work is rarely interrupted by chuckles. For your reassurance I may mention the success he has been having, particularly with young women, of electrodes clipped to the nipples and the lips of the vagina. The current can precisely match their obstinacy."

"Mr. Ducros sounds wonderfully considerate."

"He is! He achieves an end. Then stops."

"I'd always supposed there were whips and hot irons and such?"

"You should not jest about such things, Miss Carmody. They are actually employed. Mr. Ducros tells me the whip, like nudity, has a disproportionate potency for young women like yourself. In your case, I believe you have some prior knowledge . . ."

"If I have been whipped, I'm certainly not going to tell you about it."

"I am sure you wear stripes most charmingly. They are, of course, a basic approach to communication. Mr. Ducros finds suggestion and suspense a real ally also. I am inclined to believe in your case, and considering your beauty, he would make this approach. He might suspend you nude and allow you to contemplate his chosen instrument: the whip, the glowing brazier, certain devices. Quite often reason triumphs in such solitude."

"And when may I look forward to this novelty?"

Male disapproval of such levity swept over Susan in waves. "I would suppose quite soon after our arrival at Heathrow, Miss Carmody. You will be taken under our wing in some unostentatious manner and introduced into quite a new experience."

"You mean I'll be kidnapped?"

"Briefly sequestered, Miss Carmody."

"But I can save my skin now by a short visit to the restroom?"

"A compliance I strongly advise."

Susan paused. The safety of her seat in the plane had sustained her ebullience. The outrageous pictures painted for her by the man at her side were made abstract by the hum of the jets. But there was no doubt in her mind that a man named Ducros existed and that he would make her scream in agony should it be expedient for him to do so. But first she must be captured and whisked away. Reason told her the whole conversation could be a hoax, a test, a cheap bluff costing nothing and which might frighten a girl alone into parting with the objects she was employed to cherish. As a conventional gambit she offered the thought:

"But hasn't it occurred to you that the . . . the . . . other side must have their own Mr. Ducros too and that he's probably just as adept at discomfort as yours. Between the two of you I haven't much to look forward to, have I?"

"You do concede, then, that you are a courier?"

"Good heavens no!" Susan sparkled at him brightly. "You wanted to talk, and I've listened. I've really been very polite considering the subjects you discuss. I get the impression some poor girl is in for a bad time. If I was positive you're serious I'd pass the word to the Captain."

The man beside her parted with his third heavy and regretful sigh. "You are a brave young woman. Your employers are most fortunate."

"I have no employers."

"Ducros will be honored to attend you."

"Tell me more. He sounds fascinating. Such a remarkable hobby!"

The grave eyes glinted, the stern mouth relaxed. "Ducros is like the rest of us, governed by time. He is an artist who has no wish to ruin the canvas on which he works. Given time he will cherish it. But under the spur of urgency he must sometimes bring to a conclusion an endeavor he could otherwise prolong for days."

"He enjoys his work. I get the point."

"But do not deceive yourself that his interest in his female subjects is purely sexual. He is by no means immune to the poignancy of their charms in pain, but he is primarily a craftsman whose purpose is twofold . . to establish communication and to preserve the marketability of the subject."

"Marketability!" Susan's pulse pounded anew.

"We can hardly cast the young ladies to the mercy of an unkind world, Miss Carmody. Besides, we find the income derived from their sale a useful aid in defraying costs."

"You mean you sell the poor girls off as slaves or to a brothel or something?" Susan began to hope this was a hoax after all.

"We sell them to people of great wealth who can afford the luxury of a personal slave. There are a surprising number of buyers. Your own value on this market would be impressive."

"It's nice to know I can expect preferred treatment under torture."

"Exactly. In your case we must give Ducros time. He may simply sit you astride the Horse until you find yourself desirous of speech."

"I've read of that. A girl sits on the edge of a plank?"

"It is usually effective within hours. The tedium of suspension by her thumbs is also helpful without permanent injury."

"Is it just girls who get into these fun and games? Doesn't Mr. Ducros bestow his attentions on men sometimes?"

"Of course. But a surprising number of young women are employed in ways that bring them to his attention. You are female, thus I present your point of view." The grey eyes twinkled. "I have no doubt Ducros will be inspired by your nakedness."

It was too bizarre! But, true or false, Susan decided she had nothing to lose by banter. "Well then, given a bit of time, couldn't I have something painless? Locked in a cage or a dungeon or something and fed bread and water until I thought up some cock and bull story for you?"

"This has been done. There would, of course, be only water, no bread. There would also be no heat and you would be nude. Ducros doesn't favor the method. It takes time, the subject is apt to contract pneumonia, and quite often she does indeed concoct some misleading piece of fiction in her effort to earn release."

"I'm sure I'd talk within twenty four hours. I hate to shiver."

"I will mention this to Ducros, Miss Carmody. In the meantime the restrooms are still at the end of the aisle?"

"How convenient. But I don't need to go, thank you."

"You are quite delightful and quite perverse, Miss Carmody. A short session with Ducros would benefit you enormously. I begin to favor his painless speciality wherein the young lady is forced to kneel naked by a wall to which she is chained by her neck at a level which prohibits her either standing up or laying down. She cannot even sit. You would look most charming and the kneeling pose would be beneficially humbling to your libido."

"You do put things so well." Susan looked at him archly. "I'm sure that one would get me talking in a couple of days."

"Do not forget the nights, Miss Carmody. The darkness gives no comfort to your bare knees upon the stone."

Horror in perfect English! No four letter word, no brutal threat! The studiously correct flow of pedantic speech was at once reassuring and frightening. Beneath its flow her femaleness was rampant. A new dimension had been added to its vulnerability. The phallic threat and torture! The phallus had not been mentioned, but a girl hanging naked from her thumbs was scarcely likely to be left inviolate. And the torture! The rending or mortification of her flesh! In a delayed summation of her companion's dialogue, Susan shuddered. It could happen to her!

"There was the young woman we can name Olga." The male voice continued cheerfully. "Olga became our guest a year ago and was introduced to Ducros on her first day. Because of her extreme beauty the most subtle approach to frankness was employed. Olga spent her first twenty four hours with us in a tiny compartment affording standing room only and a chilly temperature to her nakedness. On release, she collapsed but contrived to spit in Mr. Ducros's face."

"Good for her!" said Susan valiantly.

"Quite so. She was superb material. It was with regret Ducros tied her hands and suspended her so that her toes swung an inch above the floor. He then whipped her bare skin."

"Seems a kindly sort of chap. Was the poor dear grateful?"

"Alas, no. She screamed lustily and without shame, but held steadfastly to the overworked fiction she had nothing to impart."

"She quite likely hadn't."

"Ducros had selected one of the less severe whips, one that would not cut her flesh to leave the tell tale white lines forever. Such a choice is not as merciful to the subject as it might seem. It enables her to be whipped steadily over long periods of time without the release of unconsciousness."

"So thoughtful. I shall be in good hands."

"It is very taxing to the spirit to be steadily and relentlessly whipped. Olga writhed and howled exquisitely and her torso became most attractively striped, but she was hanging limply and glistening with sweat before she provided us with certain details."

"Poor kid! You're a lot of absolute S.O.Bs."

"I fear Olga thought this when she was left to hang while her information was verified. It is always a disappointment to our subjects to discover release is not instant upon disclosure. The whipping stops but they remain available in case their verity proves false."

"You think of everything." Susan hoped her store of satire would prove adequate to the demands of these disclosures.

"Mr. Ducros thinks of everything," the male voice reproved. "Olga pleaded most eloquently for release, or at least to be allowed contact with the floor. But Mr. Ducros's instinct warned him to be adamant. That instinct was verified. Olga had not told the truth."

In the pause by which her companion strove to dramatize Olga's plight Susan had a vivid vision of herself in such a quandary. How terrible it would be to know yourself discovered and to face the inevitable wrath and retribution. To hang, naked and quivering and helpless while others devised the agonies by which she would pay the dues of deceit. She realized the faintly foreign voice was beginning to capture her imagination. It was all too easy to believe this stranger was speaking directly of herself. Perhaps he was!

"Pity and mercy don't enter into this, I suppose?" She wished her remark were more flippant.

"Mr. Ducros continued to apply the whip," the quiet voice continued, "but it had become evident Olga had resigned herself to being lashed into oblivion. She had contrived that mental block so many subjects manage to raise as a defence against both pain and reason. It was time for this brave but misguided girl to understand the versatility of Ducros's art."

"Don't you ever get ashamed or nauseated?" Susan felt this retort apt and timely.

"Olga was now strapped tight and well spread out to the 'X' frame which would hold her during the application of current. She moaned steadily as the clips were snapped on her nipples, but said no

word. It was not until Ducros fingered open her vagina and positioned a pair of jaws within that her pleadings became truly impressive. Her sentiments were stimulated by Ducros's verbal explanation, not strictly truthful, that the surge of current from this particular clip must inevitably render her most sensitive bud a dead thing without feeling or response."

"You're not making me like you, y'know." Susan grimaced at him in distaste. "If it's any satisfaction to you, I'll say right now that if you did these awful things to me I'd tell you anything I knew, and then some. Couldn't we talk about the weather, or maybe you'd like to return to your seat."

"You could easily get rid of me by calling the stewardess," the man beside her pointed out reasonably. "Since you have not done so I must assume the story of Olga holds some interest. Olga was a remarkable girl. You remind me of her."

"So you look at me and enjoy a sadistic kick?"

"We had great hope that the bit upon Olga's clitoris would inspire communication." The male voice was undeterred. "But once again she found the mental adjustment by which she could renounce a part of her being and hide defiantly within the cocoon of agony nature appears to have provided to absorb the pangs of childbirth."

"Had you thought of writing a book?" Susan inquired acidly. "Your clinical knowledge of us girls shouldn't be lost."

"I shall never forget Olga's cry and the thrust of her muscles and tendons against the straps as Ducros engaged the switch." The man at Susan's side shook his head sadly. "She was incredible, both in her loveliness and in what she believed to be her renunciation of her most feminine treasure. She pleaded with us, of course, saying over and over between the surges of current Ducros spasmodically inflicted that she could tell us nothing. But that if we persisted in her torture she would lie again and as often as she must."

"I'd have thought this electric horror would ruin any girl. Doesn't it? I mean, you'd never be the same . . . ?"

"No, I assure you, a female is as marketable afterwards as she was before. However, with Olga, we realized we had not yet found her Achilles heel. Ducros was chagrined by so rare an error in assessment. I know it was with regret he set up the brazier and the irons."

"Olga must have felt flattered."

"The foolish girl was much perturbed. She fought furiously as she was released from the frame and strapped down firmly to a bench. Ducros followed that principle by which only those portions of the female anatomy to be seared were totally immobilized. Above the strap securing her waist Olga was free to make such motions as she pleased whilst suffering the burn of the iron. Her loins and haunches were harshly strictured, as were her knees and ankles. She could move nothing of herself below the leather band around her center. The curves and planes held motionless offered a most adequate field for the work of Ducros. It was the most appealing to behold the obstinate girl thrust against the bench with her free hands in an effort to raise and turn to observe what was being done to her, and to plead, over and over, her inability to tell us anything of value."

"I am sure you enjoyed yourselves immensely."

"Alas, you do not take me seriously, Miss Carmody. However, Olga was now taking Mr. Ducros very seriously indeed. Her charmingly striped torso was tense and quivering and her eyes were wide with apprehension as she watched her torturer place his irons and start to use the bellows to bring the coke to a fierce glow. I was surprised myself at its radiation of heat, and Ducros had ensured its placement sufficiently close to the bench that our unwilling guest felt its intensity to an even greater degree on her bare skin as it reflected its incandescence."

"Spare me no detail." said Susan acidly. "I'm surprised you didn't take pictures."

The grey eyes twinkled. A hand reached into a jacket pocket. Deft fingers sorted, then handed the startled girl the selected snapshot. Susan's shocked scrutiny beheld the exact scene the unctuous voice had described with such felicity. It was as though the wealed naked girl bound to the bench sought her eyes in a desperate need. With a shudder of distaste she handed the frightening exhibit back to its owner.

"Graphic, is it not," the male monologue resumed. "We took pains with the lighting, feeling certain this evidence must weigh heavily with other young women eligible for similar attention."

"You oversell," Susan affirmed without conviction. "That picture was probably posed."

"The rest room does not seem a desirable alternative?"

"No. I think you've overplaying the entire act."

Her companion produced one more eloquent sigh. "You must forgive a coloration of opera bouffe, Miss Carmody, when I tell of Mr. Ducros's choice of maiden flesh for the imprint of iron. It was upon the softest rotundity of Olga's delightful derriere that the first brand was to quench its smoking heat.

"The poor dear wouldn't be able to sit down for weeks!" Susan was uncertain whether to laugh or call the Captain.

"Exactly. She would carry a constant reminder of her obduracy, a fresh reprimand each time she used a chair. But Ducros's choice carried a far more subtle implication. Yes, it seems that Ducros's choice almost always does. It is bad enough for a girl to be branded on one cheek of her bottom, but since she possesses two of them side by side it is logical to suppose that one will be treated as fairly as the other. If girlish courage can endure one, can it contemplate a repetition on the other side of the cleft. Is it not reasonable to suppose her whole spirit would revolt and communication commence."

"I really don't know. I'd have been telling you fairy tales when you first lit the fire."

"Mr. Ducros ensured maximum suspense. We hoped sight of the iron would work its magic without need for it to sear the waiting helpless curves. But Olga rejected reason. I shall never forget her face as the branding instrument was withdrawn from the brazier and carried to the fulfillment of its destiny. Her scream as it began its deep burn into her flesh went on and on as Ducros maintained a steady pressure and counted to the requisite five. When he withdrew the now dull metal, I was astounded at the exquisitely bizarre result. Olga would bear the symbol of our organization for life. A symbol she would be called upon to explain to her various purchasers in times to come. A branded bottom is an intriguing eroticism for a man to discover on his slave."

"You mean these poor girls get sold again and again?"

"Of course. Unless you can bestow love on one of your owners he, or she, will tire of you and sell you to someone for whom your charms are still a novelty. You could be sold twenty times, Miss Carmody, before ending up as a kitchen drudge."

Susan shivered. "Don't be personal," she said with acerbity. "I'm not going to be sold to anyone."

"But you already have been sold, twice. Have you forgotten?"

Susan blushed. She had forgotten. The plane and the journey had dissolved awareness of her thralldom. This man's reminder made her feel small and alone in a friendless world. Cringingly, she heard the male voice continue.

"Olga did not faint. Girls do not faint as easily as reputed. Some never faint at all. She made short and terrible sounds as we stood back to await her decision. She had pounded her small fists and writhed amazingly while the iron was within her, but now she lay with her head buried in the curve of an arm. Her sobs were continuous. Her brand compelled a fascination from which it was hard to tear our gaze."

"No doubt you both had erections."

"It is indeed strange, this link between female pain and male lust," the sober voice mused. "You are correct, we knew concupiscence. But it was incidental to our quest for truth. Mr. Ducros enjoys the privilege of sexually using his subjects as he pleases. But it is a perquisite of his office, nothing more."

"I suppose that rape by any other name."

"We may safely assume that for Olga any sexual use of her person Mr. Ducros might indulge would seem of very secondary concern. We have known instances where the young woman welcomed the vivid contrasts of sensation, a respite from reality hopefully prolonged."

"You regard it as a charitable act?" Susan's query was bitter.

"We digress, Miss Carmody. It is with regret I must tell of Olga's intransigence. Her other cheek was soon smoking beneath the iron. Her cries were peals of agony–"

"Look here, I've had enough of this!"

The exclamation burst from Susan's tongue in utter revulsion. She felt guilt at her curiosity in lending an ear to such a chronicle. Enough was enough. True or false, she wanted no more. Trembling with more than one emotion she turned on the man in the next seat. "Please go. If you don't I shall make a complaint."

He assessed her anger, and nodded quietly at what he saw. With obvious reluctance he rose, then stood looking down at her with his guarded smile of amusement. "Thank you for listening. I did not mean to be a bore."

Susan flushed. "You are not a bore and you know it! But please go, Mr . . . . Mr . . ."

The smile widened as its owner turned to leave. "We shall meet again, Miss Carmody," he said gently. "My name is Ducros."

CHAPTER FIVE

Whip and Crop and Cord

The paramount sensation of the naked girl hanging suspended by her wrists was, strangely, one of loneliness, a depthless solitude. The pain was secondary. The fear was a constant, separate and apart.

There had been a fearful inevitability about Susan's abduction. She felt shamed and humiliated by her thoughtless entry into the taxi wherein waited the man and the chloroform. London taxis looked so respectable, their drivers so remote.

There had been the same flavor of a rehearsed performance in her interrogation. She had drifted back to consciousness, a tumbled heap of girl upon a rug, in the center of a comfortable lounge. There had been three men and a woman. Their voices had dissolved the shadows of the anaesthetic.

"You sure she's the right girl? Doesn't look it."

A coarse cockney whine. "She's the one, Guv. Ain't no doubt."

Another male voice: "She's good stuff. At least we can get a good screw out of her."

"I get this one first." The feminine voice held authority. "You can amuse yourselves when I'm done with her."

"She'll be whacked out by then."

"Stow it. She's coming round."

She sat up. The faces reminded her of the auction. "Want a drink, luv?"

She felt far from the Stars and Stripes. The drink was Scotch, potent, making her choke. She sought for mercy in the watching eyes but found only a sardonic amusement.

"Hand it over." said the woman.

Susan remembered Olga, and knew herself lost. "Hand over what?" she asked vaguely.

"Oh, very well then!" The woman was impatient without rancour. "Take off your clothes."

The demand was in keeping with the script. Susan looked at the three pairs of interested male eyes. "What, here!" she exclaimed in feminine distaste.

"Yes, here. And now!"

"Couldn't the men leave?"

"The men won't leave. Undress."

The threat of force was implicit in the woman's voice. Susan slowly took off her shoes.

"Take yer time, luv." The cockney rasp was jaunty. Susan took her time. Each piece of herself was

avidly examined as she progressed to nudity. Panties and bra alone remaining, Susan turned to the woman. "Isn't this enough? You can feel . . . under if you want?"

"Strip and hand them over."

She parted with her last coverings, numb with shame.

Then watched, miserably, the discovery of the two pieces of foil.

"Where were you to deliver these?"

"I don't know. I was to be contacted."

"Where were you to be contacted?"

"The Albion Hotel."

They had surveyed her sorrowfully. "There's no such place, girl."

Her heart had plummeted. If her own side had betrayed her she was lost. These people would believe nothing. "That's the name," she pleaded. "The name they gave me: honest it is."

"What do you think, Nance?" A male was inclined to credence.

"Run these through the tests, Ronnie. If they're what we want, the girl doesn't matter."

Three sets of eyes had enjoyed her nakedness, their owner's comments irrelevant and vulgar.

"Stand up and let's have a look at you, lass."

She had obeyed, looking to Nance for a mercy that was not there. "Get your legs apart." was the woman's only comment.

Susan had separated her feet and stood, stony faced, as her pubic hair drew favourable comment. She flinched, but said nothing, as wise female fingers explored the wet sheath of her sex for that which might be hidden therein.

"We'll get something in there for you after awhile, lass. What say, Alf?"

"Aye, a proper bit of crumpet 'Erb."

"Take your minds off that," Nance had reproved. "There's other things you may have to do to her first." She sneered. "Or more likely me."

"Any gal you get talks. Pity you have to waste her on you," Herb said disgustingly.

She had stood before them, clothed in nothing but misery, her thoughts reverting to Ducros and the picture of the girl upon the bench. She wondered why he was not present. But now, hanging naked by her wrists, she recalled most vividly the return of Ronnie with the bits of foil and his disgusted disclosure.

"The clever bastards! Look what come out under the test." He handed the foil to Nance.

There was an electric moment before the woman read in a brief monotone: "This girl is a decoy. She knows nothing."

There had come a moment's gladness knowing she had not been betrayed after all. But it was dampened by the dour expressions of four enemies who now were uncertain of her and of what to believe.

"Think she's as innocent as she looks!"

