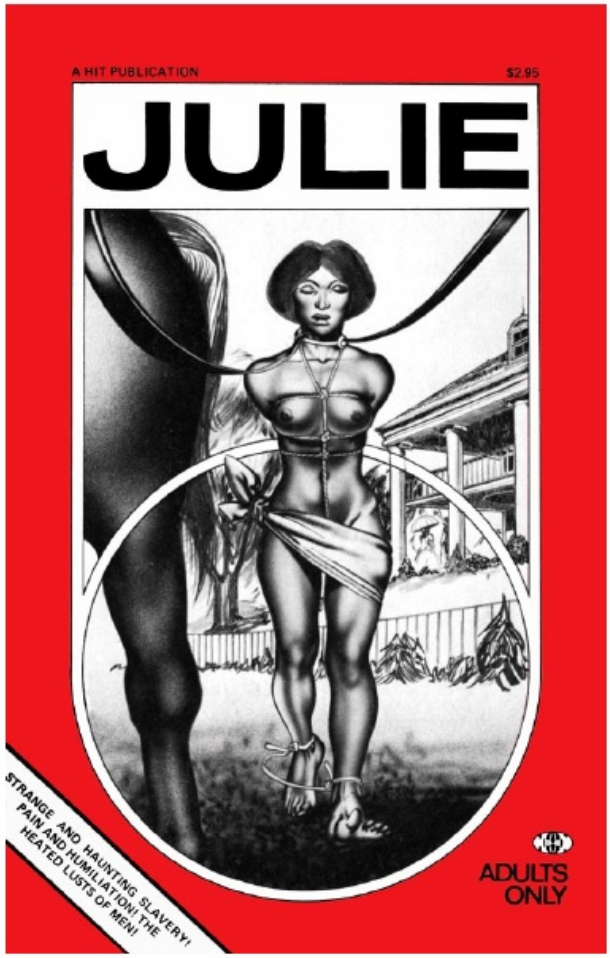


JULIE
by F.E.Campbell

Other novels by F. E. Campbell published by H.O.M. INC.

MONICA I
MELYNDA I
THE SIBLINGS I
THE PRISONER OF ISMAUL I
MONICA II
MELYNDA II
THE SIBLINGS II
THE PRISONER OF ISMAUL II
MIRANDA I
DORINDA I
CAPTIVE OF THE PRIORY
THE GIRL BEHIND THE WALL I
MIRANDA II
DORINDA II
THE GIRL BEHIND THE WALL II
CHAINS OF JEHDRA
MOIRA IN JEOPARDY I
WANDA & THE WHIP I
STRANGE CAPTIVITY
JEWEL
SUKIE
WANDA & THE WHIP II
SLAVE GIRL & THE LASH
MOIRA IN JEOPARDY II
SUSAN
CATHY
BARB BOUND
JULIE

illustrated by The Bishop

An H.O.M. Book
Published by H.O.M. Inc.
Copyright ©1981 by H.O.M. Inc.
P.O. Box 7302, Van Nuys, California, 91409
All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any other information retrieval system, or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher, except by a reviewer who may wish to quote brief passages in connection with review for a newspaper, magazine, radio or television.

First printing: February 1981

Printed in the United States of America

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

Cover art by The Bishop

JULIE
OR
SOUTHERN DISCOMFORT

"Don't be ridiculous, Julie, a sound whipping will do Felicia a world of good. As long as I'm Mistress of Launceston I'll have no impudence from a mere serving wench no matter how light her saucy hide."

Crystal Eshelby turned from the French window from which she had surveyed the rich stretch of green sloping away from the Plantation House, and gazed with an amused disapproval at the accusing eyes of her companion. Julia Lindley tossed her abundant hair in mock disdain under the cool scrutiny, but whatever retort she was about to make was cut off by the continuation of Crystal's vehemence.

"You're too easy with all you do at Beverleigh. Since you inherited the place you've allowed the niggers to run wild. Old Josh isn't getting a day's work out of any of 'em, and Aunt Meg allows those little strumpets in the big house to let the dust settle an inch thick."

Julia squirmed on the sofa, and asserted without conviction: "But, Crystal darling, there has to be some way of running a Plantation without having the slaves working with striped skins!"

"If there is, no one's discovered it." Crystal Eshelby's voice was scornful. "The moment you had Old Josh dismantle the whipping post and the pillory you were lost. I'll wager you've net shown a profit since."

"Never mind about my profit. We were talking about Felicia. She's a sweet child. 'It's cruel to whip her. If she annoys you, I'll buy the girl." Julia's eyes flashed, "I never have been sure about her skin. She's as white as I am. I'm inclined to believe her story about being kidnapped and sold."

"But, sweetheart. I've got her papers! They're in order."

Julie shrugged resignedly. "It's just a feeling I have about her. There's something not right. But, anyway, you've no need to be so severe. Last time you had her whipped she got a cut breast. I do believe you like to have her punished just because she's white ... or white enough so one can tell."

"I'll whip the little minx all I like, and she's not for sale." Crystal's regard of the younger woman was a mixture of tenderness and exasperation. "The last thing you need is another slave to spoil rotten. Why don't you sell or lend your laziest to me. At Launceston they'd learn what it means to pick cotton and say 'yes maam!'."

"And hate you for their wounds?"

"Julie, girl. I don't know what's to become of you. How about selling me Beverleigh before you run it aground?"

"Oh, Crystal dear. I do declare!" The tender blue eyes met the steel of grey. "That idea's preposterous. Beverleigh's my home. It's a part of my family, even though they're dead. I can't possibly sell it, and I don't want to. I love the place."

"Better sell it to me than see the Sheriff put it up for auction."

"You exaggerate, darling. Just because I've had one bad year. Besides, what would I do?"

"Come and live with me."

Julia Lindley laughed. "You'd love that."

"Wouldn't you?"

"I suppose I would. In a way..." Once more the blue eyes acknowledged a thing unspoken, then danced mischievously. "But I'm Julie and I want to stay Julie. You'd gobble me up."

Crystal's laugh held a mischief of its own. "You adore it. Don't tell me you don't - or were you speaking figuratively?"

Julia Lindley flushed. "You're impossible. The things you say! I'm sure you've got the servants talking."

"They can talk all they like so long as I hold the whip."

"Crystal! That isn't why you're going to whip Felicia? Because she talked? Or because she wouldn't?"

The Mistress of Launceston sniffed disdainfully. "Can you think of a better reason?"

"Lionel? I've seen his face when he's watched a girl flogged."

Crystal's laugh was scornful. "My unworthy half brother! Oh, sugar pie, you know he and I. Lionel's a nothing. I wouldn't thrash a yellow cur to pleasure him."

"Lionel's your affair. But tell him to stay away from me. I don't want his flowers and his bonbons. I do believe he's got the gall to think he can buy Beverleigh for the price of a marriage line."

The older girl chuckled. "He tells me you slapped his face?"

"And I'll do it again. He said if I did it ... well, if I did it with you I could do it with him."

Crystal raised an eyebrow. "I didn't think he had the gall. Next time slap him for me too. Look, darling. Sell me Beverleigh and move in. He'll have no motive for marrying you. But you can slap his face every day anyway. T'will keep your hand in."