"We can always find out."

there had followed a discussion, in which her body and the possible profit of its agonies had been clinically assessed. At the end of it she had been brought to this room, her hands had been bound, and she had been suspended from that binding until her toes could no longer reach the floor. They had left her alone, going away with some quiet knowledge and intent of their own. She had found nothing to say by which to impress them. The woman had said coldly: "You can always talk, dearie, if you want

your feet back on the floor. It's that simple."

It had been long ago, or so it seemed to a naked Susan whose wrists were on fire and whose arms and shoulders cried their protest at being wracked by her captive weight, but perhaps it had not been long at all. She knew time would pass slowly in her predicament. At first she had kicked and strained, seeking an impossible easement or release. But she now hung limp and without hope, knowing that any motion hurt. It was more terrible than she would have supposed:

The closed door and the room, empty save for herself and the rope from which she hung. She could do nothing, cherish no hope. Stretched thus she was more naked than standing on her feet. She could easily be given pain. All she could do would be to writhe uselessly and scream. She supposed that quite soon Ducros would enter with his skills. She did not want him to see her naked like this. She loathed the thought. She wondered if he would become more animated as he tortured her.

After what seemed an infinity of time Nance came. "Want your feet on the ground dearie?"

"Will it be Ducros?" Susan faced the inevitable.

"Who's Ducros?" The sour query sounded sincere.

"The torturer. The man on the plane–"

"Someone's been pulling your leg, love." Nance was amused. "I'll do all the torturing you've any need of. You've hung there an hour. How'd you like twenty–three more?"

"Oh don't. Oh no!" Susan knew not what to say. "If I knew anything I'd tell you. I'm no heroine. They simply told me nothing, in fact why should they if I was only a dupe!

"You've been whipped. They have to do that to make you take the job?"

"Yes, oh yes!"

"I can whip you too, you know."

"I know you can. But, oh please, don't It's such a beastly pain."

Nance studied the helpless nudity awaiting her pleasure. "I'll whip you when I'm ready," she conceded. "In the meantime you can just hang there. Likely enough you'll find something to say. I'll bring you water next time. It's all you'll get."

The loneliness returned, almost tangible in the solitude. With it came the terrible knowledge that even had she wished to blurt out a secret there was none to hear. She would hang in this silence for hour after hour! With nothing to impart at all the threat of the twenty–three more hours became a promise. It would happen! Susan wept, brushing her wet lashes against the strained bare arms between which her head was prisoned. Why oh why had she ever sold herself into slavery! That first interview with Adrian Foyle seemed a million miles away.

It was Nance who came again. She carried a bundle her captive recognized. Without preamble she loosed the rope and untied the numb hands.

"Get dressed."

"It's just a trick. Oh please!" Susan could not believe.

"Don't be silly, Do as I say."

Susan dressed.

"Put your hands behind your back. I have to tie you and you'll wear a blindfold. Don't make a fuss. You've no reason to."

Susan obeyed. "Ouch, you're hurting." She protested as thin cord cut her wrists.

"It's not for long. Bear it." Nance's voice held disappointment.

The blindfold was frightening and total. Hands guided her. There was the smell of a car and the sound of the motor. The ride was not long. At the end of it a knife cut one strand on her bonds. She was thrust out of the vehicle and on to her feet. The motor receded. By the time she had struggled her hands free and removed the cloth from her eyes there was nothing to see except one of those leafy cul

–de–sacs common to London and in which she stood alone with none to see. At her feet were her small case and her handbag. She was free, and intact, and lost.

The car turned slowly into the dead end, but with purpose. Susan watched its approach with suspicion. When it stopped and Adrian Foyle emerged she was quite sure she was dreaming. It was a lovely dream. She flung her arms around his neck and clung.

"I thought we might do the Tower of London and The National Gallery while we're over here." He said diffidently. "Pity to waste the time."

Her cell was just as promised. The collar and chain were a pleasant surprise. The collar was of shining silver and the chain which linked it to the wall was light. It allowed Susan to walk within a, foot of the cell door and to look out of the cell window if she wanted to take the trouble to stand on her cot. The view was unrewarding, it was a brick wall. She was the 'retriever' in its kennel, awaiting its next hunt.

Her owners seemed pleased. They assured her she had done a good job and would be rewarded by not being whipped. They explained that most girls made a mistake or two and were deserving of a few strokes. They offered the hope she might continue as she had begun. When she asked if it was really necessary to chain her in a cell they appeared not to hear.

Susan was still glowing. Adrian Foyle was more than ever a 'nice young man.' Their time together in London, and then on the plane home, had been pure delight. That he was vague in answering questions and had the faculty of appearing and disappearing without explanation was a disability Susan was prepared to live with. He was her anchor in a stormy sea. He had apologized in advance for this new and innocuous incarceration in the cell, pointing out her prior knowledge of it. It seemed his association with her present owners did not countenance directives as to their treatment of a girl they had bought and paid for. It was utterly bizarre and eminently civilized.

Susan sat on her cot and played reflectively with her silver chain. From time to time she fingered her silver collar, a purely feminine exploration rather than a revolt against its coercion. Escape was not on her mind. She did not yearn for it. Her speculations were entirely related to what might happen when she was released from the collar and her cell. She was sure it would be nothing mundane; its main hazard being that she might fail to please and would then be whipped. It seemed a bit unfair, but 'they' had gravely reiterated their conviction that it was the only way by which she could maintain a viable attitude to what was required of her. She was, after all, only a slave and had best not forget the fact.

Discounting the cell, the chain and nudity, 'They' were not unkind. She had been given books and magazines and told to ask for other things she might desire. She might not get them all but she was free to ask. 'They' were mostly represented by her jailer, a cheerful insouciant girl in her thirties who contrived a workable blend of bonhomie and stern authority, a girl whose view of the incredible made it commonplace. Her name was Ingrid. Ingrid carried a riding crop, a vicious object which she laughingly claimed was for effect only.

She really had yet to use it. But Susan sensed her intent, or perhaps a warning was coming in some way. The chained girl eyed its whippy menace now as it dangled from Ingrid's wrist beneath the tray. "Thought we'd have a coffee klatch, sweetheart, while I fill you in on a few odds and ends." Its owner announced cordially.

Susan perked with the coffee and her jailer's casual assumption of normalcy. "That's nice," she responded, gratefully. "Now about taking off my collar?"

"Naughty, naughty!" Ingrid reproved. "That merits about five licks. But you're new, so we'll let it pass. Watch it though. You're supposed to meekly accept whatever happens here between assignments."

"Will I always be . . . fastened?"

"Sure, it's been explained to you. Believe me, the theory of keeping you in a proper state of mind isn't as nuts as it may seem."

"Would you really use that awful thing on me if I wasn't meek enough?"

"Want to test me?"

They laughed, but Susan had got a message. "Is that why I'm kept naked: so's it hurts more?"

"That, and to keep you handily available."

"For the men?"

"And for me, sweetheart. Your fringe is one of my benefits. You're quite special when you're naked – or didn't you know."

Susan sipped and felt strangely at ease. The collar, the crop, and Ingrid imposed a warm maternal influence of security. She recalled a line of verse: "Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever." All she had to do was be meek and obedient. There was much to be said for it.

"I'm sort of shivery scared," she admitted. "I know I sold my . . . well, my rights. But I've never been available before, honest I haven't I'm going to have to work at being sweet about it."

"Even with me?" Ingrid's smile was wide. "Well . . . I've never done it with a girl."

"My, I've got a virgin!" Ingrid was jubilant. "It's so lovely the first time with girls."

"Do we start after coffee?" Susan's voice was resolute but she was trembling.

"'Fraid not." Ingrid's grin was quizzical. "You've got your self another job." She shrugged regretfully. "Whatever virginity you've got has to go along with you."

"What! A lecherous old man?"

"How'd you guess! Not that he's that old. Bowser Bullstrode's somewhere in his fifties. He's an overgrown puppy dog without a tail. If he had one it would wag constantly. He's plumpish, pleasant and amusing, and sometimes very cruel."

Susan surveyed a new picture and did not much care for it. "You mean I'm rented out to him for his enjoyment? I thought these people who own me now did more serious things than run an out call service?"

Ingrid poured more coffee. "It's more serious than that. Bullstrode's an influence peddler, he's got a lot of it, along with a pile of money."

"He'll use me, then send me back here?"

"Not that simple, dear. You're going to do some numbers for him. I'll go along to make sure you do 'em right. Bowser's a bit ritualistic and easily gets into a snit over trifles."

"Am I delivered bound and gagged?"

"Do you wish to be?"

The quiet question was startling. Ingrid was being kind. Susan realized it might be less emotionally taxing to be rendered helpless than to walk free. "I'll be meek and obedient," she chose firmly. "If you'll promise to hold my hand. And now, can I have another cup of coffee?"

"You're a darling." Ingrid sighed, almost with regret. "If you keep on like this I'll never get to whip you at all."

"I don't mind a bit," said Susan demurely.

"But I do, sweetheart," Ingrid declaimed, ardently. "You're the most beautifully whippable creature I've ever seen."

Susan recognized sincerity. She shivered, but it was from neither cold nor fear . . . .

Except for the bright blue eyes, Bowser Bullstrode was reassuring. Not tall, silky white hair, a pink face, a plumpish person. He seemed designed for smoking jackets and heavily baroque apartments. The double whiskey was as much a part of him as was the massive mansion in which the air was warmer than it need have been. He beamed at his maiden sacrifice above his glass.

"Do me a nice strip, m'dear," he encouraged heartily. "No better way to get acquainted."

"D'you want me naked too, Bowser?" Ingrid inquired. She sounded bored.

"No, love. Our little treasure here will show up better for the contrast. Pour yourselves drinks while Trixie gets bare."

"Her name's Susan."

"And very nice too!" Bowser approved. "Have you had to whip her?"

"She hasn't needed it. Remember, she originated from Winthrop's."

"Of course, of course! Marvellous institution. Glad I've got a few shares. I'll bet you're happy with your decision, young woman?"

The question caught Susan disposing of her dress and reaching shrinkingly for her bra. She paused only briefly for her answer. "I suppose I am . . . except I'm scared to death half the time," she hesitated awkwardly. "What should I call you? I mean, what title?"

"Address Mr. Bullstrode as, sir," Ingrid advised tersely.

"Lovely bush. Mind if I feel?"

With flaming cheeks, Susan separated her legs and stood tense while a pudgy hand explored her pubic hair with knowing fingers. Over the bent white head she tried to return Ingrid's amused smile. She noted, with mixed feelings, that Ingrid's slender crop was once more looped over Ingrid's wrist. "I'm glad you like me, sir." she said politely.

"I do, I do. Superb cunt! I say, Ingrid old girl, tie her hands behind her back. Palm to palm, y'know. Then lace her elbows tight. It's a lovely effect."

Susan bit back an angry refusal to be so used. Bowser Bullstrode's bouncy enthusiasm which took compliance for granted offended a girl's sense of what was proper. But she remembered in time her sale of all rights to her person. Striving for facial serenity, she turned and placed her hands behind her back.

The thin rope was a part of Ingrid, twining itself about the slender wrists with an implaccable love. Susan's breath quickened under the firm and sometimes painful tugging of the cords. She remembered Thedra and Leonie – that was something different again. Or was it! Was this wish to bind and punish a girl in the subconscious of most men and women! Respectfully watching Bowser's rapt engrossment with her binding, the captive wondered if she, too, might one day tie a girl and savour ecstasy.

"Tight! Must be tight, y'know." Bowser spoke as in a trance.

Tight it was indeed! Susan repeatedly winced and gasped to let Ingrid know her hurt, but simulation vanished when the first stricture circled her elbows. This was pain! But a deliberate pain, known and understood. She must bear it that Bowser Bullstrode might know pleasure. Susan tried to glance back over a strained shoulder but it was too late. Martyr–like she stood erect, head high, shoulders wracked back, while Ingrid pulled and compressed and pulled again as she wound the rope, strand after strand, into the tender flesh.

The naked girl had not known her elbows could be joined. But it was done. The focus of Bowser's eyes made her blushingly conscious of her breasts. For a moment, the burn of her elbows was forgotten in a fresh dismay at this new compulsion of the cords by which her shoulders seemed lost and the size and protrusion of her breasts doubled and trebled. Looking down at herself, they outrageously filled her vision in wanton arrogance. Looking at Bowser Bullstrode she beheld a man glimpsing The Golden Fleece – or perhaps a pair of them!

"Struggle to get loose, sweetheart."

Susan's obedience was instinctive. What girl wouldn't want to get out of such a tie! Even though freedom was impossible the compulsion was imperative. She twisted and turned and tugged. Her elbows screamed protest while she accomplished nothing. Her breasts were two firm cones under stress. She looked at Bowser in supplication, but saw only a total absorption with the pathetic beauty of her striving for freedom denied.

"I can't get loose. It's no good, I can never get free. And it hurts – it hurts terribly." Susan uttered the words as an absurd apology.

"Most beautiful thing I've ever seen," breathed Buster Bullstrode.

"You'll never get loose when I tie you, sweetheart."

Ingrid sounded as amused as Bowser was enraptured. "May I stand still please?"

"B.B's the one to ask, sweetheart."

"Please may I stand still, sir?"

The bound maiden had no difficulty making her voice pathetic.

"In a minute," B.B. implored testily. "Try that struggling again. You've no idea how exquisite . . . " The male owner of slave girls was lost for words.

Susan tried again. The tying of her arms made her feel foolish and ineffectual. But she realized that, for a man besotted with the female form, her frustrated contortions were probably movingly erotic. Hers was the writhing agony of a maiden in distress. She gasped repeatedly in pure pain as she fought uselessly against Ingrid's rope.

"We've got a treasure here, Ingrid," B.B. affirmed emphatically.

"I've fallen in love with her myself." Ingrid's tribute was sincere.

"I see you've been whipped, m'dear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Enjoy?"

"No, sir."

"Humph! Should enjoy it, y'know."

"I'm sorry, sir. Being whipped is something I don't understand."

"Still feel you have to be a bad girl or something, eh, before you deserve it?"

"I'm afraid so, sir."

"Doesn't it make you horny? Afterwards, I mean?"

He was an absurd little man, pathetic in his wish for an agonized girl to share his joy in her tribulations. Susan wished she could please him.

"No, sir. I wish it did but it doesn't."

"She's only been whipped by females, B.B," Ingrid offered helpfully.

Buster Bullstrode brightened. "Ah!" He exclaimed with the air of a man now on the right track. "Not a Lesbian, eh?"

"No, sir." Susan felt herself a failure on all counts.

"Never mind, dear. I'm not one either." B.B. chuckled delightedly at his own wit. "You won't mind if I poke you while you're tied like that?"

"No sir." Actually Susan minded very much. But thought it judicious to add a demure "Thank you, sir."

"Good." He eyed her shrewdly. "You can still be embarrassed, can't you, still feel ashamed?"

Was a girl ever beyond those emotions! Susan had supposed not. Bowser's question was oddly disturbing. She did her best with it. "Yes, sir. I think there are some things a girl will always be ashamed about."

"Good," he said again. It was as though he was compiling an affirmative tally. "Strap her into the loin harness, Ingrid."

The apprehensive captive realized his enjoyment of a twin dominion. Bowser's orders were as subservient to his will as the other. He was a lucky man. Thousands would envy his power and possession. Susan's eyes met Ingrid's in a distasteful knowledge as the older girl turned back from the opened drawer.

"Gets you coming and going." said Bowser with relish.

"Don't be too scared, sweetheart. You won't tear," Ingrid consoled.

Visually, the thing was quite impossible. She should turn and run, she should plead, she should kick and fight. Susan did nothing. What was the use! She had seen such things in back page advertisements. Presumably girls lived and survived. But she did voice her first shocked reaction.

"Those things can't possibly go inside me!"

"They will, darling. A bit of jelly helps." Ingrid was cheerful as ever.

"Must be a marvellous sensation. Always envied you girls." B.B. was slightly breathless.

His slave girl refrained from comment. She would have gladly relinquished her privilege. Shame claimed its first possession as she willingly spread wide her thighs to aid Ingrid in the task each knew must be done. The massive dildo with its cunning protuberances approached Susan's sex like a giant torpedo. She was convinced she could never find space for it. But this, too, was a thing of which she had read . . .

"Just relax, sweetheart. That's half the battle," Ingrid comforted.

"You'll surprise yourself, m'dear," B.B. enthused. "Wonderful things, girls!"

Susan silently agreed. Her beloved slit would be miraculous indeed if it lapped up and accepted the lubricated monster whose rounded head was already nuzzling her nest. Hating the act, she made herself as open as she could. The ropes around her elbows bit back savagely.

In other hands than Ingrid's the tearing of membranes might well have been all too real. But Ingrid was skilled and she was female. Susan's shame was boundless as she stood, obscenely spread, and watched the huge rubber object enter within her loins. The secret appeared to be to thrust slowly and gently with an infinity of twists and motions that soon had her gasping in more than pain. Buster Bullstrode collected each response as he might have done a dividend.

It was done! The impossible was complete! Ingrid hastily strapped the belt and brought the band down and between the surrendered thighs to hold the giant phallus within its warm wet sheath. Susan sensed orgasms hovering and fought them back.

"The next one's the one you'll love." B.B. affirmed warmly.

"You'll have to bend over, darling. Sorry."

Ropes and straps and the violation of her womb had made Susan into a gasping trembling entity of sensation. What was to enter her now was no more believable than what was already within. Miserably, but with faint curiosity, she leant forward against her strictured arms and placed her feet as far apart as she dared without losing balance. Buster Bullstrode walked slowly round and round the busy and engrossed maidens so as to miss no single nuance of the tableau he had created by virtue of being rich.

"Pity you're not equipped with a rear view mirror." he guffawed.

"Slow and easy, sweetheart. "At's a girl!" Ingrid was cheerfully sympathetic to a fellow female. The pressure of her fingers was firmly decisive.

The bending Susan looked up at her pubic hair curling from beneath the strap by which both outrageous plugs would be held captive within her flesh. It seemed impossible she should not be vastly distended, spread, enlarged, or that the two opposing prongs should not conflict within. But nothing was changed except for the harness and the contrasting sensations beginning to blend as one.

"They're all yours, honey."

The naked girl straightened up as the strap pulled tight within her crotch. Passively she stood firm while Ingrid heaved and buckled. From below her navel down to the juncture of her thighs Susan was invaded and provoked by rubber enemies held fast by leather bands against which her tied hands and arms were powerless. She had never known a greater helplessness. Even her vulnerability was fulfilled. There remained only her breasts. Tentatively she closed her legs and gasped at the result. She stood with them slightly open to face the two who now admired their work. Wryly she knew herself at attention. As long as she wore them the ropes upon her elbows, clamping them together, would ensure that parade ground precision. Her eyes made the plea she dared not voice.

"Never seen anything quite like it," Bowser mused. "That harness sets the ensemble off to perfection. Just stand like that, girl, and let's admire you."

Their slave girl stood, striving not to cry.

"She's hurting quite a lot," said Ingrid diffidently.

"But in such a cause!" B.B. was reverent.

Susan felt like a diapered child awaiting treatment under clinical scrutiny. Ingrid's expression was that of a sales person awaiting an assured sale, but Bowser Bullstrode's was that of a man transported, enraptured, the bound and penetrated girl realized she could endow him with no greater joy than to stand thus: not that she could do aught else! But still . . . she was touched by that glimpse of power over the adoring male, a power as old as Eve. It was faintly comforting.

It was some time before B.B. broke the spell. His voice was husky: "Walk round and round the room, girl. Walk as though you mean it."

It was another first. But even with her elbows joined and held her stance and motion would be erotically affected. But with the addition of the loin harness and the twin phallus it thrust within her being her walk became a wanton mockery of maidenly decorum. Her hips swayed back and forth with each step, a swivel action below her belted waist she could not control. The leather, tight between her legs, and that which it punitively positioned caused her to separate her thighs as much as walking allowed. Her tight breasts added their own contribution to feminine undulations in a way to cause the watching man to gasp ecstatically:

"Dammit, Ingrid, I can't stand it. She's too beautiful. The girl's a witch."

"The Group expect dividends out of her, B.B."

"Think they'd sell her?"

"No. Certainly not for awhile."