"Crystal, we're getting away from the subject. I ask you, please: Please don't have Felicia flogged?"

Oh damn you and your tender heart, Julie! Don't dramatize. The girl's going to get a light whipping which she's fully earned. Nothing you can say will change my mind.

"I suppose you'll hang the poor child up by her wrists and have her stripped for everyone to gawk at?"

"Of course. She's hardly likely to stand still for it! And she's not a child. Felicia must be all of seventeen. It's much kinder to tie her than have her flopping all over the ground. She'd probably agree if you asked her."

"Who's going to whip her? Winch?"

"Of course it's Winch. He's the overseer. I did think of doing the job myself, but it's a hot day."

"Winch isn't capable of giving anyone a 'light' whipping. He's got a heavy hand. And he's sure to tie the poor girl some way so it hurts her."

"You can give him instructions if you wish." Crystal's tone was caustic. "You're coming with me to watch."

"I'm not!"

"Yes you are, dear. Don't be silly."

"What good will that do!"

"You can witness the beneficial effect, sweetheart. If I can get some sense into your pretty head, we may yet see John rebuild your pillory and get you accounts out of the red." Crystal shook an admonitory finger. "And don't play squeamish with me. You've seen enough girls flogged ... and others. I've got a suspicion you've been reading some of that Abolitionist sedition."

"Oh, Crystal!"

"Come along, darling."

"Oh alright then."

The Mistress of Launceston and the Mistress of Beverleigh walked out into the sun.

It was hot in the slave Quadrangle of Launceston. But the girl tied to the whipping post paid little heed to the temperature. It was not hotter than the cotton field with its white bolls that frightened fingers must pluck or feel the lash. At the moment Felicia was concerned with the pain of her tied wrists. Even standing on tip-toe she could relieve them little. They were spread wide and tied up to the 'T' cross-bar at the top of the post, against whose rough timber the nipples of her naked breasts frictioned every time she moved. She was entirely naked. Winch had laughed at her plea for a scrap of something 'round her loins. He had pointed out that the tight curves of her behind were a prime target for what was going to be done to her. He had gone away and left her stretched and quivering.

Her flesh was sweating.

Felicia knew she was to be whipped. This was not her first time. But it was her first time to be whipped by a man and to be strung up nude in the Quadrangle for all to see. On previous occasions when she had earned the lash it had been within Launceston's four walls she had been bound, and it had been the unforgiving hand of Launceston's Mistress that had held the whip. Felicia sighed, she supposed the shame she suffered now was a part of growing up - like the ripening of her breasts.

The naked girl so cruelly fastened felt no resentment for the punishment for which she was forced to wait. She knew her place in the world. She was a slave and could be whipped for misdemeanour or caprice. She was certain to be whipped this day, and on other days in times to come. This was her lot. But she wished she were not naked in public. But she knew, too, that from now on it was thus she would receive her punishments. The nudity was part of it. She had seen Winch's eyes when he had made her slip out of her protective sheath. Winch would not have wanted to see her naked as a child. But now...

It was hard for Felicia to forget the color of her skin. She was white. She always had been, she always would be! That her one time paleness was now turned to gold by the sun of Launceston in no way changed what she knew herself to be. She had a strong suspicion she was flogged as often as she was because of it. Her Mistress got an extra thrill from the marks the whip left on her back. No doubt she felt that in Felicia's extra inflictions she demonstrated an impartial lack of discrimination. Whatever way it was it hurt. Being white had done Felicia no good at all. She herself had ceased to protest.

It was heartbreakingly lonely to be tied to the post and made to wait for the whip. But she was not alone. Those whose tasks took them this way walked very slowly by, their eyes curious, or devouring. Some held pity. A small group of pickaninnies, most as naked as herself, stood by in solemn contemplation of her curves. Their regard lacked animation, but held a wise expectancy. They knew!

She longed to tell them to go away, but knew they would ignore her plea. To them, she was a recurring phenomenon of plantation life, a legitimate drama they did not intend to miss. Felicia wondered unhappily how loudly she would scream. She remembered how, each time, she made her vow that she would not. But she always did.

She stood with forehead pressed against the post. She would seek no passing eye for fear of what she saw. But from time to time she would look back around her tractioned arm to see if the time was now: to behold the straggle of her audience and the burly figure of Winch carrying his whip with firm intent to slice her back. But Felicia knew the face she truly sought was that of her Mistress. The aristocratic features of Crystal Eshelby could gaze upon her with kindness or disdain. The naked prisoner of the post had little hope of reprieve. But a slave never could be quite sure of anything. The haughty Mistress of Launceston had been known to relent when a heartrending plea for forgiveness happened to coincide with some thought or purpose of her own. Felicia closed her eyes and wished Winch had not been so mean with the cordsaround her wrists.

It had become one of his prerequisites of office that Winch should make his speech before he applied the whip to the expectant back. It gave a nice official seal of justification for the cruelty about to be perpetrated. It is not impossible his solemn hypocrisy did actually deter. Certainly it clothed with a recognizable respectability the flogging of a naked girl.

"This here gal' what ye see naked and shamed 'afore ye, don't know when she's well off." Winch intoned unctuously. "She's got a Mistress what ye all knows is kind and generous. But what does this here gal' go and do -" he paused a moment for effect and to wipe the sweat from his red and bulbous features. "she goes and spills a bottle o' expensive perfume and then says it wern't her fault; says it was her Lady's elbow." He gathered his forces for a gigantic sneer. "A likely tale! So now she pays fer being stupid, and a lucky gal' she be. Miss Eshelby, outta' the kindness o' her big heart, tells me to lay it on light, and to make it a little tickling twenty instead o' the thirty hard what she deserves. I want ch' all to watch and pay some heed."

Winch waited for the applause. Dutifully it came. A few 'Yes massa's and praise be's,' and a clapping of hands. Winch bowed and slashed the leather thong squarely across Felicia's back. She held fast the scream, but her anguished eyes looked back in wide appeal. They focused hopefully on Crystal's smiling attention. Felicia's plea was purely instinctive: "Oh Missa' please. Don't let him, Mr. Winch, whup me ... please! I'm sorry, oh I'm so sorry, I --"

The whip cut her again so that her pleading ended in a cry of agony. When the third stroke sliced her buttocks she returned her forehead to the cold comfort of the wood. Her wrists bled as she jerked under the blows.

"Felicia takes a whipping deliciously."

Crystal Eshelby's eyes glowed as she watched the spectacle she had ordained. She and her reluctant guest stood alone and apart from such of her staff as were available to provide an audience for Felicia's suffering. Their comments would go unheard.

"I'm glad you think so." Julie's voice was cold.

"Just look at the way she ripples and tugs at her wrists."

"There's no need to tie her like that; she must be in agony."

"Some small discomfort, I'll warrant." Crystal chuckled. "Do please stop being such a prissy and enjoy the show."

"There's nothing to enjoy."

"Oh, but there is! Look at the way she kicks one leg. The little darling is exquisite. I should have her whipped more often."

"How'd you like to be hung like that and whipped!"

"Don't be absurd, Julie. The thought's indecent." The Mistress of Launceston giggled. "But I bet I'd put on as good a show. I think it must be the white blood or her white skin that makes Felicia so charmingly responsive. No nigger wench would be that lovely."