"I'll buy her when they're ready so long as they don't get her mucked up with their fool escapades."

"Make the offer in writing, B.B., I'll put it on the right desk. In the meantime, how'd you like to buy me?"

"I wouldn't mind. But you know damn well they wouldn't sell. They'd be lost without you. I tried once. Thorpe just laughed at me."

Susan's consciousness was mostly absorbed by pain, the misery of tied elbows and wracked shoulders coupled with the addition of the crupper between her thighs. But she listened as she walked, uncertain if what she heard was serious or repartee. She loathed her walk and was debating the wisdom of a plea for mercy when Bowser Bullstrode cunningly put his finger on a fresh development.

"The walk making you horny, m'dear?"

"Yes, sir."

"Pleased about it?"

"No, sir." The punished girl knew not what to say, so spoke the truth. "I don't want to have an orgasm like this . . . and with people watching."

"Marvellous, isn't she!" Bowser enthused, his cheeks taking on a deeper shade of pink. "Speaks her mind. Damn sensible."

"Do you actually want her to reach a climax this way, B.B.?"

"Of course! Each time round the room she'll get closer. We'll watch her trying to stave it off. Keep going, Susan m'gal. Explode when ready."

Bowser Bullstrode was hard to hate. In a mounting tide of tumescence Susan made her rounds, trying hard to compel her eyes from a meeting with those who watched. What she was suffering was deeply private and not to be shared – at least she had supposed so until this moment. But this pink cheeked little man with the cold blue eyes had robbed her of secrets. She was his utterly. Ingrid, too,

would be amused by the compulsion of her flesh.

"Watch those hips," B.B. sighed happily.

"She's the most beautiful girl you've had," Ingrid agreed.

"Watch her face. Her mind's down between her legs."

"Some will be with her elbows. That hurts worse than you know, B.B. I've had mine tied. It's a brute."

"She's well along now, Ingrid. Our rubber dong is winning his battle. Dammit, I'll say it again, I wish I was a girl!"

"What, tied and strapped like Susan!"

"Why not! The sweet thing's a bundle of sensation. Men don't have it that good. I bet she wouldn't stop walking now if we told her to."

Susan would willingly have stopped. The voices coming to her through waves of excitation imposed their own painless cruelty. She was to be watched! The most intimate response of her flesh was to be observed and commented on as though she was some domestic creature rutting in its pen. She knew herself delivered to the curious eyes she refused to meet. When the moment came, she leant against the wall, gasping and writhing in an intensity of orgasm such as she had never known. The harness and the rope added their agony to the incandescence, turning them to ecstasy in a merging of female responses to which she abandoned herself no longer caring.

"Magnificent performance," said B.B. breathlessly.

"I almost envy her myself," Ingrid conceded. "That tie has something to do with it. She's totally involved."

"D'you want to try it afterwards?"

"No, never mind. That harness . . . ugh!"

The minutes passed. Susan returned to her world of normal pain and binding strictures. She had sunk to her knees against the wall, and now turned her gaze questioningly towards the man whose plaything she had become. She achingly revolted against resuming her shameful walk.

"You really enjoyed that, m'dear." Bowser's face was beaming as though he had bestowed munificence. Susan said nothing. Her tied elbows were absorbing most of her consciousness. She waited.

"Only fair I should have a bit of fun now, eh?"

For a moment the bound girl was puzzled as to how she could offer joy to a male in her present condition. But, with the unzipping of Bowser's pants realization dawned. It seemed a girl offered manifold facilities. Instinctively she voiced her instant reaction.

"Oh please, don't make me do that. I hurt so much . . . my elbows–"

"Susan!"

Ingrid's command compelled attention. The older girl was holding up her wrist, from it dangled the snake–like length of the crop.

It was useless to resist, useless to invite more pain. Susan shrank from the thought of the bitter withe cutting her skin. Once before, experimentally, she had done with a man the thing she must now do for B.B. She had neither enjoyed nor been revolted. It was one of the things! To profess coyness now would be absurd. Painfully, she got to her feet and went to perform her duty.

"She's damn good at it." B.B. avowed when it was over.

"I think Susan's good at everything," Ingrid said drily. "Especially if I show the whip. She's very sensible about whips."

"How'd you like to do an encore, Ingrid m'dear?"

"What, right now!" Ingrid was amused. "Looks to me like that thing of yours could use a rest."

"I'm sure you could inspire it."

"In about an hour, maybe."

"Well, I'm not as young as I was," B.B. said fretfully, looking down at his flaccid member reproachfully. Mustn't be too critical."

Susan wanted to laugh. For a moment B.B. was pitiful, a pink satyr robbed of horns and hooves. But his next remark caused her to tense.

"No use waiting an hour. There's always the old tried and true"

Ingrid's reply held doubt and regret. "The poor girl hasn't done anything to deserve getting a whipping."

"Don't let's split hairs," Bowser Bullstrode admonished peevishly. "Besides, she did raise objections when I was unzipping. A good trouncing will help cure her of that."

"The way we've got her tied and harnessed isn't the best for whipping her, B.B. There's only her breasts nicely available."

"Let's whip them." B.B.'s enthusiasm was growing.

"Please don't, Susan's not that used to these recreations. Whipping her breasts will scare her to death and sicken her. I know. I've had that too."

"Anything you haven't had?" Bowser asked testily. "So what's your idea?"

"Let's get her out of this ensemble and tie her properly so you can get at the proper bits of her."

"Well, alright." Bowser obviously parted with Susan's existing configuration with regret. "But it's not me who's whipping her, y'know. It's you who's going to mark her up. I like to watch."

Susan saw the older girl hesitate, then shrug to the inevitable. "Want me to use my crop all over, or have you got a whip for her back?"

"The crop on her bottom," said B.B. with firm conviction. "And of course I've got a whip, a really lovely one you can use on her for hours. Let's take her down to the games room."

The bound and impaled girl had no wish to move. Thankful for a brief respite, she remained as the orgasm had left her and listened to the discussion of her fate with a strange detachment. How different this was to her expectation on that day she had walked so blithely into the office of Winthrop Investments. Bitterly, she knew she would never have sold herself had she known. Bowser's cherubic joy slightly tempered her present suffering, but the incongruity of what had been done to her was devastating. Both orifices penetrated and totally filled by phallic rubber invaders, her tied elbows a ceaseless misery. Now, about to be released, she would be tied again and whipped: her bare body whipped! It seemed impossible!

"Come along, my little chickadee," Bowser commanded happily. "Can't do you justice up here, y'know."

"Can I take her harness off so she can walk better?"

"Good gosh, Ingrid, whose side you on?" Bowser demanded indignantly. "Make the little darling walk as she is. It's quite a few steps. Maybe we'll get another explosion. When she goes she does it right."

"What girl wouldn't, fixed the way she is!"

"You mean we've found a cure for frigidity?"

"It would work with most," Ingrid said reflectively. "Intercourse is actually a girl's ravishment by a male. He holds her down and impales her. The way Susan's fixed is an intensification." She turned to her captive. "Come along, sweetheart. A change is as good as a rest."

"Please, I don't want to be whipped – don't whip me."

"Why not?"

Susan knew the question absurd. She could think of many reasons why she should not be whipped. Yet none would be any good to her now. She was going to be whipped to amuse Bowser and possibly give him another erection. All the good reasons for leaving her skin inviolate were out of context with her present state. The bad excuses would avail her nothing. She fluttered her shoulders hopelessly and struggled to her feet. Walking between her mentors she was instantly again prey to her ardent flesh. Within her and out of sight the prongs of her harness went busily to work.

"Getting excited, sweetheart?"

Ingrid's sympathy was femininely understanding, but also curious. The trio did not pause in what appeared to be a sizeable journey through the big house. Reluctantly, Susan made the only rejoinder she could.

"Of course I am. Oh please take it off?"

"Should make you wear it though the whipping," Bowser said kindly. "Your bottom cheeks are nicely separated. Ingrid can whip "em one at a time. If you're sexually aroused while we thrash you you'll hardly feel a thing."

The pedestrian captive was torn between laughter and tears. It was all too absurd! There might even be some truth in what Bowser promised. As her bare legs twinkled in procession the sensitivity they generated became a mounting heat burning away the agony of her strictured arms. She loathed the objects thrust deep within her flesh, yet perhaps pain and pleasure could be unwitting bedfellows. But before the portal to her new tribulation she climaxed once again into a gasping writhing paroxysm of which, later, she would be bitterly ashamed. Her companions watched.

"Marvellous!" Bowser breathed admiringly. "May as well take it off after she's finished jerking."

The naked girl had sunk to her knees under the onslaught of her orgasm. Weary and mortified she scrambled erect to be made ready for her new ordeal. Once more she must spread her legs and once more gasp as the harness was unstrapped and her impalements withdrawn. Once more she knew shame as the rubber phallus sprung erect, hot from her loins and wet with her secretions.

Bowser Bullstrode viewed the withdrawal approvingly. "Shell probably kick better without it," he consoled. "How you going to tie her?'

"Hands up and out?" Ingrid queried. "I don't know a way to make a girl more open for the whip."

"What about the little darling's feet?"

"Why not leave 'em loose so she can kick: she'll wriggle a lot better."

"O.K. I bow to expertise," B.B. declaimed grandly. "But I want you to get in a few licks up between. The little dears look so damn startled when it laps their cunt."

"It won't be hard," Ingrid promised. "She's bound to open up. But if she does manage to keep her feet together I can always tie 'em apart to the rings."

Susan looked at them: the man glowing with lust, the older girl doing her job with sympathetic regret. Pitifully, she had to try. "Please don't whip me." She looked at B.B. pleadingly. "I know it gives you pleasure sir. But it's so awful. Please enjoy me some other way."

"Watch it, kid," Ingrid advised sharply. "There are worse things than a whipping."

"Take a look around," Bowser advised helpfully.

Susan had looked and hated what she saw. Yet to be innocent and to be whipped! It was so cruel and so unjust! She knew herself a coward at the thought of the crop or the lash snapping into her skin and leaving their scarlet weals. "I'm sorry," she apologized tremulously, then stood passive and obedient while Ingrid tugged at the knots prisoning her arms.

"I sometimes think they're the loveliest marks of all," B.B. reflected as he watched the peeling away of the ropes from female flesh and heard Susan's involuntary moans of shock at the fresh pain of the sundering. "Pity they don't last longer than a day or so. You could dress a girl in rope burns."

In different circumstances the moment could have been wonderful. Free after being bound! Able to massage her wounds. The eyes of the two girls met to silently tell the naked girl this respite would be

as long as Ingrid could prolong it but that it would still be short. There was also a warning: "Don't try anything just because for a moment you are free."

Susan was thankful for the straps. They buckled tightly over the rope marks on her wrists. From them the ropes lifted her arms to compel her to stand as though greeting the dawn. She was not on her toes but was stretched taut. On either side she could observe the red indentations below her elbows. She found herself panting. Angrily she strove to control her pulse but could not. Every inch of her cringed in greeting for what was to come.

"She's classic, quite classic!" Bowser proclaimed fervently. "You're right, Ingrid my girl, it's the best pose for a girl. Dammit, I can hardly wait."

Behind the naked girl stretched taut to receive the whip there was a fearful mystery. B.B. was admiring her from the front, but Ingrid was at her back and Ingrid had the whip! Susan found she could look back over a raised shoulder and get half a view, but it was a demeaning thing to do. It evoked smiles. It also showed her things she would be happier not to see. The whip dangling from Ingrid's hand was probably a thing of beauty but it was wicked in its promise. The crop was there too. It lay on the floor for her delectation, long and lean and lissom! With a lump in her throat she turned forward and tried wanly to reciprocate B.B's smile.

The crop came first. Unexpectedly, it cut her derriere with a whining thunk. Susan screamed. The pain was too awful. Uncaring, she writhed in a total abandonment to agony. She felt certain she must be cruelly cut.

"Damn good!" Bowser Bullstrode approved. "You've got a lovely swing, Ingrid. Just watch that weal!"

"You think you're cut in two, sweetheart, but you're not. No blood at all," Ingrid reassured anxiously.

"But I can't stand it. I can't!"

"All the girls say that," said B.B. complacently.

B.B. smiled with evil. The girl's torrid and fearfully loud exclamations were old and worn. Punished girls had been making them for centuries. She must say something, but what! Somehow bring home to this ridiculous man the impossibility of her flesh bearing such pain. "I'll do just anything." she promised piteously. "Don't you understand this will kill me."

Her reply was another whine and a second blaze of fire. Susan leaped frantically against her tethers, legs flailing. Her cry was pure desolation.

"You're a long way from dying, m'dear" B.B. suggested affably.

"Try and not be so frightened, sweetheart. It's the shock that's getting to you," Ingrid advised.

She was being tortured, but the conversation might have been helpful hints on cooking. Susan hung, panting, from her strapped wrists and wondered as had other girls through the ages how her strength and so much agony could be contained and controlled by two small bands of leather. She looked up at them resentfully and saw them tight and snug. If they'd had life they'd be chuckling.

"I'm going to hit you again." said Ingrid equably. "You know it's coming, so brace yourself and see if you can't take it without such a fuss."

"But by all means kick and squirm." implored B.B. anxiously.

Susan clenched her teeth and managed only a strangled moan, a cut short arrrgh as the slenderness of the crop bit itself into the full width of her bottom, but her wristlets creaked at the strain of her frenzy.

"Lovely, lovely!" Bowser commended. "Don't stop." In the first cruelty of each impact Susan was willing to believe she would never stop her writhing contortions. Hopeless as they might be they were her only outlet for an emotion too explosive to contain. But even for that she was punished by her wrists. As the burn of the crop diminished on her bottom, so the agony of the tightly buckled leather bands took over. Until she was released she would be in constant pain and they had scarcely started! "Please put me in one of those torture things you've got," she pleaded brokenly. "But stop whipping me. Oh please stop . . . . Please!"

"She's not enjoying it." said B.B. accusingly.

"Let me change to the whip," Ingrid suggested. "This crop of mine really makes them pay attention. If I use the whip and don't hit too hard she'll handle it a lot better."

"Oh, not the whip! Don't use a whip on me," Susan moaned.

"Don't be ungrateful," Bowser admonished. "Go ahead, Ingrid m'dear. We want to spread this enjoyment out a bit."

The tied and naked girl looked at Bowser's moist pinkness and knew herself lost. Bowser Bullstrode was happy. She could almost believe in his inability to understand why she was not. She had heard of girls who adored being whipped, perhaps some had come his way so that her agonizing might indeed seem a deviation from the norm. Meeting his cheerful countenance she put her heart into an outrageous plea.

"Please, sir, you've got a rack and a thumbscrew and a pillory and all sorts of such things here. Please use one of them on me instead of the whip . . . . I'm sorry, the whip's too awful."

He surveyed her with interest. "That's a damn rummy request," he pointed out, "Most girls 'ud want it the other way round. You ever been stretched on a rack or had that pretty bottom fixed on the sharp edge of a plank?"

"No, sir."

"Getting out of the frying pan into the fire, y'know."

"I can't bear being whipped, sir."

"But we haven't started yet. We've agreed that crop of Ingrid's is a bit sharp, so we're going to give you a change. I'm not sure you deserve it. Damned ungrateful . . . ."

It was too absurd, but the small pink man's rendition of his plaint made it plausible. Susan felt ashamed. The agony of the crop's last indentation on her derriere was fading and the first lash of the whip had not yet scored her skin. Perhaps they were right! Perhaps! Miserably she capitulated.

"I'm sorry, sir. Please forgive me . . . thank you . . ."

The searing rasp across her shoulders was awful, but it brought back memories of Thedra and Leonie, and with them a faint reassurance. She had survived the whip with them, perhaps she could survive it now. Susan clenched her teeth and awaited number two.

"That's much better," Bowser approved heartily. "I like to see a girl show the proper spirit. After all, it's not every little filly who gets an experience like this. Damn lucky if you ask me."

Bowser Bullstrode's conceit was unworthy of concern.

Susan ignored it and concentrated on the pain now being inflicted on her shoulders, back and waist. Passionately she wanted not to have to look back in shame. B.B. did not matter but Ingrid did. The pinioned girl suspected Ingrid would endure this punishment with a greater stoicism than she herself could muster. She flinched and squirmed with each blow but managed to curtail outright screams.

"You see, sweetheart. The whip is kinder than the crop. And I won't let it lap around on your breasts." Ingrid promised.

"None of that nonsense," Bowser reproved. "An odd flick on her tit will do no harm. The little dears get so upset about their breasts. And what's more: don't forget what I said about a few up between her legs."

The lashing of the nude girl's exposed helplessness was done with skilled precision at an irregular tempo. Susan realized the strokes were not as hard as they could have been. But, even so, she could scarcely comport herself without shaming reactions of sound and motion. The irregular delivery of her punishment kept her constantly in suspense as to where the next lash would find her flesh. The thong bit at her from below her neck down to her knees. When, in one of her wild spasms at kicking out at nothing, it snickered up between her thighs and spent its venom on her sex she screamed aloud in pain and fury, the protest of the straps around her wrists making their own accompaniment to her anguish.

"She's turning out even better than I hoped," said Bowser as he smiled.

"An absolute sweetheart," Ingrid agreed as she struck. It went on and on and on.

CHAPTER SIX.

The Sundered Slave

A cell is a cell is a cell! The one Bowser Bullstrode provided for his female guests was very much like the other Susan had occupied so briefly. It had, however, one important difference. It held two girls.

"Bowser can be absolutely beastly sometimes," Ingrid said without rancour. "A girl never knows which side of the fence she's on."

Susan giggled. "Would you say you were slumming?"

"It's his idea of humour and he thinks I felt sorry for you. I'm being taught a lesson, that's why my hands and arms are tied like this."

"But it's torture! It's awful."

"You should know, sweetheart. It's the way I tied you." Ingrid made a wry grimace. "His nibs thinks I'll be ashamed in front of you. There you are with just a shackle on one ankle, and look at me! A collar and chain and the elbow punishment – and naked to boot."

"You're gorgeous."

"Thanks. We're both gorgeous. That's why we're here."

"But won't the . . . the people who own me be angry? I mean, treating you this way? You're supposed to be looking after me."

Ingrid tried to shrug and failed. "They'd be amused too. There's some sort of deal under way and what B.B. wants B.B. gets. The Group bought me the same way they bought you, but I've been around longer and get some privileges in between the bad spots."

Susan suddenly realized the obvious. "Oh, Ingrid, here I'm nattering while you hurt. Here, turn round. I'll untie you."

"Don't you dare." Ingrid was genuinely alarmed. "If you untie me well both get in the most awful trouble. I'm supposed to hurt and hurt I must. Don't think his majesty hasn't figured out the temptation for us both it's part of the game. Hell find the jackpot I'm in simply delicious – probably laughing his head off upstairs."

"But I'm almost free. I can't let you suffer."

"Like I said, you're a sweetheart." Ingrid grinned ruefully. "But think what I've done to you. I tied you like I'm tied now, and you've got more stripes than Old Glory. You're laced with stripes."

"You had to whip me, it's your job." Susan proclaimed manfully. "And besides, you didn't hit me as hard as you could have done. I think you were trying to be kind."

"That's what B.B. thought. Look where it got me."

"Oh dammit Ingrid I'm sorry!" Susan's sympathy welled. "I shouldn't have been such a cry baby when you were using the crop on my bottom. But it hurt so terribly, I honestly thought I'd die. It's all my fault."

"Don't be silly, sweetheart. We're girls, and a lot of men want to whip us and hurt us and keep us chained because they get a big charge out of it. If they don't use one excuse they use another. Not that they need excuses with you and me, we've been bought to please." Ingrid twisted her bound shoulders and emitted a small bitter laugh. "But I notice they like to justify their little cruelties so they can be called 'punishments'. It's burned me up lots of times, to have to be made delinquent so's I can be whipped with honor."

"Please say I can untie you," Susan implored. "I feel just awful standing like this and seeing you hurting. I'll take all the blame?"

"No. Honest, it 'ud be asking for trouble."

"Well then, let me tie you again in the morning before anyone sees?"

"Bright eyes would know. He's clipped the ends. You couldn't possibly tie me exactly as I am now. Don't you worry. It's not the first time."

It was one more instance of the implacability of slavery. Susan looked at the bars of their cell and at the massive lock on the door Angrily, she kicked her shackle and blinked back tears as she examined the ropes so deeply indented in her companion's arms. Why, oh why, had she been so foolish as to sell herself! "What will he do with us tomorrow?" she asked dolefully.

"Goodness knows." Ingrid seemed unconcerned. "Maybe hell tell me to take you home. A girl never can be sure of anything." She chuckled affectionately at Susan's manifest concern. "You'll have to get used to the idea that, for slave girls, it doesn't matter much. We aren't going any place that counts. We hurt a little; we get a bit of fun; here and there we see and do the most incredible things." She gave a short laugh. "To tell the truth, I wouldn't know what to do with normal freedom. I'm not even sure I want it any more."

"I want it."

"That's because you're new to slavery and because you've just been whipped. It's that state of mind that will get you locked up and chained for a long time to come. They know about it, and they know the best way to deal with it is to remove temptation and constantly let you know what you are. You'll continue to be put in a cell and chained, and sometimes punished. That lasted a couple of years for me. Then gradually I got to be . . . well, what I am now."

"Two years! Was it very awful?" Susan's eyes were wide.

Ingrid wriggled her bound arms in an effort to express deprecation.

"Was it ever! I astounded myself and annoyed the boys no end. I developed a sort of claustrophobia, first over selling myself and stepping beyond where I could draw back, and then these little cells. I was scared witless at what I'd done. I looked at the bars and the lock and the stone and at the chains they'd locked on me, and I went berserk. I howled and threatened and clashed my manacles like crazy. I remember working on the metal bands round my wrists. I did everything with them I could devise – quite useless, of course. A girl can't get free of chains. But I wouldn't accept that then. I was frantically certain there had to be a way . . ." Ingrid chuckled reminiscently. "They got fed up with the noise I made, so they tied me naked to a post so I couldn't even twitch. Wherever there was a bit of me that might have moved they tied a rope. They fixed me good. Then, in irritated desperation, they gagged me to stop my threats and pleadings. It was my first acquaintance with a ball gag. I was quite sure I'd never close my mouth again. Gee I was scared."

"But they didn't whip you?"

"That came later. They kept me tied to that damn post for a week. I was let loose twice a day for thirty minutes, then tied right back the same way. After the first couple of days I'd gathered up enough sense so they could leave off the gag. By then I wouldn't have howled if they paid me. They told me they'd accept some quiet moans because the ropes hurt, but that was all. So I did my little moans and came face to face with the facts of my new existence."

"All alone day after day, it must have been terrible," Susan could easily envision herself in such a plight.

"Oh it was awful enough, but I wasn't alone. People would come and talk to me, reasoning out my fears. They would play with my body – I couldn't stop them. Sometimes the fingers were kind and sometimes cruel, but they let me know what I was. I thought I'd go crazy the first time – not being able to move. But the quiet even voices did the job. As the hands brought me to orgasm or imposed agony on the bits of me I'd always thought sacred I paid more and more attention and came to realize the obvious: I was a valuable piece of merchandise they wanted to preserve and get some value out of their investment. I think it was this that put me back on the right track. A revival of a self esteem I'd lost. I became Ingrid instead of a lot of scared skin."

"But –"

Susan's exclamation was cut short by the advent of a beaming Bowser Bullstrode. He unlocked the cell door with a great flourish of a huge key, then deposited on the floor a pasteboard box at sight of which Ingrid wailed:

"Oh, Bowser, we can do without those things."

The small pink despot ignored the plaint. "Come, come, m'dear. No girl's properly dressed without them."

"But we're not going walking or even trying to."

"Ah, but you will. In the meantime our young Susan can become accustomed –"

"Bowser, don't be so mean to us."

"Tut, tut, m'dear. Hardly a chain on you."

Ingrid sniffed. "A rotten iron collar round my neck . . . and a damn long chain! And Susan . . she's got enough metal on her ankle to stop a horse. Go ahead! Leave the door open. We can't walk out."

Susan sensed a strange relationship and a complete understanding between these two. Was this how she would eventually become, exchanging repartee as she was punished? Used as mentor to the new slaves. The odd mix of privilege and punishment was emphasized by Ingrid's next demand.

"B.B. Be a dear and untie my elbows?"

"You've been a bad girl." said Bowser complacently. "Very naughty. You deserve to suffer."

"I know I have," Ingrid admitted with doubtful sincerity. "But my elbows have been tight for a couple of hours. Isn't that enough! It hurts like hell, y'know."

"Do you a world of good"

"You've tied 'em so tight they're dying."

"In that case they won't bother you."

"Oh Bowser!"

Ingrid's exclamation was lost in the clatter as their visitor emptied his box. Susan's surprised gaze encountered a number of pairs of shoes which at first glance seemed surpassingly beautiful. A closer scrutiny revealed an inevitable quality of the sinister.

"If you put those on us we don't need to be chained," Ingrid said with a certainty not entirely hopeful.

"You first, m'dear." Bowser smiled at his youngest slave. "Don't listen to Ingrid's chatter. She's trying to cozen me. Sit on your bench and stick out your pretty little foot."

Susan meekly obeyed. For a moment she experienced Ingrid's claustrophobia in a sad memory of a receding freedom. But then her interest was absorbed by B.B.'s enthusiastic search for a perfect fit. When he found it she watched its prisonment of her foot almost in awe.

The silver shoes were of metal. Basically a narrow last with a toecap into which her toes vanished completely with a surprising ease and comfort as though a mould had been made of her foot and the metal cast to fit. There was an absurdly high heel, and from it at the back a flat riser terminated in the silver anklet which snapped tight and locked itself snugly round her ankle.

"A perfect fit." breathed Bowser proudly.

"It's lovely!" Susan's tribute was heartfelt and sincere.

"Wait 'till you try and walk," Ingrid contributed bitterly.

"We're not too well acquainted," Bowser apologized absurdly. "You won't mind if I use these."

Susan was amused. He thought she might make a dash for the door when he unlocked her shackle! It was almost a compliment. Without demur she twisted round and put her hands behind her back.

"Splendid girl!" B.B. commended as he snapped the shining bands around the willing wrists. "There! All nice and safe."

Rendered helpless, the naked slave looked down with interest at the shoeing of her other foot. Restraints had become so much a part of her life she was not concerned to argue about them.

"Now, let's see you take a little walk, m'dear," Bowser encouraged. "Here, I'll help since you're handcuffed."

It came in a flash: the knowledge of a fresh loss. If she walked at all it would be with a scary instability. Her need of Bowser Bullstrode's steadying arm was real and grateful.

"Take a run up and down the passage." Ingrid said bitterly.

"I'll get to you next, Ingrid m'dear." Bowser promised regally.

She was walking on her toes. There was no other way. The lovely sheathing silver clung to the contours of her foot and held her toes imprisoned without hope of their withdrawal. There was small comfort in the heel. When the helping hand was withdrawn Susan remembered the stories of the bound feet of Chinese maidens long ago. With added stature, she minced delicately in tiny steps. Her hand–cuffed wrists tugged hard at their bracelets in an apprehensive need to be ready for her fall.

"You should always wear them," said Bowser reverently. "You are superb."

"Take the handcuffs off her, Bowser." Ingrid pleaded. "If she falls without hands she'll hurt herself."

"She won't fall," Bowser said imperturbably. "And now for you, m'girl. I've got your own special pair. Out with the tootsie."

Susan experimented with her hazardous steps while she watched Ingrid similarly shod. The older girl had stopped complaining and accepted her imposition resignedly. It was easy to guess she had worn the silver shoes before. But she was now very helpless indeed. Bowser showed no inclination to untie the punishing strands from her elbows or to remove the shaming collar from the lovely neck.

"Now that I can't run, can I have my handcuffs off please, sir?" she asked wanly.

The shot filled the cell with brutal sound. Bowser Bullstrode's small bright eyes popped in surprise before they closed forever in death as his body slithered gently to the floor.

Two men, lithe, powerful. One replacing his revolver in its holster, the other making a quick examination of what had been a pink cheeked little man with bright blue eyes. "It's Bullstrode O.K. That looks after that."

They were a handsome enough pair: quick, decisive, in their early thirties. They had the sleepy eyes of men who know too much. Those eyes now surveyed the shocked captives. The gunman's voice was a sneer.

"The old bastard must have known we were coming. He's got 'em packaged for delivery."

The senior member made a quick assessment. "Not bad, but fix her good, Lint."

"What about the other? Why not take 'em both?"

"Too much static. I don't need a harem."

The captive girls looked at each other in agonized fear.

They kept silent, there was nothing to say. Susan sat on the bench and watched her ankles brutally tied, wincing as the cords bit into her skin. In mute misery she accepted the balled up rag upon her tongue and the broad band of adhesive across her mouth. When the black silk was folded over her eyes she struggled in protest, but it was too late. Blind, mute, and helpless she had become only a bundle of female merchandise. But she still had ears. The leader's instruction to Ingrid came through loud and clear.

"You can tell your lot the deal's off. No dice. We're taking the girl to pay expenses. Teach the damn fools a lesson."

"There'll be hell to pay, Denver."

"I doubt it. They'll cut their loss. They should be grateful to get you back. I could just as easily take you too."

"I know that." Ingrid's voice was desperate. "But leave the girl. They might write the Bullstrode deal off as a loss. But if you take Susan it's a slap in the face they won't accept. She cost them a lot of money."

Denver chuckled. "Teach 'em a lesson not to fool with me, Tell 'em I might send her back after awhile, well screwed of course, and maybe a few marks. But if they layoff reprisals I'll return their investment. For the moment let's call her a hostage."

"Dammit, Denver, let's take 'em both. This Ingrid dame gives me the hots. Look at those tits! I'd like' to stake her out on a bed for couple of days with a pillow or two under her ass."

"O.K. Take me," Ingrid rejoined defiantly. "I don't want to stay here fixed the way I am. I hurt–"

"What had Bowser got against you?" Denver queried, amused.

"Just his idea of fun. This job I've got isn't all honey, y'know. Look, Denver, take me. You can use me a day or two then send me back with the message. Don't leave me like this. I'll be chained here all night for sure, and goodness knows how much longer."

"This fun business . . . It's the B&D Thing, isn't it?"

"I suppose so – if it has to have a title," Ingrid's voice was weary. It's just you men. Most of you like doing this to a girl. I bet Lint's got a hard on."

"How'd you guess," Lint guffawed. "Boss, let's take her. She's first class merchandise."

"I know." There was real regret in Denver's voice. "But the way I've laid it out is best. You can get rid of your erection on the kid when you get her back to the Place."

"Denver, you don't hate me. If you must leave me here, be a good chap and untie my elbows. I'll still be safe enough."

"O.K. But it will cost you. Go ahead and screw her, Lint. When you've got rid of that hot rod cut the rope on her arms, but leave her hands tied."

"Gee thanks!" Ingrid sounded sardonically grateful. "How's about cutting the rope before you screw me?"

"Hell no. Don't be so fussy. Lying on your tied arms will raise your ass. Besides, it'll hurt you so's you'll push back better."

"You've done it before." Ingrid accused.

"I bet you have too. Lie back and spread 'em. You've got plenty of chain."

Susan was glad of her darkness. It was bad enough to hear the sounds without having to watch. She sat in huddled helplessness while the rape of Ingrid ran it's clearly discernable course. Grimly she contemplated her own ravishments still to come.

"Thanks! Oh, Denver, thank you!"

Ingrid's sincerity told Susan of the cutting of the rope. The blind girl could picture the wealed flesh and feel the immense relief from pain. How impossible these people were! Friendship and enmity! Rape and relief! The handcuffs on her wrists and the rope cutting her ankles told her how much a part of them she had become.

Strong arms tossed her passive nudity over a broad shoulder and carried her into a new captivity.

The bed was soft, the air warm upon her nakedness. The gag had been removed with the warning:

"Sleep. You're helpless, but make a fuss and you're in trouble."

"Aren't you going to take off the blindfold?"

"No. You don't need to see anything."

Susan had slept, fitfully and with much twisting against her bonds, but she had slept. Now, she knew it was morning only through Lint's voice.

"Wake up Kid." There was a pause. "Bathroom and breakfast comes next. Understand?"

"Yes. But please–"

"Shut up and listen. I've got a whip. I'm going to hit you with it once so's you'll know what to expect if you horse around when I untie you."

Joy at thought of release was shattered by the most sickening agony the naked girl had ever known. A searing lash bit at her body from crotch to neck. Behind it was the strength of a male arm. Susan screamed in shock and writhed in a futile expenditure of pain.

"Going to be sensible?"

"Yes. Oh yes!" No other response was possible.

"Good. Maybe you won't need another. But you'll be tempted."

Susan understood why. The handcuffs were unlocked, her arms pulled to the front and her wrists once more clasped in steel. The painful rope was cut from her ankles.

"Touch that blindfold and you get the whipping of your life."

"I won't. I promise." She was quivering with apprehension.

"I'm going to lead you to the bathroom. I'll put your hands on everything you'll need, then leave you alone. Take your time, then call."

"I . . . I'll be alone?"

"Hell yes. Don't do nothing for me to see a dame sitting on the john or washing her twat."

"My feet. You know I can't walk properly . . ."

Interested hands tugged at the silver shoes. "Well, I'll be damned! They're locked on you, but good. You gotta' walk on your toes."

"I can only walk very slowly and I may fall. Can't you get them off?"

"Maybe with a blow torch or a hacksaw. We'll let Denver decide. As far as I'm concerned they can stay on. They're sorta' cute and won't affect the screwing."

Susan took her time. On hobbled feet she tripped where she was led. She had little doubt that, despite his disclaimer, Lint would be watching with avid eyes. Let him! What did anything matter any more! Her main concern was to avoid the whip. She longed to tear the covering from her eyes but did not dare. In blindness she ate her breakfast.

"It's back on the bed for you, kid."

Obediently, Susan lay down. When the handcuffs were removed she made to turn so that her wrists could be cuffed behind. But Lint's voice had a new leer.

"Rope this time, honey. Lay still. I'll do the work."

He did it with competence. Susan lay passive as her hands were pulled up and tied, one to each side at the head of the bed. But when he pulled her left ankle forcibly to a bottom corner she ventured anxiously:

"You don't have to tie me this much. I can't get away – and I won't struggle. I promise."

"Sooner have the whip, kid?"

"Oh alright, I'm sorry." Susan's tears were close behind the blind. "It's just that it's such an awful helplessness . . . and in the dark."

"Dammit girl, you're about to have the time of your life."

Susan heaved at her pinioned foot. But it was too late. Lint had it securely stretched and tied. He was now looping her other ankle. Susan wondered how she could have been so naive. She was being spreadeagled.

She felt so taut and so stretched and open. Then when a pillow, and then a second, was forced beneath her bottom she knew herself perfectly posed for her promised rape. Miserably, she wondered if the hated word was truly applicable to her condition. What was going to be done to her was only an occupational hazard.

"I'll juice you up a bit." Lint's voice came through with gentlemanly helpfulness.

Susan was not a child. The touch of male hands was nothing new. With wry concern she wondered if she should be pleased or angry at her captor's 'juicing up' ministrations. At least he was competent. The wise fingers soon had her gasping. She could not move. She was stretched into a perfect 'X'. Already her wrists and ankles were hurting from the cut of the ropes. She was a very ready sacrifice to however many lusts required appeasement.

Lint took her first. He was highly skilled. Susan took his seed without complaint. Under the influence of her femaleness he even said "Thank you, honey" when he went and left her alone upon the bed.

They came without pattern throughout the day and used her body as they pleased. Some spoke, some were silent. Susan suspected there were those who returned to seek again the solace of her sheath. She took a rueful satisfaction in losing count of the number of her visitors, and wondered why girls, or at least fictional girls, made such a fuss about a penetration that, consummated once, might just as well be inflicted a hundred times. She lay, as she must, beneath each grunting weight and took her pleasure or her pain according to their skill. With the more tender seeming ones she asked to have one hand freed to give her rest and to give them added pleasure. None complied. By mid–afternoon her ropes were torture. She cared nothing for the violation of her sex – only that she be freed.

When freedom came she was so stiff she could scarcely stand. Lint aided her to the bathroom on the same terms as in the morning. Then she was picked up and carried. Her only bond the handcuffs locked in front and the metal shoes in which she could not run. She was still blind. At the end of a journey in Lint's arms she was deposited on a rug.

"You can take off your blindfold," Denver said quietly.

Even that wasn't easy with chained hands. Lint had gone and the door closed before Susan set the silk aside and sat blinking in the light.

"Have a good day?" Denver asked pleasantly.

The captive attended to her sight. It took moments to adjust. Even then she squinted up at her new owner and retorted hotly: "If you charged for me you must have made a fortune."

"No enjoyment at all?"

She hated his sarcasm, but conceded. "I'm a girl, and I'm human. What do you expect!"

"Good. You've had the herd. Now you get the head."

"You want me to lie down?"

"Hell no! I want you to fight."

Susan tensed fearfully. Here was trouble! Fearfully she watched Denver take the long yellow cane from the bureau drawer. "You really don't need that," she assured him timidly. "I'll obey."

"I'm curious about this B&D," Denver told her thoughtfully. "Never had time for it. But I'm curious. Tell me about it."

The nude girl on the rug looked down at the handcuffs binding her wrists. She wriggled uncomfortably under Denver's amused scrutiny. She sensed pain in the offing. Always pain!

"There isn't much to tell. It's not mysterious."

His voice was tolerant. "Give me the basics. There must be some."

Susan shrugged "Men tie us so we hurt . . . and so as to make our female features more prominent. You know, our breasts . . . our bottom."

"There has to be more to it than that."

"Not for some. The ropes make us safely captive; they get their erection, or whatever, from watching us helplessly squirm."

"But the others?"

She was sure he knew! But he wanted her to put it into words. In a flat monotone Susan recited.

"They go further. They want us punished. The girl hasn't done a thing, but they invent a transgression. Set up rules we must inevitably break. Or they order something we're not capable of doing. When we fail or fault they punish us. Our bottoms are caned or our backs whipped."

"Just stripes on your pretty skin?"

"Mostly. It's by far the favorite. But there are horrible ways of tying us or hanging us up. Suspension by our wrists maybe – or our thumbs. It's awful to just hang and hang . . ."

"Would you call it sadism?"

"They don't mean it that way. I think that poor little man you had killed hoped I'd enjoy the whole thing. I got the feeling he didn't see himself as the least bit cruel."

Denver nodded. He was unconcerned, amused with a new toy. "If I tell you now I'm going to cane your bottom, what's your cue?"

Susan hated the interrogation. But if she could keep pain away with words she was glad to do so. "There's two approaches," she told him soberly. "In one, the girl bends and touches her toes and stays that way for as long as the man wants to use the cane on her derriere . . . if she can. I mean if she has the control. The other is to tie her in whatever position the man favours – there's lots of them. She can willingly dispose herself to be tied or she can fight so he has to use force to strap her down or rope her up."

"Sounds like fun."

"It is for the man. It affects them powerfully."

"And the girl?"

"I'll be honest with you and tell you that after the punishment there is an erotic glow for her. The pain centers and burns. But while it's happening there's only agony." Susan looked up at her master glumly. "You're going to hurt me, aren't you?"

Denver nodded absently. "Of course. I've got you, I may as well use you."

"I've already been well used up there tied on the bed."

"That's not what I mean, and you know it. Bend over and touch your toes."

It had come! It always came. Susan got awkwardly to her feet and teetered in her metal shoes. Earnestly she met her owner's gaze. "I suppose you know about these shoes?" She asked listlessly. "They're locked on. I can't get them off. I'm wobbly when I try and walk. I can't run at all."

"I like 'em." Denver said succinctly. "I don't have the key, so you'll wear them. Your wobble is delicious."

"I'll bend over as you've ordered," Susan assured him uncertainly. "But I don't have much control under pain. Between that and the shoes I'll probably fall." She eyed him piteously. "Please don't punish me extra."

"You telling me or am I telling you?" Denver's voice had become hard.