"Winch is hitting the poor girl hard. Those blows aren't light."

""Well, I'm not going to interfere, darling. I have to uphold authority at Launceston, even though you refuse at Beverleigh. Winch is white and he's conscientious. I'll back him."

"Twenty lashes the way he's laying them on is a terrible punishment, far worse than she may deserve. Crystal, tell him to go easy."

"Nonsense! He's giving them to her slowly. She has time to catch her breath. I think some of those screams aren't quite genuine."

"Well, at least order him not to cut her breasts."

"He won't. I've already told him. But he does have one small surprise for the dear child."

"Crystal, no! Not --"

"Exactly, darling, up between the little beauty's legs when she kicks."

"That's a rotten thing to do to a girl. Really, Crystal, I sometimes wonder about you."

The older woman's laugh banished protest. "You're a hypocrite, Julie darling. Most people are. I'm not. I simply adore watching the way Felicia responds under the lash. It's pure beauty. And I'll say that to anybody's face."

"But it's so unfair. Just because she's young and pretty."

Crystal archly squeezed the protester's arm. "Tell me the truth now, Julie. Look at those lovely lines across Felicia's back. You're wet between your legs, aren't you?"

"Crystal!"

"Come on now - the truth?"

Julia Lindley grinned sheepishly. "Oh alright, so I'm wet. It's your enjoyment ... it infects --"

"Rubbish. Take a good look at Winch. There's a bulge in his pants. And over there at Nona. See, she's got her hand under her clothes playing with herself."

Julie sniffed pettishly. "You'd have me believe everybody gets aroused by seeing Felicia whipped?"

"Of course. You may disapprove, but you'd like me to take you to bed. Tell you what, darling, after our little sweetheart's hung from the post awhile when Winch is through with her, I'll let you have her alone and all to yourself. She's never so good as after a thrashing."

Julia Lindley stifled a bitter retort. In some ways she adored her older companion, the laughing girl who had always been a part of her life from childhood on. But in other ways Crystal had the power to churn within her a mixture of emotions she found disturbing. She was naive.

Beverleigh's mantle of authority, falling on her shoulders at an early age, had taught her much: things about herself, as well as those whose lives she held in an easy-going slavery. Crystal had a positive skill in putting her finger on fallibility. At this moment, Julie felt a socially compelled guilt at the sexual arousal hidden beneath her clothes. She was also naggingly aware of the truth of Crystal's dissertation on the affairs of her plantation. Old Josh and Aunt Meg were not coping, and neither was she. Grudgingly, she conceded the symbolism of the Whipping Post: disposed of, it left a vacuum she had been unable to fill. How easy it would be to hand over her affairs to the capable hands of the woman at her side. Everything would fall into place. But Julia Lindley had pride. She and Beverleigh were one. She would not betray the trust of the parents who had bequeathed it to her. It was all

perplexing...

"Well, dreamer, d'you want the wench?" Crystal's voice was cynically curious.

"Don't be horrid. You know I never ... except -"

"Except with me." Crystal's merriment trilled accusingly. "You see, it's as I said. You're a humbug." Her fingers tightened on the young arm. "Watch this. Winch is about ready to liven up that unsuspecting pussy."

To the naked girl tied to the Post, it was a horrendous discovery of a fresh agony, a new indignity of herself as woman. Felicia had a luxuriant bush and plump lips. When the thong snapped hard into them the shock was so great as to cause her to lift her writhing nudity by her cut wrists as though to climb above the range of the seeking lash. The cry pealing from her innermost being held all the anguish of a girl become a woman, her sudden recognition of what her developing body must now expect. Unfortunately, her legs instinctively flailed at nothing in a protest of their own which laid her once more open. The snap and crack of Winch's instant accuracy jerked her into one more paroxysm of feminine undulations. But this time her legs welded themselves together so that her thighs were as one.

"Beautiful," Crystal whispered breathlessly. "The little sweetheart will be positively flooding. I can't wait to get close to have a good look. That man Winch is a genius. Just look at the way she's closed the gap. I wonder if she'll forget and open up again."

"Can't we go now?" Julie's voice betrayed her irritation with the scene and with herself. "We've seen your piece de resistance. I think it was cruel."

"Of course it was, darling. You're always missing the point of things. Cruel and beautiful! One has to see both. You close your mind. And no, we're not going. I'm enjoying every moment - so are you."

Julie was not prepared to stalk angrily from the scene alone. She was a guest and would be loyal to the woman with the stronger will. No whipped girl, no matter how innocent or how appealing, would come between them. That Crystal kept her forever in a state of perplexity with herself was now a fact of life, a thing she wryly recognised but did not resent. She suspected they found too much happiness in each other to ever part. But she had a spirit of her own that surfaced often enough to deny loss of identity. Despite Crystal Eshelby being what she was, the girl who was Julia Lindley remained a woman of her own. In a battle of wills she might lose. But both of them would enjoy the matching of their wits.

Julie's protest now was tentative.

"Look at the poor thing! She's panting and sweating ... and there's a streak of blood."

"Delicious, darling. Since you're suffering so much on her behalf, we'll have her serve Tea in a little while. I'll have Winch dowse her well before she gets her clothes. You'll see, she'll be perky as ever."

Julie was aware of one more small defeat as she watched Mistress and maid in the shaded patio of Launceston. Crystal was sweet and loving, Felicia was thankful for pain well past.

"You'll serve us Tea. Felicia dear. I'm so pleased you enjoyed your whipping. You did, didn't you?"

"Oh yes, Miss Eshelby, course I did. I'll be so good now. I promise I will, honest."

Julie tried hard not to meet Crystal's triumphant eye. "That's a good girl, Felicia. But you may take off that dress I want you naked while you serve. It's a pity to waste those lovely marks you have. Miss Lindley wants to see them too.

Julie refused to rise to the bait. Then recognized that she, too, wanted to behold the loveliness of this whipped girl who should not be a slave. She watched Felicia's few deft motions that left the tawny

suntanned curves totally bare. In some strange indefinable fashion Winch's whip marks clothed the slender loveliness in a beauty of their own. But when Felicia had gone upon her errand she returned to the fray.

"Can't you see? With her naked in here like this, walking naturally, she's white. She hasn't a negro trait in her. Watch her feet. See how she walks. That's where the difference shows. And her hair, all of it."

Crystal laughed delightedly at her earnestness. "But, darling, suppose she is white, what does it matter! I'm just lucky. I got a bargain. Felicia isn't worrying about the color of her skin half as much as you are. All she's concerned about is keeping it intact."

"But she must be resentful,underneath where we can't see. Didn't she tryand escape once?"

"And she got the whipping of her life. A full dress affair before the whole staff. Winch used the cat' on her. Not this little correction she had today. I kept her chained for a month too, she hasn't tried since. I don't think she will." Crystal smiled in affectionate reproof. "You're mixing slavery with color. Don't forget the indentured whites from the English prisons. That was slavery. Their owner had the legal right to punish or imprison or to put irons on them. Everyone accepted the condition, even the convicts themselves. It's not that long ago either."

Julie shrugged hopelessly. She would never win with Crystal. Felicia's own resilience weakened her argument. Perhaps, after all, she was being silly. The slaves of Launceston seemed as happy as her own, and certainly worked with greater diligence. Pensively, she watched the whipped girl dispense the tea things. The striated slenderness possessed a charming grace. Felicia betrayed no trace of rebellion, indeed she radiated a happiness that her punishment was past. She seemed oblivious of her nudity and without shame in her wounds. Julie shook off her concern. A visit with Crystal should be fun. She changed the subject.

"Do you know a man named Burlow?"

Crystal Eshelby paused but a moment in her involvement with cups and saucers. "Couldn't say I really know him, dear. But he's been here a couple of times trying to buy Launceston. Strictly commercial, not a gentleman."

"He's been bothering me about Beverleigh. Polite enough, but insistent."

"Tempted, darling?"

"Of course not. I refused to discuss a sale."

"Cotton's high now. The man's right about this being the time." Crystal wrinkled her nose. "Burlow's not a type I like, so I'll make a few inquiries. He's a sort of broker. You know, a lot of fingers in a lot of pies."

Crystal diverted her attention to the whipped and naked girl. "You did that beautifully, Felicia. Now go and stand to one side where we can both get a good look. Stand with your legs apart and clasp your hands at the back of your neck. Stick your breasts out nicely and just stand."

"Thank you, Miss Eshelby, maam."

Without a blush of shame, the punished slave girl took up a position as directed. It was cruelly revealing pose. But Felicia accepted her Mistress's demand as normal. She stood, tautly lovely, her eyes focused on some horizon of her own beyond the patio.

Julie smiled at the sweet submissiveness of the girl she thought ill used. She allowed the same smile to drift on to her hostess. "I had a funny feeling about Burlow. Is he honest?"

"As far as I could discover. No one exactly admires him, but not one could point a finger. He's by way of being a lawyer too. So far as him wanting to buy land, he's just one of many. You really should sell, darling. Not to him. To me!"

"Oh Crystal -"

"Don't sound so distraught, love. It's good advice. Beverleigh's going down hill. I could save it. I don't think you can. Honestly, darling, can't I talk you into having Old Josh rebuild the pillory and the post? I bet he's got the pieces tucked away somewhere."

"But, Crystal, we've gone into this before."

"Alright, alright, Miss Tenderheart. But have a mite of sense. Rebuild them. Then, if you're too squeamish to put 'em to use, at least that lazy lot of niggers you support will see they're there. Might liven 'em up a bit." Crystal laughed at a sudden thought and again turned to the posing nude.

"Felicia, would you work hard if there wasn't any whip?"

"Don't 'spose so, maam. No one likes work."

"And if you knew there was no punishment, would you run away?"

Felicia Visibly squirmed. "'Specks I would, maam. I got a family somewheres."

"Which do you fear the most, child, the whip or the pillory?"

"Reckon it depends on how hard I gets whipped, maam. That there stocks is mighty tryin' to have to stand in all day. Sun gets powerful hot on a girl's back. She can't do nothin', just stand and get tired."

"Are you glad to have a Mistress who makes sure you get properly punished, dear?"

"Oh yes, maam." There was a ring of sincerity in the ready affirmative. "I knows then where's I'm at."

"You don't hate me for ordering you whipped today'!" Felicia was genuinely shocked. "Oh maam, Miss Eshelby, 'course I don't. I expects to get whipped. And you gotta' do it to me. Has to be someone. You's nice."

"Thank you, dear. You may leave us now. Take the tea things, and don't forget your dress."

Julia Lindley felt foolish. She silently watched the object of her embarrassment obey instructions. When Felicia's youthful nakedness disappeared, she made a half humourous concession of defeat.

"Alright, Crystal, don't say it. I'm an idiot."

"Wasn't me that said it, love. It was Felicia."

"I suppose so." Julie shook her head sadly. "You've made me think. But I don't know what to do. I don't suppose I'll do anything."

"Yes you will, darling. You'll come upstairs with me now. We've wasted too much time."

"Oh Crystal. Crystal darling..."

Julie sought the refuge of the opened arms.

Several days passed before the bomb exploded.

Looking back at them afterwards, Julie saw them as a calm before a storm, the end of innocence, the last halcyon days before a war. They took unto themselves an unreality as though normalcy was itself an anomaly. She wept for them often in the time to come.

Jacob Burlow was a sizable man who filled a chair, and for whom no hospitable drink ever seemed quite adequate for either his bulk or his complexion. Julia Lindley had filled his glass twice and allowed his insistence to fill her own once.

"I allus' think a drink helps. Miss Lindley." Burlow examined the Mistress of Beverleigh meditatively. "Specially when there's business afoot."

Julie said she supposed it did, and wondered how to get rid of this nuisance as politely as possible.

"Business ain't never all that easy." His tone was portentous.

"I hope you have not come about Beverleigh. Mr. Burlow. I've told you I have no wish to sell."

"Ah."

Burlow spoke the unemphasised exclamation in the manner of a stop gap. Waiting for its elaboration, Julie flushed beneath his scrutiny. Jacob Burlow was most certainly no gentleman.

"Seems like in this world, nothin' ain't quite the way we'd like it, maam."

Again, Julie sensed some unspoken inference. She wanted him to come to the point and go. She refrained from an offer to refill his glass. Then sat in seething indignation while he performed the service for himself. "I am sure you have something in mind? she inquired firmly.

"Aye, that I have, ma'am."

"Well?"

"Would ye do me a kindness, Miss Lindley. Just pull that there bell rope for the servants, or whatever one of 'em answers."

Julie's impulse was to refuse. But why be as rude as he! Perhaps the man had something logical in mind. She pulled the cord.

"Don't hold it agin' ye none, maam, not wantin' to sell. Right fine place is Beverleigh. Must be quite a handful for a gal'."

"It's really no concern of yours, Mr. Burlow."

"'Spose not. But seems a pity. Niggers outa' hand, so I'm told?"

"I suppose you have a suggestion?" Julie's tone was frosty.

"Ye might say that." He nodded absently as though his intent was elsewhere. "Ye see what I mean, Miss. Ain't nobody answered that bell."

Irritably, Julie pulled the cord again. She was chagrined that this coarse oaf might prove his point, just as Crystal had proved hers.

"Doubt ye'll get an answer, maam."

"And why not, pray?"

Jacob Burlow consulted an immense watch. "There ain't no one there to answer, maam. That's why."

"What utter nonsense! I'll go and --"

"Sit down."

At Burlow's words Julie froze. Half out of her chair.

she turned and glared at her visitor. "What did you say?"

"Ye heard me, Miss. I says sit down. I'll say it again."

"But the servants ... and you!"

He waved a placating hand. "I know. Bit of a shock, I expect. But don't get riled. There ain't no staff at Beverleigh no more."

"Don't be absurd. You're behaving --"

Once more the halting hand. Jacob Burlow leant down and retrieved a leather satchel he had carried. "Best maybe ye read these here, Miss. Saves a lot o' talk." He extracted several official documents and lumbered over to place them in Julie's unwilling hand. "Them's copies." He informed her as though in warning.