"I'm sorry." Susan longed to cry. Instead, she bent over and put her fingers on her toes. She kept her knees rigid. She felt sure Denver would know all the tricks. "Is this how –"

The yellow cane cut her sentence as it cut her flesh.

Wielded by a man it made Ingrid's blows seem thistledown. With a heartbroken peal of anguish Susan tumbled writhing on the rug, her hands clenched bitterly within their shining cuffs.

"Get up."

Susan knew she could not take the pose again. Denver's tone was frightening, but surely for a girl there would be mercy! "Please! I can't! Oh please don't hit me like that again." Her chained hands sought her wound and recoiled from the raised ridge of her own flesh, a welt that pulsed angrily with a life all its own.

"You'll do as I tell you or I'll cane you as you are. I won't hit your breasts, but I won't promise about the rest of you."

Susan gave a wail of despair. "You don't understand. I just –"

The yellow cane sought her cunningly. No matter how she twisted and screamed it found the target of her buttocks or her hips. When it cut her back the pain was sickeningly doubled. Like an exhausted swimmer seeking the shore she groped her way gaspingly back to the hated posture Denver demanded. The moment her chained hands found contact with her silver encased toes the beating stopped.

"Something to be said for it," Denver mused quietly. "Persuaded you to do something you thought impossible."

Throbbing with pain, Susan was having trouble holding position. To rigidly hold herself in suspenseful readiness was almost as awful as the impact of the cane itself.

"You're a good kid." Denver approved. "O.K. Stand at ease."

The military command was unexpected. The well caned girl stood doubtfully erect, tall upon her toes. She gulped and said: "Thank you."

"Do I hurt you more than Ingrid?"

"Yes. A lot. You're very strong. I'll be marked for months."

"As bad as that! O.K. I'll watch it." Denver grinned disarmingly. "We're not through, y'know. How do you want the rest: free style or tied?"

"I don't want to be hit again at all." Susan's voice was pitifully appealing. "I can't stand it. I don't pretend to be brave or stoic or anything. Please don't cane me anymore. You don't have to break me, I'm already broken."

Denver laughed. "By the Code you've already condemned yourself by beefing. Come on now, which is it to be?"

"If you must hurt me some more I'd better be tied. I just can't stand still for that awful cane."

"Ask me nicely then. Come on, make it good."

It was a cruel thing for a girl to have to do. Susan did it in a quick gasp. "Please tie me so I can't move while I'm being caned."

"Suggest a way." The steel was back in the order.

"I don't know. Oh, I can't!" Susan's tears overflowed. She buried her face in her chained hands.

"You know what will happen if you don't"

Susan knew! She did a quick tearful survey of the room's resources. "Tie me over the back of that armchair, my hands down to the front legs and my feet tied to the back." Frightened, she added a pathetic, "Please."

"You're good, you really are. I can see why they paid that price for you. O.K. Go and arrange yourself."

One more cruelty! To have to choose and then dispose herself to be bound for a caning she had done nothing to deserve – it was too much! But what could she do! Risking only a small reproachful glance she minced her tiny steps to this new altar of her martyrdom and bent over the back so that her pussy was thrusting hard, her buttocks tautly protruding. Looking sideways, she saw Denver take cord from the drawer that had provided the cane. She maintained a resigned silence while she was tied. As usual the ropes were tighter than they need have been. In front the rope looped her handcuffs so that it

was her wrists that would take the stress of the metal circlets when she struggled. Susan had no hope that she would not struggle, none at all . . .

"Do they usually sentence you?" Denver asked clinically. "So many strokes, or whatever?"

"Mostly, but not always." It was a battle to keep her voice drained of emotion. She knew herself already condemned.

"Which do you prefer? Honestly, I'm interested."

The naked girl believed him. But it was another of the queries she did not wish to face. "It's awful . . . not knowing." She managed.

"O.K. You'd sooner be sentenced. How about a hundred with the cane?"

Susan's heart almost stopped. He was serious! "It would kill me." she said simply.

"Then how about fifty?" He was not laughing. "That would kill me too. Oh, I'm sorry . . ."

"O.K. then. Twenty–five?"

"I've never been punished that hard. I just don't know."

"You've got whip marks all over you."

"I know. But they're quite recent. They were purposely light so I could bear a lot of them. I just can't relate them to your cane, it's so . . . so . . . Oh please, it's damn awful. Worse than anything . . ."

"I'll hold the arm a bit."

"Thank you."

"So we settle for twenty–five?"

Susan burned her boats. "I'm scared of offending you. I don't want to be caned at all but I know I'm going to be. If I ask for too few you may double it or something. I'll try and take the twenty–five and hope I don't lose consciousness or suffer some injury. At least I can't get loose. I have to stay like this." She tried to look back at him but could not. "I'm sort of new at this too . . ."

Denver patted her tight bottom gently with his hand. "Like I said, you're good stuff." He stepped back, swung and struck Susan the first of her twenty–five.

He made her count each stroke.

In between her screams she managed to gasp the tally. When it was done she was freed of rope and given the inevitable order. Grateful for whatever mercy he may have shown, thankful to be conscious and alive, Susan serviced her master. Her handcuffed hands were deft, her tongue eager, her lips warm. It was good to be alive.

"You can kneel there on the rug, facing my chair. I'll mix some drinks. We can both use one."

She had pleased him! Susan sensed his surprise at the joy he had found in her. Thankfully, she rested back on her heels – she had no wish to sit. She could almost believe she would never sit again. When he handed her the glass their eyes met in a strange communion.

"There's something to this business." Denver said thoughtfully.

Susan sipped avidly. With her immediate torture over, she was quite prepared to get drunk in a state of euphoria. She eyed Denver over the rim of her glass and wondered who and what he was. Wondered too, if he had other punishments in store for her today.

"It makes you beautifully submissive and it makes me potently erect," Denver mused. "Would you say that was justification enough?"

"For you."

"But not for you?"

"Not with what I'm sitting on, and how it got that way."

"What about that afterglow you spoke of?"

Susan squirmed, but was honest. "Well alright, it's there, Do you want to use it?"

"On terms of mutuality."

Susan finished her drink in three gulps of bravado. "So O.K. I'm horny. I'm your property. Use me." She set aside her empty glass and lay flat in the most ancient posture of mankind.. "I hope you realize this hurts."

He tossed her a cushion. Placing it beneath her wounds she grimaced. "I'm not sure if that's better or worse," she admitted. "But it's better for you. That's what counts, isn't it. I'm only a slave girl."

She opened her arms and smiled They took a long, long time.

Afterwards, sipping refills, they sat and admired each other. "I'm hungry," Denver said when the drinks were done. "How about you?"

"Starving."

"We'll go to Lombardo's."

Susan looked askance. "Me! Naked and handcuffed!" He chuckled. "Not a bad idea – if we could get away with it. But no, we'll do it properly. I'll carry you to the guest room; there's an extensive wardrobe."

"But even dressed I can't go as a captive. They'd call the police."

Denver grinned, enjoying her bafflement. "You'll be tree as air," he said blandly. "Except for those shoes . . . You'll have to put up with those. They weren't my idea."

"Oh, I'll manage." The words burst from Susan excitedly.

Laughing at her little girl happiness, Denver carried his slave girl upstairs.

The silver shoes were almost a punishment, but not quite. Susan would gladly have walked across the continent in them to once again savour freedom and Lombardo's plush opulence. With Denver's arm firm under her own she made an almost regal passage in and out of taxis and behind the Maître D' to their table. She knew she was looked at.

It was a high necked dress; it had to be. The original backless model she had instinctively chosen betrayed too many whip weals. Lombardo's might have balked at the stripes. A brilliant plethora of jewellery hid her rope burns and the chafe of the metal collar that now was long ago.

But no jewel's brilliance could surpass Susan's sparkle. Tomorrow she might be chained and whipped again, but for tonight she was a princess. Denver was proud of her. She glowed with female joy. Realization of opportunity came late, and caused her to gaze at her escort wide eyed.

"If I chose to walk away from here, you couldn't stop me!"

Denver laughed. "That only just occur to you! You're right, you could. A bit shakily in those shoes but you still could. Why don't you?"

"I haven't had dinner."

They shared enjoyment of her quip. Then Denver said: "I'm curious: there's more involved than dinner."

Susan momentarily remembered Ingrid's fatalistic disposal of the question of freedom. "It isn't that I don't know where to go." She said slowly. "But I'm still a captive. I don't know why, but I am."

"A state of mind?"

"I suppose so. But I could swear there's a chain on me somewhere."

"Could be you haven't hated all your captors. You don't hate me."

It was true! Susan felt guilty at the truth of Denver's guess. Most of those who had used her as a slave had been in some way kind. Her situation of the moment was scarcely credible. Denver had caused the death of Bowser Bullstrode; he had thrashed her, now he was dining her in costly splendor at one of the best places. Was she being silly now in her revulsion against escape. She could not envision herself rising and walking away in her silver slippers, or appealing to the management, or phoning the police. She did not even have the dime for the phone! But she wanted none of these things! That was the crux of it. Mischievously, she asked:

"Are you going to take me home and chain me up for the night?"

He caught her mood. "Why not! You're a valuable property."

"Couldn't I give you my parole or something?"

He shook his head. "Out of keeping with your slave status."

"Why don't I get up and walk away now then?"

"I don't know. I've offered a thought. You tell me."

"Well, never mind. I don't seem to have a lick of sense. Sitting on what I am I ought to be off and running. I still hurt down there y'know."

"Still making you horny?"

"Never mind that either! Look, are you going to use that beastly cane on me again?"

"No, you've graduated."

"You mean I'm nicely broken and well behaved?"

"I don't mean that at all. Next time I'll use the whip instead. It makes more of you available. We mustn't fall into a rut, y'know."

"It's habit forming, isn't it? You enjoyed what you did to me today."

"I enjoyed it all." Denver placed emphasis on the last word, his eyes glinting.

"I'll never be able to wear a low necked gown when you take me out."

Denver gravely considered her point. "You're right. Maybe we should stay with the cane. It's on safe ground."

"I won't have anything to sit on in a week."

"It's a problem," Denver agreed cheerfully. "I suppose it's more your problem than mine; it's your bottom." Susan discovered that this absurd discussion of her agony, abstract as it might be at the moment, aroused within her a tumescent excitation. Forced to examine it, she realised it emanated as much from the dark maleness of her companion as from their use of words. Playing with fire, she found herself pubescently anxious to be burned. "Does it always have to be the bit I sit on?" she asked coyly.

He understood her mood. "It's Lombardo's that's talking, not you. You're pixilated. Tomorrow you'll be mad at yourself."

"Thank you for the warning, kind sir."

Denver shook his head in mock sorrow. "You're incorrigible. You are also made to order for what you've sold yourself into. Unwitting I'm sure, but it's a fact. As for your only suggestion: no, it does not always have to be the bit you sit on. I'm already thinking of diversity."

The thrill that pierced Susan from head to heel was like an electric charge. The man across the table with its fine napery and silver was mentally envisioning her naked loins, her breasts, her taut tummy, and beholding thereon the sudden scarlet birth of whip weals vivid on her white virginity. She shivered deliciously.

"You're a bad influence," she admonished with partial sincerity. "I'm saying these things to you that I'd never say to anyone else. I'm asking for awful things I'd hate, if they happened—"

"They will happen, and you know it."

She knew but did not care. Tonight was her's! "Promise you'll just keep me chained as a pet," she wheedled foxily. I'll make you very happy."

"You will make me very happy," he agreed. "I will also make you the best striped girl in North America. It's mutual."

Susan sipped and ordered and ate and glowed. Winthrop Investments now loomed in her memory as the ultimate Santa Claus. Denver deliberately veered his talk between the brutal and the amusing. She was his utterly.

"I'm a little tipsy." She giggled. "What happens when I have to go to the little girl's room in these shoes?"

She could not best him. Insouciantly he tossed her his irish linen serviette. "Sit on this and your own, under the gown. Use 'em as diapers. Two should do the trick."

It was outrageous. It was adorable. Their repartee was spiced exquisitely by the lurking shadow of tomorrow and reality. She tossed the napkin back to him. "Take it home. You can use it tomorrow to staunch my blood –"

Her words checked as she saw the shadow erase the light from Denver's smile. The quiet voice behind her was, at once, a clap of doom and a paean of joy.

"Nice to find the two of you together."

It was Adrian Foyle.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Torment

Susan was reminded of a lurid magazine cover or a scene from one of the more Gothic Operas. It was too awful to be true, too shockingly close to type to be real. Hitchcock could have rejected it as a stereotype. It was a carefully designed set, with herself in such small spotlight as there was.

The stone confines of the sizable chamber were discernible as shadows cast by the glow of the brazier with its protruding irons. In one corner there was the dim bulk of a wooden chest. The only other object in view was the whip. It lay between her and the flickering illumination of the coals. Inert in its supple coils it was cruelly eloquent.

That was all.

Susan flexed and winced. She looked up the tractioned columns of her arms to where the rope circled her wrists and held her hands high and far apart. No straps, no tempering of the bite and constriction of the cords. There was no mercy in her tying. The silver shoes were still upon her feet. Their metal bands shared her ankles with the rope which was drawn down and out so that her legs were widely spread. Rings set in the stone appeared designed for her immobility. She felt bound and stretched tightly enough to vibrate should she be touched. Her metal shoes reached the floor, but only just.

She was clothed.

That she be covered seemed anomalous. Save for the jewellery, she wore the gown in which she had graced Lombardo's. She had slept in it, handcuffed, in the small cell, her mind a whirl of conjecture and dismay. The morning had brought her present plight. The faces and the hands were new. Communion had been minimal.

Denver's face hovered in her mind. She could not forget his dark amused strength. He was male, male, male. Considering what he was and what he had done to her she should have hated him, but she did not! In relation to him she felt an infatuated teenager. In his hands she would be careless of all else save the joy he found in her.

Denver had relinquished her without a struggle. He had conceded Adrian Foyle's prior claim within the frame of those strange vague understandings by which these men lived and worked. He

had summed it up in his smiling remark, aimed solely at her: "You win a few and you lose a few. This one hasn't been all loss." At their parting, his eyes had been for her only, intense and smoldering. "I'll get you again. You know that, don't you."

In Susan's mind there was no doubt. Adrian had been again the 'nice young man'. For him she felt affection, and from him a sense of security. The two of them had tapered off her evening happily enough. He had laughingly fended off questions, and had delivered her to her owners. Thought of flight had been no more credible with him than with Denver. They had kissed But as Susan kissed back hard, Adrian's lips had become the hot imprints of the man who had relinquished her.

And now this!

It made no sense. There had been no inkling. While she had been fastened she had repeated over and over in frantic urgency: "But I'm on your side, I'm on your side. I belong to you."

It had done no good. Two men had controlled and bound her as she now was. They refused to speak. Their silence was as frightening as the somber room and the glowing coals. The stage was medieval: she was a female felon condemned. The increasing pain of wrist and ankle was her only gauge of time. She was fearfully alone in a phantasmal waiting room.

He came from behind her and she heard no sound. A black body stocking accentuated his muscularity. Suddenly he was there, a dark presence spawned by the place itself.

It was Ducros.

"Good morning, Miss Carmody." His voice was the same somber resonance as on the plane, faintly foreign. His eyes glinted in the brazier's glow.

"But you mustn't!" She was urgent with fear. "There's something wrong. You don't belong here. You're working for –"

"The other side?"

"Yes. I'm – I'm – I'm not guilty of anything. This is a mistake!" Somehow she must make him understand.

"There is no mistake, Miss Carmody."

"But I can see what you're going to do. You mustn't! Oh no!"

"Are you so sure of innocence?"

His question frightened her anew. It sounded sincere, as though he believed her dissembling. Susan voiced an agonized appeal.

"Of course I'm innocent! What could I be guilty of, I'm always a prisoner. Oh, please get someone. Someone who knows. Let me talk before you – before – before do something."

"Before I Torture you?" The faint amusement was still in his voice.

"Yes – oh yes!"

"I am guilty of deception, Miss Carmody," Ducros admitted drily." You and I belong to the same Group. On the plane I was testing you. We were pleased with your response. You passed with honours."

"Then why – ?"

"You have disappointed us. You were clever."

"But Adrian – Mr. Foyle – he would never let this happen to me. Please get him."

"He is not available, and it is none of his business. He has no knowledge of what will take place now between you and me."

"But what am I supposed to have done?"

"Who killed Bullstrode?"

"You don't think it was me!" Susan's heart missed a beat. "That's crazy. I was naked and handcuffed. Ask Ingrid. She was there."

"We know this What was the murderer's name?"

"How should I know! I never saw him before. He suddenly appeared with a man called Denver. Denver just referred to him as Lint."

"When did Denver first employ you?"

"Oh, Mr. Ducros – ! Please! This is nonsense."

"When did you first meet Denver?"

"Right there – when the gun went off, and Bullstrode–"

Ducros sighed "I had hoped of better things from you, Miss Carmody," he said with genuine regret. "After my little sermon on the plane describing my methods, I had no belief I would need to use them. You seem so sensible."

"Oh, I am! Mr. Ducros, don't do those awful things to me. If I knew anything, I'd be glad to tell you. I'd howl it out at the top of my voice. I don't want to be tortured."

"No girl does, Miss Carmody. But your wish is not enough."

"I don't know a thing about those two men. Nothing! If you torture me I'll think up something fictional to get you to stop."

"Let us take the preliminary step, Miss Carmody. I am sure it will help." Ducros's hand reached slowly for a firm grasp of her gown.

"Don't strip me – don't – Oh, oh!"

She remembered the quiet voice beside her on the plane. This was a rehearsed script from which she already knew her lines. She had been naked enough in her slaveries that to be naked again now should matter little. But it did matter! She shrank in cringing revulsion from the exposure of her femaleness while she was bound thus, taut and quivering. Ducros knew his work, knew the searing impact of the slow stripping of her clothes.

The gown resisted so that the male hand was forced to use its strength to tear it from the girl to be tortured. Susan's wrists and ankles screamed in fresh agony as they absorbed the pull until the lovely fabric tore and was rent from her body. She wore now only nylons, garter belt, panties and bra'. When the hand reached again she gasped: "No more, please! Isn't there enough of me bare for you to – to do – ?"

"Total nudity, Miss Carmody. Remember?"

She remembered. She closed her eyes as the belt and nylons were shredded by the hand, then said: "If there was anything to tell, I'd tell you now. Surely you understand that."

"You work for Denver. He planted you. It was planned"

"No! No! No!" All Susan's sincerity spurred the denial. Her breasts were bared by one single rending of her bra. In an agony of apprehension she writhed painfully against the pinioned protestations of her flesh.

"Don't! Don't! Oh please – how could I know him!"

"Why did he take you but not Ingrid?"

Susan froze. The monotonous inquisitorial voice had suddenly opened a vista she had not seen. A chasm yawned. People have been hanged on circumstantial evidence. "I – I – I don't know," she said miserably. "Probably because she was chained to the wall and he didn't have the key. Besides, didn't he leave some sort of message with her? I remember, too, he cut her elbows free. It was a kindness. Is she suspect because of it?"

"You are temporizing, Miss Carmody."

"No! Oh don't tear them off too – !"

Susan braced against the heavy fingers inserted under the frail band of her panties. She cried out in pain at the harsh wrench that took them from her. Ducros's gaze examined her nakedness and approved it.

"You are a lovely subject, Miss Carmody."

'The script was no less potent for having been rehearsed. For the nude Susan it projected an even greater implacability. For moments she felt herself shrivel under the burning eyes. But reason asserted itself. She had been subjected to a psychological torment. The stripping was infinitely worse than the final nudity. Now it was done. She felt a strange relief. She eyed Ducros evenly.

"I'm ready to be tortured now, aren't I. I'm naked and I'm helpless and I don't suppose anyone can hear me scream." She fought hard for normalcy. "But why ruin a good girl! Why spoil the merchandise!"

Her plea evoked a thin smile. "A brand – or two – or even three will not ruin you, Miss Carmody." Ducros's voice was the acme of reason.

"I did not know Denver – I didn't! How could I!"

"And yet he took you to Lombardo's for dinner. He gowned you, bedecked you with jewellery, and freed you of all restraints! Come, come, Miss Carmody, we are not idiots."