There is something about the seals of officialdom that commands attention. Julie's instinct to tear the parchments to shreds was halted. While Burlow helped himself to one more libation and resumed his seat, her eyes scanned the intent of what she held in unwilling hands. What she saw most prominently was her own name.

The room was very still. The import of what she read held the Mistress of Beverleigh in a frozen immobility. Burlow quietly sipped, but he too was tense, watchful, waiting. It was as though a fuse had been touched with flame.

That which she read held Julia Lindley spellbound. It was like some vivid piece of fiction deserving of a second scan, and a third, lest some nuance of its import be lost, or a wrong conclusion precipitously assumed. When the girl had done full justice to the script, her eyes flashed to meet those of the watching man. Her voice trembled with more than anger.

"This is balderdash."

"Feared ye'd think so, maam."

"It's insulting." Julie's eyes appealed. "Or is it someone's idea of humour?"

"No humour, Miss. Ain't nothin' funny 'bout that there."

They faced each other for a minute in silence. Julie's breasts rose and fell as her heart thudded painfully. She wished Crystal was there. Crystal would dispose of this gross creature in short order.

"Do you actually suppose these -" She waved the papers angrily. "will make me sell Beverleigh?"

"Ain't nothin' 'bout selling Beverleigh in them papers, maam."

"There isn't, is there!" Julie's voice was controlled fury. "These fabrications purport to prove me -" She consulted one of the sheets, "'The aforesaid Julia Lindley, to be of negro srcins, and to be sequestered by the State and sold at Public Auction.'"

"All proper and legal," said Jason Burlow affably.

"But everything here is a lie!"

Burlow sighed. "Has to be a shock to ye. Miss Lindley. None knows better 'no me. But there's no getting round them depositions. Too many of 'em - some going well back. And there's others..."

"All forged. They have to be. The whole idea's preposterous."

"Wish it was, maam. Feels right sympathetic for ye, so I do. That's why I'm here a'trying to break the news sorta' gentle."

"I suppose this is your doing." Once more the angry girl waved the offending documents at her visitor. "You're seeking some sort of advantage. You're trying to frighten me."

"Not really. Miss. You got a friend in me. There's them what wouldn't take the time and trouble over this like I'm doing."

"I'm as white as you are, and you know it."

Jacob Burlow nodded his understanding. He was playing the heavy role of consoling relative. "Nature's strange 'bout them things. Color comes and it goes. Jumps whole generations sometimes. I don't need to tell you. I'll wager you've seen cases."

Julia flushed. She remembered Felicia. She had been told of other instances but had never believed them. Once more her attention was directed to the deadly things she held. As though in a trance she read on: " ... And that the above described female of color shall be taken into custody and held and constrained in such ways as may be deemed expedient by the Custodian: And that she be subject to the authorities and disciplines as set forth by the laws of this State governing the confinement, treatment and sale of slaves. That by this Indenture, the negress Julia Lindley be declared and deposed a slave within the jurisdiction of this State, and that her Estates and possessions be forfeit to The State to be sold and disposed for the benefit thereof."

"Don't leave no leeway for argument, maam."

There are shocks, such as the sudden death of a loved one, that are too great to bear. The mind rejects, the spirit rebels. These are mechanisms by which we survive. Disaster invokes refutation. Acceptance is rarely instant. It was so with Julie now. In her case there was distrust of the bearer of the bad tidings and disbelief in their veracity.

"I think you had better go," she said firmly. "This charade is cruel and in bad taste. I've had enough of it."

Burlow eyed her anger amiably. "Happens I'm the Custodian, Miss."

"You insist on prolonging this ... this impertinence?"

"The Law insists, maam. The Court appointed my Dealership as your custodian and auctioneer. The auction's right soon."

Julia's face grew red,

"The Law!" Julie's voice was scornful. "We'll see about the Law. I am going to the Sheriff immediately with these ... these absurd papers. I shall lay charges."

She was half way to the door when Burlow's voice halted her. "Sit down. I ain't through."

Julie hated herself for obeying. But there was that in his barked command which she could not ignore. Radiating suspicion and distrust, she resumed her seat and watched in disbelief as her visitor lumbered to the bell cord, gave it two quick jerks, a pause, and then a third. When he had sunk back into his chair he explained cheerfully.

"Brought the Law with me, maam. Only right and proper. Knew ye'd need the Law 'afore ye'd believe me. Sheriff Dureault's bin' a 'waiting downstairs." Burlow chuckled. "He don't much relish this."

"But Dureault's an honest man!"

"That's right, Miss. That's why I brung him."

When the door opened to admit the familiar figure of the keeper of the Law within the County, Julie felt she shared a stage with someone who, like herself had forgotten their lines, had in fact no lines to speak. They gazed at each other, he in mute embarrassment, she in such a turbulence of emotions she knew not what to say. Dureault broke the deadlock awkwardly.

"I'm right sorry about this, Miss Lindley."

Once again the flutter of the parchments. "These are true? They can actually be enforced?"

Dureault shifted uncomfortably. "Except for... for, ahem, for yourself. Miss, they already have been executed."

"You mean..."

"Yes, maam. Your slaves are quartered elsewhere awaiting sale. A Bailiff is in residence and control of Beverleigh. The 'Order of the Court' has been posted in all designated publicity."

The two men watched the girl as she grappled with defeat. Each realized they witnessed a play of an emotion unlikely to be duplicated within their lives. A metamorphosis, invisible, yet implicit in every breath and motion of the three participants. Julie's face became drawn, her eyes piteous.

"I cannot believe it."

"Can't rightly say I did myself, at first."

"But you can't just... just come in here and make it happen!"

"It's already happened, Miss Lindley." Dureault's features shone with sympathy. "Don't mind telling you I was mighty grateful to Mr. Burlow here for breaking the news the way he's done. Wasn't a job I relished."

Julie looked at the two men. The Sheriff was honestly concerned. Jacob Burlow was an enigma. Looking inward she faced a horrid spasm of pure terror she was loath to examine. But it was there. Her gaze wavering, her world dissolving beneath her feet, her voice tremulous, she asked the inevitable question:

"What is to become of me! What am I supposed to do?"

"Sensible question. Miss. Can't think o' nothing..." Dureault grinned deprecatingly. "Lessen' you'd like to change clothes. Something more simple?"

"Suitable for a slave!"

All the bitterness of the world was in Julie's voice. She had hurt the Sheriff, but Burlow Sounded pleased.

"Right good idea, he approved. "Guess ye've got something?"

She was angry with her blush. A slave wore little. But another fear intruded. "Am I expected to walk out of here: told where to go? Am I under some sort of arrest?" Her breasts heaved angrily. "Or am I to be dragged out of my own house in chains?"

"Mr. Burlow's been right kind about that too, Maam. There's a couple of his staff waiting. They'll look after you. Less embarrassing than him or me being the one to escort you ... where you're going."

"Less embarrassing for Mr. Burlow, I'm sure! And just exactly where am I going - or being taken?"

"Mr. Burlow's got a Slave Dealership and Auction, Miss Lindley. He'll make you comfortable, I'm sure."

"In chains, no doubt!"

The Sheriff gestured apologetically. "This has to be hard for you. Miss. I'm sure it does. Nothing's ever going to be same."

"You mean it! I'll be chained ... like a -"

"A slave may be chained at the discretion of whatever authority they are domiciled under."

The Sheriff's declaration was intoned as a statute from a book. It sent a shiver of apprehension and distaste down Julie's spine. His next words were placatory.

"Guess you know most as much about these matters as we do. Miss Lindley. I'm sure Mr. Burlow's going to work you in real easy like. There's a little space before you're auctioned."

"She'll be made right comfortable." said Jacob Burlow.

There began then for Julia Lindley, one time Mistress of Beverleigh a phantasmagoria of impressions made none the less vivid by the civilized exchange of words and observations that accompanied her journey into slavery. Each step was made unreal by the continuing, though perceptibly diminishing, respect for her former status. The transition from the deferential 'Miss' or 'Maam' to the demanding: "Hey you, girl!" was gradual, but none the less horrifying.

It began with the clothes. The two men accepted her assurance of what Burlow described as "being sensible." And awaited her reappearance while comforted by the liquor she could no longer offer as hostess. It was with a wry vexation she found herself selecting a plain belted sheath from her wardrobe. She knew well enough what female slaves were expected to wear. She rebelled against nudity beneath the dress, so hid her secrets as briefly and effectively as a compromise might permit.

She selected her shoes with care; here indeed it might be wise to be 'sensible,' something stout and simple.

Julie asked herself why she conformed. The demand of: "Why, why, why!" beat at her steadily. But the prospect of being dragged from her home by force was demoralizing. Far better to do whatever the Sheriff advised now and trust to The Law and the intervention of Crystal Eshelby later. Without the knowledge of Crystal in the background she could have become hysterical. But Crystal was hope. Crystal was a rock. Crystal would sweep aside this outrage like an avenging fury.

Having complemented her on her choice of garb. Burlow and Dureault discreetly withdrew, leaving the trembling girl to the care and mercy of a pair of Burlow employees, a Mr. & Mrs. Hammet. The bewildered slave noted that, along with being middle aged and decisive, they were of muscular physique that dissipated any thought of resistance she might have cherished.

"Right sorry 'bout this, maam." from Hammet.

"Do the best we can for ye, Miss." from his wife.

In pure horror, the object of their concern gazed at the length of supple rawhide and the man who had produced it and who was now tugging it suggestively between his fists.

"Surely you don't intend to tie me!"

"Much the best, Miss."

"Might save you doing something silly, Honey," Mrs. Hammet suggested comfortingly.

"But that's absurd! You know who I am. The last thing I want is a fracas."

"Know's how ye feel, Miss. But, best not be tempted." Gazing at the pair. Julie beheld tight lipped purpose.

She knew well enough that restraints were placed on slaves when their ownership changed and they were subject to old loyalties and new temptations. It was conceivable that, in their eyes, she was in that state of transition and therefore unstable. For the first time she knew total fear.

"Very well. I give you my word, my parole. I will accompany you and do what you desire. But I will not be bound."

Their silence was worse than words. They gazed at her with sad and solemn pity. The rawhide jerked back and forth, awaiting its function in her flesh. Julie knew beyond the shadow of a doubt that

nothing she could say or promise would change anything. This was not a confrontation between the Mistress of Beverleigh and two menials. It was a matching of wills between Authority and a female slave. Miserably she held out her hands.

"In back, please Miss."

It was the abyss. The pit in which indignity would forever plumb fresh depths. The newly created slave considered refusal. But what wasthe use! Did it matter whether her hands were bound before her or behind! It was the act that was significant. Julie shrugged, turned, and crossed her wrists behind her back.

"Thank ye, Miss. Sure do appreciate..."

She had seen slaves bound often enough. The reasons had been routine and seemed normal. But that she herself be bound! It was inconceivable, yet it was happening. Never in her twenty-two years had she been in any manner constrained. Now she stood passive, but taut and trembling, while a man she had never seen before tied her wrists together with a leather thong in such a way as to render her helpless. As Hammet's strictures circled and bit, Julia Lindley drew from them humiliation and shame such as she had never known.

If Hammet's words were respectful, his cord was not. It was snug and tight and it hurt. It banished thoughts of wriggling free. It took Julie into a new world of impotence. It opened vistas she did not care to see.

"Must you tie me so tightly?"

"Ain't but one way to tie, Miss: tight and safe. Waste o' time any other way."

She hated his logic but recognised it as such. When he had tied his last knot, Julie twisted and tugged in a wry gauging of her plight. It was an entirely new sensation. Strangely, she found herself more conscious of her vulnerability of breasts and sex than of the discomfort of the bond. She could not make any of the instinctively feminine motions inherent beneath Hammet's appreciative male eye. She could cover nothing.

"Makes a nice job o' tying does my Hodge." Mrs. Hammet said proudly. "You'll not get loose from that, maam."

"Would it do my any good if I did?" Their captive asked wearily.

"Depends!" Mrs. Hammet was prepared to take the bitterness literally. "I seen gals, not half as smart as you, get a surprising long way once they slipped an iron or a rope."

"What happened to them?"

"Same as 'ud happen to you, honey. Naked to the Post and a right smart whipping."

"That's no way to treat a human being."

"It's the way to treat a slave, my girl, and don't you forget it."

It was in the open: the awful word, implied threat, absence of a polite prefix. Julia Lindley was being obliterated from the world.

"Before you ... before you take me. There is money ... and things?"

"Slaves don't own no property, honey. Not even what they wear." Hammet chuckled sardonically. "Goin' to make life mighty simple for ye."

"There's worse things 'no being a slave, lass," Mrs. Hammet added darkly. "You get bought right, and it's the life o' Riley ye'll be havin'."

"A nice rich gentleman, maybe not too young," Hammet counseled paternally. "When Ye're

up on the block, honey, look 'em over. Pick your man and give him the eye. 'T'will loosen his purse strings."

Again the yawning chasm she had not seen! Slaves worked in the fields and around the big houses. But pretty young female slaves brought huge prices from men ... and for only one reason! Julie cringed inwardly. Her white skin would assuredly doom her to concubinage. She remembered the jokes and innuendoes about plantation owners she had met or heard of.

"Must I be sold?" It was the cry of a trapped animal.

"Ain't no other legal way, Miss. We brung a carriage," Mrs. Hammet informed kindly.

"Seemed like it was best, this first time."

"Thank you ... oh", oh. I am grateful."

"Thought ye'd be led on a tether, did ye." Hammet chuckled. "Well, that time may come, but not wi' us today."

How demeaning to be thankful for so little! Yet Julie was appreciative of their thought. Slaves walked behind a carriage or behind a horse.

The Hammets flanked her in their passage of her lost home. The tied girl walked between them, erect, flushed, looking to neither right nor left. Julie's bound hands imposed upon her a terrible awareness of what she had become. She no longer belonged here in Beverleigh. She saw herself as a criminal being taken to a prison far away. She was soiled and suspect. She refrained from a last nostalgic look at her home and her parent's home as the carriage made a brisk passage through the demesne. She sat awkwardly under the watchful eyes of her warders, and worked her captive hands against the supple leather that joined them as one. She knew her motions as purely instinctive, a reflex against abnormality, but was soon conscious of uneasiness in her companion's regard. It was with a bitter humour she inquired:

"Would you feel easier if you tied my feet as well?" Her sarcasm went unrecognized, but the suggestion did not. In an almost laughing disbelief, Julie wondered how many lengths of rawhide Mr. Hammet's capacious pockets might contain. She watched incredulously as he tied the slim ankles she obligingly thrust out for him. He did the same firm competent job as he had done on her wrists. They hurt. She felt absurdly trussed, and repressed a hysterical urge to laugh.