This time the chasm was doubly wide. By his quixotic act of giving her an evening's happiness Denver had damned her utterly. She had not even wanted to escape. What other conclusion could Ducros or her owners arrive at! She was self condemned. Susan flung her head from side to side in wild despair. "He was just being kind – we liked each other – for an hour I was happy. You can't understand –"

"I wanted you to test the stripping of your clothes, Miss Carmody." Ducros's vibrant words ignored her own. "Your reaction confirms my estimate of its value. You found it trying, but not trying enough."

"It's awful – beastly! Don't brand me – don't!"

"I am paying you the compliment of dispensing with the tedious small preliminaries of pain and questioning, Miss Carmody. You will start where most girls stop. But please understand; if the red iron does not loosen your tongue there are other things. Pain is infinite."

Susan watched the sparks scatter as Ducros shifted the irons and used the bellows. So this was it! She was to be rendered a piece of palpitating female flesh that none would want. Her loveliness scarred forever. She could not contain her question: "Where – where will you – mark me?"

He smiled He knew her fear. She was woman! "I too can be kind," he said gently. "The first iron will burn into the upper curve of your right buttock. A simple curve – meaningless but more decorative than a straight line or bar."

"I'll scream like crazy. Don't do it! Oh please!"

"The second will bum the same place above the left buttock."

The word was hateful. 'Buttock!' Susan loathed it. It robbed a girl of her femininity. It belonged in the barnyard. "Get someone – someone higher up – someone who might understand –" she pleaded.

"You may tell me, Miss Carmody. I am not of the lower orders."

"But I can't tell you! I've nothing to tell – I can't get through to you!"

"The third burn will be on the upper slope of your right breast."

Susan was panting. Sweat trickled from her armpits. "Don't burn me," she gasped brokenly. "Hurt me in other ways – please!"

He surveyed her in silence. The glow from the brazier highlighted Susan's glistening skin. The cords round her wrists and ankles were almost lost within her flesh, her hair was dank with the perspiration of pain, her pubic bush accentuated the cruel separation of her thighs He shook his head sadly.

"Very well – but just for the moment," he conceded.

He picked up the whip. "I am not sure I am doing you a kindness." He swung the black thong in a sweeping arc.

"No don't" A shocked girlish voice pealed out the words. The door swung back with a crash. Leonie Wakelyn swept into the dim chamber like a ray of light and flung herself upon the tied and naked female figure awaiting torture. Young eager arms encircled a captive neck and lips met lips.

Ducros lowered his arm. The whip hung waiting from his hand. From the corner of a confused eye Susan saw him unperturbed faintly smiling. Not surprised She herself was lost in wonderment.

"What's he doing to you?" Leonie demanded hotly. "He mustn't!"

"But how?" Susan was lost.

"Someone told Mumsie I could visit you, so here I am."

"Visit?"

The youngster turned to the watching man. "Go away. Poor darling. I'm going to untie her."

Ducros did not go away. Instead, with frightening ease, he plucked the exuberant teenager from her embrace. After a few minutes of furious struggle and angry exclamations Leonie hung from bound wrists, her legs sundered as were Susan's, bound to Similar rings in the floor.

"Miss Wakelyn has arrived at an opportune moment," said Ducros suavely.

"Let me down! Who the hell d'you think you are!" Leonie struggled in futile abandon until the pain of wrist and ankle compelled quiescence.

Susan was desolate. Everything was so terribly wrong. Nothing made sense. She looked at Ducros askance. "Let her loose! Surely you know who she is?"

"Miss Wakelyn is an excellent medium, an aid in our present task," Ducros explained. "We have no wish to injure you: you are merchandise. But we have no such qualms about this charming young lady . I was about to whip you raw, but now I can use the whip on our visitor. I will whip her until you indicate a wish to speak. I will then stop."

It was neat. It was perfect It was fiendish! Susan knew for sure that had she something to impart she would speak it now. To stand and watch this child stripped and flogged was unthinkable. But what could she say – what! She had only words and they were not enough.

Leonie had words a 'plenty. "Let me down, you big ape." she demanded in outrage. "This hurts like hell! And look: don't you touch my clothes! You strip me and there'll be trouble."

"I intend to both strip and whip you, Miss Wakelyn. You are an unfortunate victim of circumstances"

"Don't you dare! I'll howl my head off."

"No one will hear. But should your terminology become too offensive I will employ a gag."

"You rotten bastard You daren't whip me –"

"Miss Carmody can bring your suffering to an end at any time."

Leonie stopped writhing. "Is that right, Susan? What goes?"

"He thinks I know a secret. But I don't! Oh, Leonie, I'm more scared than you are."

Ducros grasped Leonie's dress and tore it from her young slenderness in a single rending tug. It came as no surprise to find that the child had been naked beneath the single garment.

"You son of a bitch! Cover me up. I don't want a gorilla like you looking at my pussy and tits." Leonie was actually blushing.

"Oh Leonie – Leonie dear! If I knew something I'd tell him." Susan was piteous in her frustration. "But he won't believe – he'll never believe –"

"It's O.K. Mr. Ducros. You can let me down now." Leonie's dulcet voice with its impossible implication caused Susan to gasp and stare in disbelief. Her own pain, her nakedness, her fear were all forgotten as she watched the Executioner loosen his youthful victim and saw the victim herself gather her seemingly torn dress and contrive, with remarkable success to cover her so recently revealed nudity.

"A small deception, Miss Carmody," Ducros said silkily. "You were sadly suspect, but you are suspect no longer. Our apologies."

Once again the small whirlwind of girlish arms and legs and lips. "I just had to help, darling. Everyone thought it a lovely idea – much better than –," she giggled happily, "than spoiling the merchandise. Say you forgive me."

Susan was in a mood to forgive everybody everything. Ducros's parting words were indeed an accolade. "Once more with flying colours, Miss Carmody. My congratulations. You are more than ever valued."

"Isn't he super all in black!" Leonie enthused. "I almost wished he would torture me just a little – was it very awful, darling?"

Susan tried to tell how awful it had been. Instead, she wept. Hysterical tears of pure relief and thankfulness. She was ardently hugged and her tears lapped up by a warm and fervid tongue. "Are you allowed to untie me?" she sobbed hopefully. "I hurt so much."

"Better than that! I've got you for a day and a night," the moppet said gaily. "You're being borrowed. Your cage is all ready, and I've got the loveliest new whip."

"It sounds nice," said Susan, uncaring. "But may I be untied please?"

"Promise to let me tie you again? I'm going to tie you tight and gag you and take you home in the trunk of the car. I'll get a couple of these fellows to carry you and put you in."

"You don't need to, Leonie. I'll come with you. I'd love to."

"But I want you bound and gagged, darling. Don't spoil my fun. Promise you'll behave if I let you loose?"

"Of course I'll behave, you little goose. You can do whatever you like with me," Susan promised happily in reckless euphoria.

It was heaven to be untied. With the willing help of the child, Susan massaged her wounds. It felt wonderful. Everything was wonderful. Momentarily she had a vision of Denver's sardonic regard. It would have been nice to be rescued by him instead of by an adolescent girl. But still . . . " Do you want me to walk to the car or will you tie me here, dear?" she asked absently.

"Right here, darling. You want to get out of this place, don't you, so I'll make it snappy. Hands behind your back to start."

The naked slave found actual pleasure in obedience. She stood erect and crossed her wrists above her derriere. When Leonie uncrossed them and placed them palm to palm she got the message but did not complain, contenting herself with the appeal: "Don't you have handcuffs, dear? My wrists have had a rough time."

Leonie was a spoiled child and knew what she wanted. "No handcuffs," she declared firmly. "I feel like tying you, so that's the way it's going to be. Remember, you promised!"

Susan winced under the thin rope. She had no illusions what to expect from the absorbed child so busily rendering her helpless. She was going to hurt. But compared to what Ducros had conjured for her it was almost fun. Even when the small busy hands circled her elbows with the vicious strands she made no sound, but held her shoulders back and tried to help.

"You're terribly sweet, Susan." There was real affection in the young voice as the wise fingers tied the last knot. "You'll have to lie down now so I can do the hog–tie. Here, I'll help."

The naked girl watched her ankles tightly bound. Leonie was immensely competent. The ropes were circled three times and then cinched between so that the ropes welded her feet together. Then she was told to lie face down while ankles and wrists were joined. "It hurts something awful." she said quietly. But it was not a complaint, it was a communion between two girls.

"I'm a little beast, aren't I!" Leonie giggled. "But it won't be for long. I promise. Then when I get you home I'm going to do the loveliest things to you."

Susan grinned inwardly. She had once been thankful to get away from Leonie's painful mischief. Now she returned to it with gladness. A slave's life was governed by comparisons, gradations of pain. Some were easier to accept than others. There was a smile in her eyes as with docile willingness, she opened her mouth for the ball gag. She even found amusement when the two men awkwardly picked up her jackknifed nakedness and carried it to the rug laid in the trunk of the car. Before the lid slammed her into darkness she had a last glimpse of Leonie's enraptured face.

The cramped blackness of her mobile prison could scarce be pleasant. Bound as Susan was it was painful and a little frightening. To keep perspective, the tied captive allowed her mind to rove the possibilities in her immediate future. The rest of the day, and then the night. After that a return to her owners, the cell, and her next assignment. Undoubtedly the child to whom she had been loaned would use her possession to the fullest. The 'lovely new whip' would no doubt feature prominently in the day, the little cage might house her for the night. Unless – ! She grinned in the darkness. Unless mother or daughter, or perhaps both, chained her to their bed. Either way she would be well used. Expensive merchandise would not be left upon a shelf.

At first she rejected awareness of passing time. The motor hummed, the tires sang, her wrists and ankles hurt. Her elbows were on fire. Susan wished fervently that the moppet could have foregone the pleasure of binding her elbows so tightly that they met and were clamped together. True, the binding made escape impossible – she would not even try to free herself, it hurt too bitterly. But she was a willing captive. The elbow tie was something she did not need. Its pain made the ride seem unduly long.

The moment she faced reality was a terrible one for Susan. This ride was too long! It went on and on. She sensed speed: perhaps a freeway! She bit hard on the rubber ball in her mouth, seeking to eject it. But Leonie's fingers had done their job too well. The small sphere was well inside her mouth upon her tongue, its strap was buckled tight at the nape of her neck. In the same moment of panic she worked her hands against their cords. It was all futile. She could not move. She could influence nothing, she was a naked piece of helpless flotsam afloat on a stream she could not stem. The dark and the whine of tires mocked her.

Susan was prepared to believe it hours before her prison slowed and stopped. There was a commotion within the car, and then without. There was male laughter and the sounds receded, then only silence. With a thrill of horror the bound girl glimpsed the possibility that, if something had happened with Leonie or the Wakelyn chauffeur, she could lie as she was for hours or for days. So completely was she tied and gagged she was incapable of sound to attract attention. It was the most fearful moment of her life. When the key turned in the lock her world stood still. The flooding light revealed an amused male smile.

It was the man called Denver.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Love In Chains

"You shouldn't laugh at a poor girl in trouble," Susan admonished severely, but there was laughter in her own voice too.

Denver's merriment continued unchecked. He slapped his leg and shook his head in amazement. "I was going to get you," he affirmed forcibly. "But to have you handed to me as a bonus – and as neatly tied a package as I've ever seen!"

"Aren't you lucky!" Susan tried to put ice in her voice but failed. "What have you done with Leonie?" She twisted her bound shoulders ineffectually. "And why can't you be a gentleman and untie me!"

"You're not hog–tied any more, honey. Don't cheat a poor man of his pleasures. You look damn sweet standing in the middle of the floor all trussed up – the kid do that to you?"

"Yes, and I'm likely to fall on my face at any moment. Oh, Denver, be nice to me. I'm so happy you've – well, got me."

"That's more than the kid is – what's her name, Leonie? She's pure spitfire. I'm going to enjoy her. So will the boys."

Susan's mind was in a whirl. She tried to keep the adoration from her eyes but knew she failed. She was an infatuated schoolgirl. For her, Denver was Burt Reynolds and Charles Bronson rolled into one. He could do no wrong. She hurt frightfully but did not care. But Leonie! That was something else! She owed Leonie nothing. The bright eyed youngster had whipped and tied her, and yet –! She was an engaging moppet. "Why – why have you, it's kidnapping, isn't it?" She asked.

"Let's call it leverage, sweetheart." Denver had again become the amused and sardonic male who had thrashed and loved her. "I had her picked up for a bit of bargaining, but getting you tossed in gives me ideas you're habit forming."

"You're not going to hurt her?"

"Did I hurt you?"

Susan remembered the yellow cane and Denver's cords all to vividly. Her derriere blazoned its punishment. Or was it punishment! For her perhaps not, but for Leonie! "Don't do to her what you do to me." she pleaded.

"Why not?"

"You've got me. Leonie's only a kid."

"She's a kid who's given all the boys an erection, including me."

"You can get rid of it in me." Susan admonished. "They can too – if you want me used that much. You let 'em do it before."

"Mmmmm!" His eyes mocked to speed her pulse. "Forget the kid. You and I have unfinished business. How about a drink?"

"Like this! I daren't move."

"I'll feed it to you." He went to the bar and began to pour.

"Denver, please! Untie my elbows?"

"No. They make your tits stick out."

"I'll stick them out for you anyway. I promise. My elbows weren't supposed to be tied so tight so long, it's torture."

Denver took a swallow and gave her two. Susan gulped without shame. Her heart thumped at his nearness. She stood, tingling, as he tore at Leonie's knots and peeled Leonie's rope from the pinioned elbows. Hearing her gasp, and understanding her pain, he held the glass once more to her lips. "You infected me with B&D." he said casually. "I like it. You can teach me more."

"But I don't know any more than you do," Susan wailed. "I got tossed into it when I was sold. I got used! I hated it until –"

"Until you met me."

Susan blushed and did not care. "Oh alright, until then! There's something about you – I can't explain." Denver nodded, his dark eyes assessed his prize. "You're in love with me."

"Yes I am, damn you!"

"Won't do you any good, y'know. I'll beat your bottom 'till you dance."

"Go ahead. I'll howl. You'll have to put up with the noise."

"You honestly don't give a hoot, do you – or think you don't?"

"I can't help it, Susan retorted, half angrily. "It's all your fault. I'm ridiculous. Maybe if you hurt me enough I'll get back to hating you."

"Do you want to?" Denver was curious.

"It makes things simpler, for me that is," his captive admitted honestly. "Can't you understand what a jackpot of emotion I'm in! I want to get in your bed, and whatever I have to do or to suffer to get there I'll do."

"I'm a lucky bastard, aren't I!" His sardonic voice was soft.

"Well, I'm lucky too," said Susan, twisting her tied hands. "Wouldn't you like to untie me? We can always start again?"

"No, I wouldn't."

She sighed, and was absurdly thrilled by his refusal. How gorgeous it was to be so wanted and possessed by a man! Yet she knew if it was someone else she would feel only pain and fear. The drink and the loss of the rope round her elbows spurred her to mischief.

"I'd be very obedient and let you?"

"I said, no."

"Please, take me to bed?"

"When I choose."

Again the thrill. She tried again. "If you'll let me loose from these ropes of Leonie's. I'll think up some interesting new ways for you to tie me. I'll hold out my hands?"

"That's an idea." She had captured his interest. "You mean, to cane the palms of your hands the way they did kids in school?"

That had not been what she meant at all, and she suspected he knew it. Infatuation primed submission, however, and she agreed sweetly: "Of course, if it will please you."

"You got stuck with that one, didn't you!" Denver laughed. "Of course it will please me. My John's hard at the thought. It won't please you though."

"I don't matter, I'm a slave."

"You're a bloody miracle." His gaze absorbed every inch of her nakedness. "I never affected any other female this way – they either flop or flee."

"I'd have fled. But I was chained allready for you. Remember?" Susan twinkled. "I suspect a lot of girls might fall in love if they were tied tight enough and long enough to get 'em over the first hump."

Denver nodded, soberly enough. "I'll keep it in mind. All fooling apart, I think You've got something there. Women shouldn't have to make up their minds about us, a man should do it for 'em."

Susan vibrated happily. Denver was the ultimate Male.

That he was also other things, some of them dark and sinister, was a fact she refused to face. A count of the days since she had first walked into the office of Winthrop Investments would make a small tally, yet in that time she had travelled far enough along strange paths that she could now stand before this vibrant and ruthless man, naked and bound, with perfect equanimity. Aware of instability, she asked prettily:

"Can you take my silver shoes off? Nobody seems to have a key. I can't get them off myself, and they make me teeter on my toes."

"Good! Wear 'em. They add to your sexy walk." Denver chuckled in contemplation of the locked metal. "I'll get a key, but I may never use it. Those shoes might save me a slave girl sometime if you managed a Houdini and headed for the trees."

"I wouldn't do that."

His gaze turned somber. "You believe that now. But you don't know me. All you see right this moment is that I'm bound to take you to bed and make you very happy. You're getting a nice sensual quiver out of those ropes, and the shoes, and the thought of getting your rump warmed up with a cane – so long as it's me who's using the cane. Right?"

"I suppose so," Susan admitted impatiently. "But don't analyze us down to zero. Let's go to bed now. I want you."

"You do know you started something, don't you?"

"Well alright! So you enjoy beating my bottom! Who's complaining!"

"I'll do a lot more than that to you. You may wish you didn't wear those shoes."

She did not answer. Female vibrations swept towards Denver in waves. Female musk was sweet and heavy in the air. Susan smiled as Eve must once have done.

Denver picked her up and carried her from the room.

Their lovemaking lasted two days and three nights. For Susan it diminished nothing, quenched no fire. She was as enraptured with Denver at the end as at the beginning. She was passionately and erotically in love. What he was, or what he might do with her were abstract questions thrust into limbo by the heat of her loins.

Mostly she was free, but naked in her silver shoes she knew herself securely captive. With her feet locked in the exquisite metal she would go nowhere. By some magic of his own, Denver produced a key and removed them so that she might bathe and rest her toes. But in an hour he put them back on. They fascinated him, and because of that Susan was happy to feel their clasp.

In his own dark way, Denver was as happy as she. He savoured to the full her total submergence of herself to his will. He had broken girls often enough so that they crawled and begged. He had enjoyed his fill of them. But this girl was different. She embraced slavery at his hands as none had ever done, she revelled in it – not abjectly, but as a thing of glory. He allowed her to call him 'Master'. They had laughed about it when Susan had first shyly used the word. But the appellation stuck. It suited their relationship. In the darker recesses of his mind he knew he would justify her choice. He would be her Master now and always. The thought always puzzled him, he had never thought of girls in terms of permanency. He allowed himself to be led into lotus land, keeping his own mental reservations which Susan sensed but did not question.

Denver kept his slave girl free of bonds for their many and diverse explorations of the act of love. But when they slept he made sure she was chained to his bed by an ankle or a wrist, or perhaps a collar on her neck. They laughed about these restraints knowing them only an emphasis on her condition. Once he bound her brutally with cords, even to the hated elbow cinch. But she slept happily beside him, nestling against his bulk, breathing gently on his flesh. She could scarcely move, but she did not want to move. When she awoke he knew she was hurting badly, but she made no plaint. Her eyes followed him everywhere – adoringly!

It did not end. It changed. Or returned to a beginning. Denver remained intrigued by the facet of Sex he had hitherto ignored. Whether Susan was his guide or his victim in this fantasy of cord and cane mattered little. She was abundantly present. He was as much obsessed with her as she with him, though in a different way. She spelled his entry into a rich new land of sensuality he must explore. He was secretly curious as to whether she could sustain her tolerance of the agonies his search would impose. But that did not matter. She was his utterly. She could never escape! Even if his cruelty severed the emotional bond by which she was now held, the metal links and nylon strands would keep her safe for him.

"Remember the waving palm?" he asked on the third morning.

Susan remembered, and her pulse paused at the memory. She stopped kissing and licking his naked knee, and knelt beside him on their bed.

"Yes, Master, I remember."

"Happy about it?"

"Not really. Just scared"

"I've fixed a room. Let's go down."

She followed him, a little frightened, a little excited. She was a slave girl going to get her hands whipped. She had learned to walk now upon her toes with a modicum of assurance.