"Ye see what we mean about the tying. You was thinking o' making a run for it, weren't you, honey." Mrs. Hammet consoled. "Now you can't do nothing foolish and won't get yourself in no trouble. You do see, our point, don't you, dear?"

Julie saw their point. Every thing happening was clothed in its own bitter logic. "I think I do understand. Thank you," she agreed, hating herself for her humility. "This is all so strange for me. I can't quite believe it yet."

"You'll soon believe it, honey," Mrs. Hammet assured ambiguously.

"Will I... will I... have to be tied, or chained all the time? I mean until the ... the auction?"

"Bothers ye, don't it. Miss." Hammet was heavily jocular. "We can understand that. Can't noways be easy for ye. We'll make things as good as may be, but it's best ye get the hang o' things."

"That means I will be ... fastened in some way?"

"Don't take on so, girl," Mrs. Hammet advised.

"You're thinking of the way you're tied now. Its a shock, and undignified and it hurts a bit. The idea o' Miss Julia Lindley having her hands tied or wearing a set o' irons just don't sit right. But look at it the way it is: for a slave girl to be restrained ain't nothing out o' the way. Her dignity ain't hurt none. Nobody even notices."

"And I'm a slave?"

"Ain't no use fighting the fact, honey. A slave is what you are and the way you'll stay. This next while you ain't going to be doing much 'cept wait to be sold, so a set o' irons won't stop ye doing what little you'll have need to do. Like I said, they'll keep you outa' trouble."

Julie's sigh was an acceptance of another defeat. She almost wished she was being dragged behind the carriage by a tether 'round her neck. To sit as she was in a civilized communion with these people, yet at the same time to be tightly bound was an incongruity hard to rationalize. She voiced her one positive hope.

"Would you deliver a message to Miss Eshelby at Launceston for me?"

"Guess one won't do no harm, Miss," Hammet doubtfully. "But best ye forget such things." He chuckled. 'Slaves don't carryon no correspondence."

"It is vital she be informed of what has happened to me..."

"She'd know soon enough, Miss. You got nothing to worry about there. The whole county 'ull know. What's happened to you is summat' I seen a few times here and there. But it ain't that common. It's news."

Julie lapsed into silence. Anything said would only add to her despair. The Hammets were neither kind nor cruel. She had best keep them neutral. She refrained from working at her tied wrists, the natural reflex might annoy. For the remainder of the journey she contented herself with brief responses to anything said.

"Ye'll make some lucky gentleman a damn good slave girl." Hodge Hammet assured her heartily.

"A nice sensible wench." Agreed his wife. It was Julie Lindley's epitaph.

To the slave named Julie, the world into which she was ushered by the Hammets was not new. She had grown up in a slave society. She herself had owned slaves. She knew how they were housed and fed, bought and sold. She knew their privileges, or lack of them. She knew, too, the punishments to which they were subject. All these things, particularly the latter, were variables governed by the temperament and choler of the slave's owner. But all the foreknowledge in the world could never prepare a young lady for as rapid a transition as she now faced. She was like some member of a prison staff who suddenly, for good and legal reasons, finds herself on the wrong side of the bars.

The vivid impressions continued their imprints on her mind. Being led bound from the carriage to the slave barracks before the curious gaze of both blacks and whites had a quality of agony all its own. Hammet's stern hand upon her arm took the place of the rawhide on her ankles. With the terrible foreboding Julie realized that never again would she have hope of freedom. Her white skin would tell against her, for it would be supposed to endow her with a superior intelligence best countered by cord or chain.

The odor of the barracks was demoralizing. She knew it well. Not unbearable, but distinctive of a prison. The cell into which she was ushered had a solid outside wall with a barred window, its remaining three sides were bars, leaving an occupant in much the vulnerability of a canary in a cage. On both sides it was flanked by larger cells, one vacant, the other inhabited by four negresses, one being middle-aged, three younger than herself. From their interest it was evident her advent and appearance was a relief from boredom.

"Nice for you to have a place to yourself, honey," Mrs. Hammet comforted. "I'll be back in a little while."

She was half way through the door when Julie thought to expostulate. "But, Mrs. Hammet, I'm still tied - my hands!"

"So ye are, love. Don't you fret. Bit o' rawhide never did a girl no harm."

Julie stood, feeling more awkward and ridiculous than ever. The open bars made all the prisoners seem more than naked. They had less privacy than walking on a public street.

"You get untied, you jest chained instead." The negro voice was flat and unconsoling.

"We hear 'bout you," the older woman said affably.

"You sure is gon' ter find out a lot you don't know. That there white hide ain't a'goin to do yous a lick o' good."

They were neither friends nor enemies. They regarded her with large solemn eyes in which she saw a hint of compassion. In a pathetic need of communion, she asked, "Can you tell me why my hands are tied?"

"So's you knows yous is a slave, honey."

"Keep yo' thinkin' straight."

"Yo ain't nohow untyin' 'em."

Julie recognized the tired voices of experience. She took one more step. "Why is one of you chained?"

"Fust time I'se bin' sold. They scared I run."

"Burlow's don't take no chances. Honey."

Julie went to the bars and peered at the captive girl's bondage. It was light enough and simple enough for its purpose. 'Metal bands were locked on her wrists and were joined by no more than a six inch span, the center link of which was attached to a band on her right ankle by a length of chain sufficient to enable her to raise her hands as high as her navel, but no more. To reach her face she must needs bend down or squat. The intent was obvious, she would not raise her hand to strike.

"Wouldn't do me no good to get outter' this here."

The chained girl motioned around their prison. "Couldn't get me no place nor do nothin'." She giggled as though at real humour. "Don't matter none. I ain't doin' no work. Suits me jes' fine."

It was a point of view. Julie wondered if she would come by it herself. She let her eyes rove over her small prison. Its only comforts were a narrow mattress, a bucket of water, and a bucket with a lid. A memory of the home from which she had been driven brought tears to her eyes. She fought them back in an urgent awareness of her bound hands. How demeaning to weep without the ministrations of fingers! She turned to the waiting eyes:

"Is it true I'll be bought by some man ... for ... for --"

"Sho' is, Honey. Yo' sho' nuff' lucky. You ain't like ter see no cotton fields fer ten years."

"What about you?"

"Mebbe' Jen. Jen got real nice tits. Us other ain't purty nuff..."

"Do you get... punished?"

"Sho' do." The voice was flat and without emphasis.

"Whip and the stocks mostly. Don't mean much. Does it to us when they feels like. Lessen us runs or somepin', then we gets flogged good."

A new and terrifying world! The chains a smiling Mrs. Hammet carried on her return made it even less attractive. "Be a lot more comfy like, for you, lass." She managed to make the prospect sound attractive.