She supposed all such rooms must of necessity look alike. This one did. It was a sizable compartment set aside and converted for the purpose of inflicting pain on girls, primarily herself! Considering its function it was reasonably cheerful. Prominent at its center stood a stool.

"May as well sit down, sweetheart."

Sweetheart sat down and watched her feet drawn back and her ankles tied to the rungs. Her black triangle was well exposed, but that was to be expected.

"I've given this a bit of thought, honey. I want to avoid being hackneyed."

Honey agreed it would be nice to avoid the trite. Her heart was beating fast but her voice was sweetly demure. "Yes, Master."

"The rope ties round your wrist like this."

She was as intent as he, watching. Two strands. Tight, knotted at the back of her wrist. From it the rope trailed to a ring in the floor. Loose! Both wrists the same. The effect was odd.

"Scratch your nose."

Instinctively she tried, but with neither of her hands could she touch herself. By swaying this way or that she could come close in a frustratingly partial freedom. When she desisted, her hand and arm hung loosely out to one side, not truly bound.

"I can't. My hand won't reach."

"Neat, eh! Get the drift?"

Susan shook her head. "Why must I scratch my nose?"

From somewhere he had produced the yellow cane. "You don't have to, sweetheart." He flexed the lissom length lovingly.

She thought she understood. "You want me to hold my hand up to be hit, Master?"

"That's the ticket! Up. Well out. Palm nice and flat."

The captive hand had never seemed so small and innocent as Susan extended it the full length of her arm. It was cruel to punish so sweet a feminine thing. From beneath the wrist the tethering rope looped, without function, to its ring.

She trembled and gasped as he tapped gently with the cane, raising and lowering her arm to suit his aim. The suspenseful promise was excruciating. "Do you like doing that, Master, or is it just to scare me?" Susan asked in genuine curiosity.

Her answer was the swift sure arcing of the cane and its thrumming slicing of the air as it cut its way to her open palm. The resulting agony was so great as to numb her into gasping silence. Her hurt hand fled for solace to her armpit and was snubbed far short of its goal by its rope tether. Stunned with pain, the naked girl on the stool surveyed her straining arm in wonder.

"Silly to have you hugging yourself after every switch," Denver said, smiling.

His captive gazed up at him, no adoration lost, but her eyes wide with pain. "Thank you, Master." She managed a tremulous smile.

"Hurt bad?"

Susan nodded sadly. "It's awful. It doesn't go away."

"How bad d'you want to hug?"

"Oh Denver! With every inch of me. Please, can't I?"

"Of course not. Teach yourself control. From where I stand the effect's damn good."

Susan longed to curl up and cry. It was a beastly stomach turning pain. If only she could have hugged her injury beneath an armpit! She was certain her agony would be mitigated had she been able to follow instinct. Now, her cut palm with its furious throb hung and jerked against the rope

which had seemed so innocent, but which now held her hand in lonely isolation as though she had abandoned it.

"Oh, Denver, have mercy on me – Master!"

"None, sweetheart."

"Take me back to bed – please?"

"Is that a bribe?"

"I hope so, Master."

"It damn near is. But you know better. Now your other hand."

Susan held it out bravely, hating its rope. Strangely, she could not hate the man who had tied it. "You hit me terribly hard that first time, Master," she ventured.

"I'll do better this time."

Denver did better. Susan screamed and tore madly to recover her hand. The rope mocked her. She sat helpless on her stool with an arm out to each side like half opened wings, hands limp. Moaning, she sought to absorb her Master's gift of pain.

"You have a gift for looking sweet."

"I don't feel sweet, Master."

"But you understand why I am doing this?"

"Yes, Master, it gives you happiness. I may howl but I won't complain. Could you hit me a little less hard?"

"No I couldn't!"

"Thank you, Master"

"What about you? Any happiness at all?"

"I'll be terribly happy when it's over." Susan gasped, askance. "Oh, Master, I didn't mean it like that! I'm not sure what I mean. But you've hit me twice and I'm glad I mean I'm glad I've been able to make you happy, and I'm glad I don't feel any different to you because of the pain. So I think I'm going to feel proud, ever so proud when you stop caning my hands and tell me it's over. Does that make any sense?"

"A lot of sense, sweetheart. Hold out number one again."

Susan obeyed. The cane rapped sharply on the existing weal. She flinched and closed her eyes.

"Bit of stress, I imagine – the second time round?"

"If I could, I'd run," Susan admitted.

"More support for your theory about keeping a girl tied," Denver said cheerfully, and cut her hand hard.

This time her scream was longer and broken into trailing moans. In complete abandon, Susan tugged and heaved at her pinioned hands. Not in expectation of freeing them but as a substitute for such comfort as her armpits might have given them had not Denver's ropes forestalled her need. The stool rocked and creaked, her body writhed and twisted. But at the end of her struggles she sat, head bowed, gasping.

"Damned if you haven't given me a hard on."

Susan looked up at her Master and tried to smile. It was not easy. "It's not me, it's the cane." she told him wanly.

"We'll have to do something about it, y'know."

Susan looked up in gladness, suddenly radiant. But when he loosened only her right hand she knew what she must do. With numb fingers she dealt with his zipper. Despite pain and disappointment she thrilled at what she pulled into view. The disappointment vanished when she filled her mouth and busied herself with lips and tongue. This was her Master!

Her task complete, her Master's phallus laved by her tongue to his demanding specifications, the slave girl once more extended her arm and watched as it's wrist was bound. A strange normalcy had fallen upon the bizarre proceedings. Denver's pronouncement was terse.

"A total of six." Half way!

He did not untie her. After he had hit each of her taut palms three times he stood back in reverence. For Denver, this girl was a new dimension. Susan herself sobbed and moaned her way into final quiescence and sat tied to her stool like a wounded bird with drooping wings outspread. Her hands throbbed like two enemies at the end of her patient arms. Remembering an undemanded cue wholly her own, she whispered thankfully: "Thank you for caning my hands, Master."

There fell a silence, broken after seconds by Denver's exclamation. "Do you realize what that did to me – that 'thank you' of yours. I've got another erection!"

"I must have pleased you, Master."

"Please me! Hell, after the last couple of days I shouldn't want a woman for a week. But I'm hungry for you – starved."

"Take me to bed, Master."

"No, I won't! I want to figure this out. Besides, you look too damn pretty sitting there like that. I'd like to leave you there all day."

"You can, Master."

"Go easy on that sweet submission, honey, or I'll give you a couple more. I can hardly stand it."

Susan, with female guile, took a gamble. She raised and extended a taut palm.

"Look at that! Dammit, Susan, you must have played this game for years?"

She tried to shake off her erotic sensuality and be matter–of–fact. "No. Honest I haven't! It's as crazy to me as it is to you. I've hated all the pain and imprisonment I've had to take since I sold myself. It's you. You do something to me. I think it's one of those cases where two people fuse – if that's the word."

"You're enjoying this!"

"That's not the right word. The pain's the same as always – I want it to stop. But when it does stop I'm terribly wonderfully happy. It hasn't changed my feeling about you at all. I still want to belong to you – always."

"Yet I'll be an absolute bastard to you."

Susan shrugged. "We can't help that, can we!" She let her proffered hand fall limp.

"You know what I've got planned?"

"No."

"That back of yours. I've got a whip!"

"Yes, Master."

"You're making me feel a prick."

"I know, Master. We affect each other powerfully. I'm not trying to make you feel like that. Please whip me." Denver sighed heavily and shook his head, baffled.

"Can you guess what screwball idea that request has done for me?"

Susan giggled. "That again! Well, don't feel badly. It's wonderful."

"Oh sure, that's right in there. But at this moment I have the most powerful urge to yank you off to a Justice of the Peace and marry you."

All of' Susan was suddenly alive. She sat erect, her wrists tugged at their tethers, her eyes were wide. She spoke in wondering disbelief: "You know I want that more than anything else in the world."

"Right now you do. But remember, sweetheart, I'm a – what's the best word for me? Gangster?"

"I don't care."

"Men like me can't marry. It makes them vulnerable. You'd end up the way the kid has. Because of her the Wakelyn woman is vulnerable. Because I have the kid I'll pry something I want out of Winthrop."

"I don't care."

"I wouldn't want you hurt. I'd be running scared."

"Marry me."

"I shouldn't have told you your effect on me. But it's never happened to me before, and I'm puzzled. I'm just trying to sort it out. Forget the word marriage. I should have kept my yap shut."

It was Susan's turn to sigh. She went limp within her bonds. For a moment the little girl inside had beheld a vision. Now it was gone. Sadly, she said what came first to mind: and knew it absurd.

"Never mind, Denver. Whip my nice white back. Maybe then we'll both feel better."

Denver made a gesture of renunciation. He grinned wryly. "I killed the mood. A guy, even me, doesn't whip his mother, his sister or his wife. See what you've done to me! It won't last though. Understand?"

"I understand, Master."

"Good! Maybe it's as well we've crossed the hump. It was sort of hanging fire. I will whip you today though: you may as well know it." Again his somber grin. "I suppose most of what a man does depends on his balls. Another hour with you and I'll revert to being a bastard again."

The helpless girl looked at him levelly. "I want you to – Denver."

"You sure can project a message, sweetheart. But forget the bit of parchment and the orange blossom. We've got a bit of time to fill while I recharge, how's about a distraction?"

For moments she said nothing. Then, only: "You can leave me tied like this if you have things to do."

"The sweet virgin sacrifice!"

"I won't mind."

Denver busied himself with her ropes. "I want to show you something. Just as well you look."

Susan's freed hands did not seek her armpits, the moment had passed. Ruefully she examined her swollen palms then let them hang limp and hurting. Proudly, she tested her mastery of the silver shoes. Deliberately she was cultivating a provocative swing of her hips. She minced happily beside her master. It was another of the nameless rooms. It had little to offer save two features on center stage, welded inseparably by rope. One was a functional wooden bench, the other was a naked Leonie, firmly bound on her back with her legs outrageously sundered and drawn off to either side so that Susan's first impression was of a small oasis of adolescent pubic hair.

"Welcome to the Club, darling," said Leonie without visible dolor. "Come and kiss me. I can't move."

Sinking to her knees beside the bench, Susan kissed and hugged the girlish nudity. Her feelings were a mixture of horror, sympathy, and a mild affection. Leonie, in her own domain, was something of a little bitch. But here, bound tightly to the bench she was a pixie sweetness to be pitied.

"This is the shits, darling, I can't even twitch," Leonie proclaimed without obvious concern. "Look

how they've pulled my arms up and tied my hands – does it flatten my boobs out too much? I mean, you can still tell I've got a couple, can't you?"

Susan rose and backed away to take in the view. She was able to reassure the captive maiden of the twin evidence of her femininity. Leonie was ingeniously tied as a sacrifice to an intent all too clear. A strap 'round her waist cinched the concavity of her stomach down to the wood. Her hands were pulled ruthlessly back and tied to each top corner of her hard couch. But it was her small bottom and her legs that compelled concern. Her tight small derriere hung in air beyond the bench. It was held rigidly by the slender legs and feet, each tautly stretched by the ropes from the ankles to a pair of widely separated posts. Leonie's feet were high and far apart. The neat furred slit of her girlish sex twinkled invitingly.

"You know what I'm here for, Darling!" said the stretched captive with macabre relish.

She felt a chill. Susan knew! Confirmation came from Denver's amused voice: "The boys take her as they please. The kid's a nice facility."

"Oh, but they mustn't! She's too young! You can't do this to her, she's only a hostage." Susan turned to her Master imploringly. "Denver, don't do it to her. If your boys are that hard up they can use me. One more round won't do me any harm. But for a kid like her –"

"Hey Susan! They're not going to kill me," Leonie interjected with faint irritation. "They've got me tied this way to be screwed."

"How d'you know she won't enjoy it," Denver suggested sardonically.

"But she's a child! Her mother –" The sight of Leonie's flagrantly exposed sex aroused all Susan's sense of rightness.

"You going to tell mother, kid?" Denver inquired laconically.

"Jeepers no!" Leonie's negative was fervent. "And look here, Susan, don't you tell her either. She'd blow her top. I'd be in that cage for a month."

"But it's not your fault, Leonie! I could explain – " Susan looked from one to the other, perplexed. "Denver, please! Use me instead."

"No. You're mine."

"But you mustn't, you can't!"

"Oh, shut up, Susan." The tied girl advised testily. "Let him screw you. He looks super. But look, don't tell mother, please! Say you promise?"

Susan had worked herself into a fine indignation. She looked down at the imploring pixie features. "I won't let them do it to you, dear," she affirmed vehemently. "I just won't! I'll find some way – Oh Denver!"

"What d'you mean, you won't let 'em!" Leonie giggled. "They've already done it."

Susan stood, aghast.

"We've just dropped in between times." Denver's amusement almost overflowed into hilarity.

"I think I've been fucked by every chap in the State." Leonie informed casually. "I lost track. The first one was awful – and he had bad breath. But since then it's been better every time." Her bright eye roamed. "How about you, Mr. Denver? Susan can wait outside."

Susan breathed hard. Delectable visions of soundly whipping this outrageous little strumpet flickered through her mind. She felt absurd, deflated, by her defense of a treasure already cheerfully relinquished.

"I've been wondering what it was like," Leonie mused reflectively. "Oh boy!" She turned anxiously to Susan. "You have tried it, haven't you? If Mr. Denver hasn't done it to you yet, you'd better ask him. Honest, it's out of this world."

Susan turned to Denver. It was hard not to share his grin. "If she's so damn willing, why is she tied like that?"

"Remember your own theory: the hump a girl has to cross? We helped her out."

"You can certainly untie her now."

"Don't you do it!" The victim of lost virtue exclaimed. "Don't be prissy about this, Susan. It's lovely! I haven't tried it any other way, but I'm damn sure this is best. It's – It's – Ohhhhh!" Leonie's loss of words was more eloquent than the words might have been. Her next plea was urgent: "Darling, get Mr. Denver to tie you like this and fuck you. It's the chance of a lifetime. I bet most fellows and girls don't even know –"

Susan's furious retort was killed by the advent of an expectant male, already fumbling at his belt. A fumble that stopped at sight of company.

"Oops, sorry! Didn't know –" He turned to leave. "Don't run away." said Leonie firmly. "These two are just leaving."

For a moment Susan was stunned by the sheer effrontery. Then, in a fury of righteous vexation, she grasped her Master's arm and tip toed with him haughtily from the bower of concupiscence.

When they were well down the passage Denver allowed his amusement to overflow. "The kid got to you, eh!" He chuckled.

"Well, I never in my life –!"

His slave girl looked up at him in pink indignation. Then, seeing his lips possessed by his grin, she too surrendered to humour. "The little bitch!" she exclaimed. "I'm certainly not going to tell her mother about this."

"Guess I won't either," Denver conceded. "She's asked the boys not to push negotiations. She doesn't want to go home."

"But you're not going to leave her like that!"

"No, I'm not. Little hot–puss is going to have a sore rump. No reason why our great experiment has to be confined to you."

"Ours!"

"Well, it's your fault I got addicted."

Susan shrugged. "An hour ago I'd have asked you to use my behind instead of her's, I'm damned if I will now! A dozen with that beast of a cane will do her good."

"A dozen! Oh, come on!"

"Oh alright! I'm not pleading for the little mink." Denver picked up his slave girl as though she was a feather. "Forget the kid," he ordered. "We're going to talk about us. And we'll have a drink. You're going to need yours."

Susan was a contented cat. Had she been able to purr she would have done so. She nestled in two male arms, uncaring of what those arms might later do to her, and put her own around a male neck while she rubbed cheeks with a man who might, for all she knew, be the cruelest human she had ever met. Denver stood her upright in the lounge.

"Serve the drinks, girl," he said genially. "I may as well get something out of someone else's investment in you." Susan poured and Susan served. She was very happy.

Kneeling before her owner she offered his libation. "As you desire it, Master."

"You do that damn well. Take yours and make yourself comfortable. I want to talk about whipping you." Susan obeyed. She glowed. She felt only a great coziness.

"I want to do this right." Denver mused. "There's preparations underway right now."

"Preparations! Just to whip me!"

"Don't act so surprised" He eyed her shrewdly. "I think you may get a bang out of this too. I read it in a book once."

"Not a Russian knout or an African Sjambok, I hope?"

"Couldn't care less, could you."

"So alright, I'm besotted with love – or lust – or something. But, honest, I do care. I don't want to get all cut up."

"You any authority on whippings?"

Susan sipped and considered the question. "I suppose really I'm not – but, on the other hand – ! Why?"

"I've got something going. It should be neat."

Susan would have preferred another subject. She sipped and reflected: "Don't you just tie the girl up naked and go to work on her with whatever beastly instrument you've chosen?"

"You deserve something better."

There was that in Denver's voice which should have chilled maiden lechery. It barely touched the base of Susan's spine. "Master, I'm starting to quiver." She took a demonstrative gulp. "Can't we talk about politics or going back to bed? I'm so happy."

"To tell the truth," Denver said frankly, "I'm getting the biggest charge, sitting here with a naked slave and discussing the whipping she's going to get in a little while. It's unique in my book. I want you to get in on the act."

"It's me who's getting whipped," Susan said demurely. "Isn't that a good enough contribution?"

"That's not what I mean. You've been whipped quite a lot. Tell me about it."

"It hurts."

"Feeling foxy, aren't you! C'mon, do better."

"It hurts something awful. A girl knows for sure she's going to die."

"But isn't that just the first time?"

"I suppose the dying bit is." Susan giggled. "I was quite sure about it that first time. Honest I was! Now I just hope I will."

"Quit fooling."

"Well then, the pain's so shocking that's all you think about while it's happening – no analysis at all."

"Sure you're not getting a damp snatch talking to me about it?"

"Only because it's you."

"You looking forward to it – because of me?"

"If I let myself think of what you're going to do to me I'd be a frantic lunatic by now," Susan said slowly as she thought it out. "But because it's you I'm not thinking of the whip at all. I can block it out so it's not real. I just think of you."

"That's love?"

"It's man–woman love. I think females are programmed at birth to immolate themselves for the one man – for me it's you. They endure the nine months of pregnancy with joy if the child inside 'em was fathered by the right guy. It's possible women actually do want to suffer when they're deeply in love. Maybe we hope the man will measure our love by our pain."

"Damn neat," said Denver, impressed by sincerity. "You've brought me 'round and back to square one." For a moment he was thoughtful. "But don't men sometimes lay it on the line for a woman?"

"Men do it in bursts of glory. Lovely short bits of drama they can enjoy and then set aside after the female is suitably impressed – and soundly screwed."

"After this sermon I'm going to enjoy whipping you, sweetheart," Denver dourly declaimed. He cocked an amused eye. "Is little hot–puss in the other room going to feel the way you've said?"

"Mmmmm!" Susan was beginning to enjoy the discussion. She was aware of heat between her legs. "You have to remember Thedra – that's her mother – bought me because of what the two of them are. They're the real B&D people. They bought me to whip me: I was to be Leonie's plaything. I know they adore dishing it out – but taking it! I suspect that little nymphet will howl as loudly as I will."

"Hmmmm! We'll find out. But I'm more interested in you. When you're whipped you get marks: What about 'em?"

"Well, what about 'em! So I get marks!"

"Looking at them I get horny as hell." Denver confessed.

"So do I." Susan blushed. "Each one is a bit of you that you've put there – and I can't get it off. At night I finger them in the dark – if I'm not too miserably tied."

"O.K., O.K.! I'm a bastard. What say we go and whip you?"

"Yes please, Master. But can I have another drink?" Denver had one too.

CHAPTER NINE

Flogged

It was the wrong room! It had to be! Everything was changed. At first glance the naked girl in the silver shoes believed her Master was intruding her unpardonably upon a sacred privacy.

A movie set! A page from someone else's story! But no, the story was her own, and terrifyingly real. Susan blinked in the bright light.

"A formal occasion," said Denver blandly by her side.

The first focus was upon the male figure in clinical white. A slight figure, anonymous with spectacles. From his neck a stethoscope. A doctor.

Two girls with eyes that were curiously waiting for – her! Their faces young but wise. Wondering – why her! What had she done! Each was naked to the waist, their breasts pert with youth. They wore harem pantaloons and golden slippers.

The room was bare, except for a few things pertinent to the occasion. A small enamel trolley on which the doctor fiddled with swabs and jars, two black whips tossed carelessly upon the floor for her to see, and from the ceiling and on the floor the things she knew too well, and from which she averted her gaze.

"Prisoner forward."

Denver's supporting hand fell from her bare arm. His fingers gently thrust so that she took her first step upon her toes towards her fate. She longed to turn and cling and to cry denial that it should be other than he who would weal her. But the scene was hypnotic. She had lost her will, as does a hospital patient wheeled to the operating table. She was on stage, the trembling ingénue who must not fluff her lines.

"A flogging."

It was Denver's voice. But it was not Denver! A Prison Governor's voice from another world, another life. Sweetly upon her toes, Susan took another step –

They came to meet her, smiling. Their hands reaching to help, lest in her trembling she fall. But the hands were firm and strong They grasped her by each wrist and above each elbow. She did not struggle. It would be useless. And besides, Denver had written the scripts: she would mar no word of it.

"Secure the prisoner."

The girls strapped the cuffs upon her wrists and raised them high and separate. There was no need to winch them, for when her silver shod feet were drawn to each side the tethers tightened. When the straps were tight upon her ankles all of her was taut and strained. She was exquisitely delivered to the whips hungrily waiting on the floor.

"The prisoner's hair."

Female fingers worked with feminine skill on a familiar task. Susan knew a surge of relief, for one awful moment she had thought she was to be shorn. But the braid, wisely woven upon her head carried its own awful message. Loose, it might have shielded a portion of her flesh. Now it would not. All of her was open. She tested her bonds. She could move nothing but the slenderness of her figure: and that but little.

"Medical inspection."

It was absurd but she could not laugh. Certainly she could not resist as fingers probed. The white clad male was probably a minor gangster endowed with the dignity of a few easily obtainable props. Susan hated her blush, but the eyes upon her were avid and close and she was helpless. She felt all breasts and nipples and pubic hair.

The medic, if such he was, was meticulous. Her breasts were tested, her nipples brushed. An experienced hand cupped her taut vagina, a searching finger probed inside. Susan squashed her angry protest – if Denver wanted this charade, so be it! As yet there was only the pain of stretched legs and tractioned arms and the tug of straps: familiar enough to her now to be mundane.

She gasped as the alcohol swab wet her back. It was large enough for its extensive task. She was laved from neck to knee with the antiseptic, even her armpits, her flanks and her breasts. She shivered nakedly against the cold, cold, cold that made her trebly nude and told her explicitly where the lash would scorch her skin.

And then the stethoscope! The girl about to be flogged could almost believe the man a doctor, so thorough and so intent was his attention to her vital sounds. When he stepped back and made his pronouncement it was the knell of doom.

"The prisoner is strong and ready."

Susan could have wept. This was not what she had wanted, not what she had expected. This was a nightmare: and like all nightmares she was powerless to influence its course. She longed to scream to Denver to deliver her from this travail, but knew instinctively he would pay no heed. She was the star of a carefully designed production from which her contract prohibited withdrawal. As though to emphasize her stellar status, a spotlight in the ceiling flooded her back with brilliance.

"Begin punishment."

It was about to happen! At any moment a whip might cut her. A whip not held by Denver. A whip that would hurt her with a viciousness unleavened by love. From it she would get only pain.

Desperately she kept his image in her mind. He wanted this to happen to her – so it was alright – alright –alright. Hating her weakness, she looked back over one shoulder. The harem girl had picked up the whip and was coiling it in her hand. Her smile was a promise. Turning to her other side, Susan saw nothing – the first blow struck and plowed its furrow across her naked back. She did not scream, but her cry of disbelief in such agony was worse:

"No! Oh no! – no –"

A girl at her back and to each side, clever with their whips. Perhaps they had whipped a girl before! Certainly they knew how. They were a team, rhythmic, spacing her strips, measuring her agony. The doctor counted in a flat monotone.

"One – two – three – " Would screams be a disloyalty to Denver! Susan did not know, but she did not want them. Her Master's ears should not be affronted: a screaming girl is not pretty. Each blow was his, marking her flesh. She wanted to be grateful. She wished she could see him and smile so he would know she understood his need. But she could not. He was a presence somewhere at the rear, watching the tracery of whip patterns etch her back.

Instead of screams she writhed. The undulations of her nakedness were pitifully contained by the straps at wrist and ankle. Susan vibrated and tensed – and tensed again as the thongs curled in fearful intimacy where only the hands of love should touch. She made sounds and recognized them not: hurt

animal whimperings and desolate moans. She wondered if Denver had an erection. Almost certainly he would have. Hating it, she had noticed the doctor had betrayed one from her first lash.

"Eleven – twelve – thirteen –"

The whips stopped to let her hang panting and hot with sweat. One of the girls mopped her face and rearranged her hair. The man in white used his stethoscope upon her nudity in a diversity of probes.

"The prisoner's condition is unchanged."

"The flogging may proceed."

Susan floated on pain. She was delivered to a world in which pain was the natural state for girls. How could she have believed in that other world now far away! From side to side the thongs licked at her hungrily. Her whole being was on fire from the snapping leathers, jerking beneath each blow, never quiescent, The strain of her spreadeagling a constant attrition. Why couldn't she faint! Why, why, why – !

"Twenty–eight – twenty–nine – thirty –"

This pause was longer. She gulped brandy avidly. She was sponged and groomed. The stethoscope was a small evil mouth, sucking her secrets.

"The prisoner is in excellent condition."

"Oh, I'm not!" Susan cried protest into his face.

There were smiles. She was a child, not knowing what was good for her, a child to be humoured because she was loved.

"How many – how long – ?" She asked the question of them all.

None answered.

The girls handled her sex, testingly, and examined their hands. They flicked her nipples to discover their rigidity. They traced their fingertips across the raised weals they had placed upon her skin. They were genuinely curious. In her desuetude the flogged girl found a strange comfort in their touch, it reassured her she was female.

"Continue the flogging."

Susan screamed now. Not at every stroke, but whenever a lash was particularly cruel or a tip lapped her breast. Surely thirty should have been enough! It should have been –! She wanted to tell Denver she was only a girl, and to save some of her for another time.

She still loved him.

Adrift in agony, the whipped girl examined this anomaly. Her pain changed nothing. If she died under the beating thongs she would die adoring and desiring. Was she deranged, or was this the real meaning of a woman's love for a man! A meaning most girls never discovered or guessed. Along with her anguish she desired most ardently to be taken to his bed. Hysterical laughter welled in her throat: Denver with his erection and she with flaming loins and a wet sex while the whining strokes went on and on! The man she loved had written a script that would gain no credence anywhere: save with herself who had no need to mime.

"Forty–two – forty–three – forty–four –"

"Please, no more?" She asked it of the doctor as though he had the authority of his profession.

"Please, don't hit me so hard?" She asked it of the girls as though they might feel sympathy.

No one answered. She did not ask again.

Susan moaned gently as the hands ministered. She gulped and choked and gulped again on the brandy, knowing it only as the herald of the prolongation of her punishment. She no longer expected to die. These whips were without such mercy. She had a great need to know the limits of her agony. Fifty lashes! She was nearly there – a hundred!

"The prisoner is still vigorous."

She hated him and his pompous proclamations. How could she be vigorous! She was weary to the core with pain. She looked at him appealingly but he would not meet her eye. If only they would set her free for just a little while! How glorious it would be to have her hands and feet again. And to rest, rest, rest! How willingly she would allow herself to be strapped again afterwards! If only – if only –!

"Resume the flogging."

It began again. The steady excoriation of the blows took her back into the world that was all her own, a place of searing pain and jumbled impressions. She counted silently past the fiftieth lash, hoping it was terminal. When it was not she ceased to care. They would whip her forever. Long afterwards, when she strove for recall, she believed it to be at the seventy or eighty count that the blows stopped. But at that time she had drifted far away and had no tally. She did not know she had been left alone hanging against the prisoning straps.

But not quite alone! There was a presence. Secure in the mists where pain had driven her, Susan knew it was not Denver. She had no wish to return to the world of whips, she kept her eyes closed, her head bowed forward. She was not even sure the flogging had stopped, everything had merged into unreality.

There came sensation, strangely pleasurable. As the mists receded, Susan breathed quietly, waiting. The pain of her strapped wrists was so constant she paid no heed to it. Soon, her metal shod feet would take some strain, but not now. Perhaps someone might release her! Or perhaps they had left her thus so they might return and start all over again!

"Just keep still, darling." said a small breathless voice. It was Leonie.

It was also Leonie's hand from which the pleasurable sensation came. Susan's sex was being competently massaged. By the time she recognized the source she was heatedly aroused.

"Don't – don't do that – stop!"

"You're only saying that," the moppet said wisely. "You don't want me to stop at all, and I won't."

The orgasm was sudden and shattering in its intensity. Susan abandoned herself to it utterly, the straps creaked with her writhing and her moans were the same as those she had emitted when flogged.

"There! Feel better, darling?"

Susan gasped and moaned anew, seeking orientation. Painfully she put her silver encased toes to work to ease her wrists. A glass was placed to her lips and she gulped greedily.

"Thank you. Oh Leonie, what – ?"

"I always feel nice and cozy after a come," Leonie said affectionately. "You sure had an earthquake. Take it easy, I'll look after you."

"Oh, Leonie dear, you're wonderful. Take me down, Let me loose."

"They told me I mustn't, darling. Promised all sorts of awful things if I did. Seems like you've got to stay the way you are for awhile."

"Are they going to whip me again?"

"I don't think so." The moppet giggled. "I think you're supposed to be an awful warning to me." She giggled again. "They tell me I'm going to be whipped the same way. Isn't it exciting!"

Susan shook her head and struggled back to complete awareness. "You won't think so when it happens," she said dully.

"Oh, I will! I will. Here, have another drink. I'm going to have one too. Let's get drunk. Mumsie never would let me. Oh, all the lovely things that happen here!"

Susan drank deep. Pain was burning her everywhere. Perhaps the alcohol would anesthetize.

"Please unbuckle the straps, Leonie." she pleased. "I hurt so bad. I'll take the blame."

"I'm scared. They're nice, but they can be awful mean.

"Unstrap me for just a few minutes. I'll let you strap . me up again?"

"Oh, darling, don't keep on about it. I can't. So please shut up."

"How long have you been here?"

"They were counting up to twenty when they brought me in. I had to stand at the back and watch. It was so I'd know what I was going to get. Gosh, darling, you were beautiful!"

"Screaming and struggling! Oh Leonie – !"

"But you're so lovely when you're whipped. I wanted to finger my clit, but Mr. Denver was right there."

"Why aren't you dressed?"

Leonie chuckled gleefully. "Same reason as you, I guess. I don't think girls are supposed to wear clothes around here."

"Leonie! Don't be so damn happy. You're in trouble. Make a run for it while you're not tied."

"What! And leave you!"

"Well, I'm certainly not going anywhere," Susan said bitterly. "Not fixed like this. But you could."

"If I though I could get away I'd let you loose so's we could go together," Leonie said thoughtfully. "But we'd only be caught and hurt – not a nice kind of hurting: something beastly. I say, darling, you are gorgeously marked, y'know. I've never seen anything like it. I wish mother could see."

Susan looked at the glowing nymphet, puzzled.

"Leonie dear, you don't really mean it about being whipped – the way I've just been whipped – you don't want it – you can't – ?"

"Why not!" The teenager looked aggrieved. "It just has to be the most wonderful experience – look at the way you exploded afterwards! I bet you're ready for another right now."

Susan wanly wondered if the fire in her loins was visible. The single orgasm had not quenched the banked up embers generated by the flogging. It made no sense, but it partly explained Leonie.

"It won't be one great big orgasm, even for you." she warned.

"Oh, but all that lovely ritual! I'll feel like a queen being beheaded or something."

"Was Thedra – your mother always involved in this, this – Oh that beastly term, 'B&D'?"

Leonie became serious. "Oh yes. She told me. Ever since she could remember as a child. It was the same with me. She didn't have to teach me a thing. It's lovely."

"How would you like to be tied and chained and whipped all the rest of your life like it seems I have to be?" Susan asked bitterly.

"I'd go halves with you, darling." The nymphet's voice was eager. "I'm your prisoner for a week, then you're mine. Fair enough?"

Susan sagged against her straps. It was all absurd and hopeless. "I suppose it is," she admitted with enthusiasm. "But we can't do it. I belong to someone else. I don't even know all their names. Just Ducros and Ingrid – even Ingrid's a slave like me."

"You're in love with Mr. Denver. I can tell." said Leonie sagely. "And right now we both belong to him, even me. I say, Susan, is his – you know what – very huge? I bet it's tremendous. I wish he'd put it inside me."

"You're outrageous," Susan declared, half humourously. "If I do every get to see your mother again I've a good mind to tell her all about her sweet little daughter. I'd love to see you in that little cage for the longest time."

"But you won't, will you!" The moppet's words held complete assurance. "I'd be bound to get hold

of you sometime and I'd really make you sorry you'd blabbed."

"Leonie, there just has to be something else in life besides being tied up and whipped!"

"There's screwing. It's lovely." Leonie was suddenly ecstatic.

"But, dammit girl, don't you read books, go to the theater, play games, have friends – ?" Susan demanded.

"I used to," Leonie admitted brightly. "But I'm not going to waste my time on that stuff any more – not after this!"

"You don't imagine your mother is going to imprison a man just to satisfy your lust, do you!"

"I suppose not," Leonie admitted dubiously. "Besides, I'd need more than one. Isn't it a shame the way they go limp after. I'd no idea. Us girls are much the luckiest. I could go on and on and on. Darling, does Mr. Denver go limp? I can't imagine –?"

"If I ever got free long enough, I'd buy you a dildo – or a vibrator," Susan retorted drily.

"If I ever get you alone for a week I won't need 'em. I'd keep your tongue busy full time. Just think darling, hour after hour."

"Let me loose now and I'll do it for you."

"Naughty, naughty! I ought to whip you for that. Gee whiz, darling, I could, couldn't I? Would you like me to whip you?"

"No . ."

"Just a little? I won't do it hard."

"No!"

"You can't stop me, y'know."

"No I can't. But I've had enough. Please!"

"You're terribly sweet when you plead like that. I'd love to whip you and make you keep on pleading."

"Don't be so mean."

"They left their whips." Leonie's voice became eager. "Wouldn't you like to please me – just a nice light whipping to make you squirm? I can do it anyway, but I'd sooner you said yes?"

It was the last thing Susan wanted. Her thrashed skin was replete with stripes. Pain had wearied her, and the straps continued to impose it after the whipping was past. But the child's voice betrayed a certainty. Leonie was going to whip her whether she said yes or no. Anxiously, she supposed it wise to keep on the youngster's good books, make a virtue of necessity. Unhappily, but with a show of grace, she surrendered.

"Alright then, dear. Whip me. But please go easy."

"I'm so glad they left you strapped up tight." Leonie exulted. "I think these whips are both the same. Let's try this one. Here we go, darling –"

The staccato blasting of the shots was like thunder in the house. A continuous chatter from an automatic weapon, interspersed by the Single crack of a pistol. For a moment it stopped, then a pistol shot and one more short burst from the automatic. The ensuing silence seemed vibratingly fragile.

Susan quivered in terror. Her helplessness was so complete she felt only panic. "Leonie, unstrap me! Let me loose – oh please!"

Two slender bare arms enveloped her in a panic equal to her own. "Susan, I'm frightened. What should I do?" Leonie had become a little girl. Her embrace was frantic. "Unbuckle my straps. You must! You must!"

"Do you think it's alright? Oh Susan, what if –?"

"Unfasten me!"

Buckles were fumbled, straps were tugged. The moppet was wide−eyed with fear, but she gave Susan her freedom in short order.

Panic was an ally against the stiffness of bondage. Susan teetered unsteadily on her toes, her hands busy massaging her hurt wrists. It felt so good to be free again! She reached for the trembling girl and clasped her head between her breasts.

"Oh, Susan, we're going to be killed, I know we are."

"Hush!"

They stiffened. There were sounds. Footsteps, low and heavy but coming closer. In female nakedness the two girls clung, their eyes wide and focused on the door.

Ducros entered slowly. There was upon his face the same half smile Susan remembered from the plane, a man who knew what he was doing. He carried the automatic rifle, now silent. He surveyed them with evident satisfaction, bestowing a brief nod and inclination of the head. He then leant back against the door frame, the rifle clattered from his hand, his massive figure crumpled at the knees, and he fell heavily forward on his face. Mr. Ducros was very, very dead.

The house proved small, easy to explore. Ducros had done his work well, catching Denver's men playing poker in a single room, killing them all with his first fusillade. Denver's body was down the passage. His pistol shot must have spelt Ducros's doom, but he himself had been cut down by the invader's last burst. Susan cradled his head in her lap and wept into his sightless eyes. She remembered the Biblical passage: 'They who live by the sword −' Her soldier was dead.

The silence of death held them in awe. It was Leonie who first became practical. "We have to get clothes," she whispered tremulously. "And get out of here. There have to be some."

There was little, and what there was, was male. They took the smallest. Each a T shirt and briefs: not unbecoming.

"There has to be a car, darling." It was still Leonie who led.

There were several cars. In the hallway there was a hook in the wall, and from it hung keys. They took the one they wanted − there was another! Susan tried it. It was Denver's last gift. It unlocked the metal bands about her ankles. Reverently she removed the silver shoes and placed them beside the still figure of her Master. In one she dropped the key. With heels safe upon the floor she strode away. It was good as being untied, a winged freedom!

"Darling!"

Leonie paused, her pert features perplexed in thought. Despite the horror, she had regained her aplomb. She eyed the older girl dubiously.

"Darling, what about you?"

"What about me!" Susan was in no mood to quibble.

"You're − you're supposed to be a slave."

"So alright, I'm a slave! let's get away from here."

"But suppose −" Leonie was thinking fast. "Isn't it funny Mr. Ducros was alone? Suppose there's others of his − what do they call it, a group − and we run into them. They might not like it if they find you running around free."

"I couldn't care less."

"They might be mean."

"Forget it! Let's go."

"They might be mean to me!"

Susan paused in her stride to the car. She turned to a Leonie who was dragging her heels and

looking troubled. "You mean they might think you were helping me to escape or something! Don't be silly, c'mon."

"Susan?"

"What now? Oh Leonie, do come!"

"Let me tie you."

Susan felt hysterical. Death all around, and this nymphet wanted to tie her hands. She longed to laugh, to weep, to scream. "What good would that do us?" she demanded angrily.

"Well, it would keep us both in the clear." said Leonie with weak logic. "Besides, when we get home – I mean to our place, Mother's going to be embarrassed over you. I mean, you're supposed to go somewhere else: these people who own you. But if you're tied or handcuffed or something she'll feel easy about it. I'm sure it's best."

"You just want to get me tied up and helpless."

"Oh Susan, no! Oh alright then, maybe I do. I can't help that. But it's still a good idea – and it wouldn't hurt you."

"Everything hurts me!" Susan retorted testily. "You don't expect me to sit in that car all tied up for everyone to see! What if we stop for gas?"

"If you sit right nobody will notice. Or maybe –"

"No!" Susan exploded into vehemence. "I refuse to be put in that damn trunk again!"

"Alright, alright! Keep your shirt on. But I still think it's a good idea."

"We don't have any rope."

"Yes we do. I'll go and get some." Without waiting for a reply Leonie ran back to the house.

Susan was tired, she was frightened. She had to keep her mind from Denver for fear of tears. She was too weary and hurt to think. Perhaps there was some logic in Leonie's wish. She could not see any – but still! In any case they were both going to the same destination. And if it made the child happy! All she wanted to do was get away. She shrugged resignedly.

"See, darling, lots of it," Leonie's eyes were sparkling. Condemning her own weakness, but too tired to argue, Susan turned her back and crossed her wrists, then winced under the cunning twisting of the cords.

"Not so tight, Leonie. Oh damn, that hurt!"

"It's alright. It'll be comfy when I've knotted it and you've struggled a bit. Keep still, darling."



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