Julie's distaste must have shown in her regard of the loops of metal. Mrs. Hammet was wary. "You goin' to be sensible, girl?"

A hundred words flooded to Julie's lips, but her hurt wrists under the rawhide made it easy for her to simply say. "I'll behave. I'll stand still."

Mrs. Hammet took the precaution of locking the door before she loosened the captive wrists. Julie thankfully massaged them, but quickly held them out for their next travail.

"This here's a nice light set, honey," she said as though speaking of a new dress. "You wearin' anything under that dress?"

Julie's blush of understanding was enough. "Better take 'em off, love. Be a lot easier."

The new prisoner could not deny the statement. Yet to remove the scented covering of her loins was one of the most difficult tasks she had ever performed. As she dropped the intimate fabric on the floor to one side she was conscious of the five pairs of avid female eyes.

"Like I said, you're a sensible girl." Mrs. Hammet approved. "Now, hold out them little hands."

Julie tried to take heart from the superior quality and workmanship of her fetters. They were so distinctly less utilitarian than Jen's. On the other hand there were more of them. Each cuff or anklet snapped upon her shrinking skin with a cold finality. Her wrists were joined, her ankles were joined. From each hand and foot a chain went to a central ring above the level of her knees. The end effect was the same as with the girl next door; she could raise her clenched hands no higher than her waist. In addition she could walk only with hobbled mincing steps. Unless she sat on the floor and drew up her feet she could do nothing. Standing, she was completely helpless.

"You look real sweet - sort a' suits you."

Mrs. Hammet picked up the discarded rawhide and the feminine fabric and departed. The locking of the barred door had about it an uneasy sound of doom. Julie pulled at her shackles in simple curiosity. Finding herself hopelessly confined, she looked in despair at her companions and took a couple of clinking steps towards them.

"Bout right fer the fust week. I'd say, honey."

"Yo' ever raise yo' hand and yo'll wear 'em fer a month."

"Ain't no wuss nor most."

It was thus that the former Miss Julia Lindley spent her first night as a slave.

Her next step down into the anonymity of her new condition came the following day. It was one of the most traumatic. After feeding time, about mid-morning when Julie was despondently viewing a helpless, hopeless vacuum of a day, Mrs. Hammet arrived with her usual brisk cheerfulness. At a motion of the hand which the negresses in the other cage were obviously conversant with all four of them shrugged out of their simple coverings. Even the chained girl managed to render herself as nude as her companions. It was obvious to the watching girl that, for these women, nakedness was a part of life and undeserving of query or comment. But Mrs. Hammet's next words were like a blow.

"You scared 'bout being nekkid, honey?"

"I have never been naked in public. There's no reason why I should be." Julie knew she was on the defensive.

"You're talking about the past, girl. I mean now. You nervous about showing what you got?"

"Please. Mrs. Hammet, must we talk about such a thing?"

"See them girls in there. Being bare don't bother them none."

Julie was not so naive as to fail to know certain advantages of sometimes having slaves go about their affairs minus clothes. It put them in a particular frame of mind and immensely facilitated punishment. It also saved money for clothes. She knew of more than one plantation on which nakedness was the rule six days a week, with loin cloths and sheaths handed out on Sundays. She made her answer forthright.

"Very well then. Yes, being naked would bother me very much."

"Figgered as much. But best you get used to it. Strip."

"And if I refuse?"

"Honey, you know the answer to that one. We have 'em off you by force. I only gotta' call."

"But really, Mrs. Hammet, what good can it do! It will shame me without profit to anyone."

"Hoity-toity, girl, it's you who profits. Once you gets sold, them clothes is coming off real fast. Be a damn bad shock without a bit o' practice."

"I'd prefer to take my chances if I may."

"Well, you may'nt! Ye can think yourself damn lucky there's naught but women to look at your pretty tits."

"Please, Mrs. Hammet, I beg of you." Julie rattled her shackles. "Am I not shamed enough with these fetters locked on me!"

"Two different things altogether." Mrs. Hammet was undaunted. "But you're right 'bout them chains. They gotta' come off. You willing to be sensible again?"

"Yes, I'll be what you call sensible."

Julie stood with quickened pulse as her chains rattled to the floor. What was demanded of her now was the hardest thing of all. She was not sure whether she could bring herself to obey the pending command.

"Please, Mrs. Hammet, don't make me naked. Please!"

"My, you are skittery, aincha'. Mean to tell me ain't no one had a good look at ye?"

"My personal life surely cannot matter here?"

"It does if it interferes with your orders, my girl."

"Well then, will you give me another day or two to try and adjust? This is all so frightening."

"What's there to be scared of in a bit o' bare skin?"

"Perhaps nothing ... I don't know. But the implications are awful."

"Such as what, honey?"

Julie hated to utter the words: "Rape... or being whipped."

"Ain't either of 'em half as bad as you think."

Julie was still squirming when advice came from beyond the bars. "Take 'em off, honey. A man does it for yo' iffen yo' don't."

"Bein' naked ain't nothin'. Better'n being whupped." Mrs. Hammet grinned cheerfully. "You sure did get yourself a load of modesty. I can see you needs help real bad. Anyways you come to the

right place. Now, love, d'you want me to call?"

With a sob of desolation, Julie demurred: "No, oh please. Don't! I'll undress."

Even as she performed the hated act, the slave was aware of Mrs. Hammet's hands busy with things she wished she need not see. When she stood naked she met the older woman's eyes and pleaded, "Please, don't do anything else to me! Please, no more chains?"

"Don't take on so, lass. What I'm a'goin' to do with you is going to be a big help in times to come. Mebbe' cure them blushes."

Julie's shock of nakedness before the amused and curious eyes was modified by her concern for Mrs. Hammet's next endeavour. It was frightening to stand newly naked and know her exposure to be merely a prelude. Her hands had sought her breasts, but this instinctive modesty was now denied.

"Let's have them little hands again, love."

The naked girl watched unhappily as her proffered wrists were circled by the metal and the bands snapped shut. From each wristlet dangled a short length of chain.

"Gotta' cure ye o' this bashful business, my girl," Mrs. Hammet declared purposefully. "Ye mayn't think so, but I'm doing it easy like. Now, over by them bars."

It was like being positioned by the executioner for the axe or the noose or the rack. Julie allowed the firm hands to mould her to their will. They thrust her shivering nudity against the bars to face the amused stares of the four negresses on the other side. Her right hand was raised and stretched, its links rattled, a padlock snapped. The same service was performed for her left, but this time the stretching compulsion was more severe. She stood taut and held facing her fellow slaves. Her cheeks flamed as she recognized her exposure and its intent. She was helpless.

"That ain't a'goin' to be painful, girl - lessen' you wants to struggle," Mrs. Hammet consoled. She gave her captive's bottom a reassuring slap as she moved back into the small cell to survey her masterpiece. "But I think maybe we'd better do this right while we're about it."

Julie remained mute. She gasping with the mixed emotions of the hands, the chains and her nakedness. But there was an inevitability about Mrs. Hammet against which she dared make no protest. Her distress was tempered by but a single thankfulness: No men ... no men! It was a small solace.

"You make me wonder, girl, iffen' I was ever that ashamed of my tits and my bush. Don't recall as I ever was. That there crossing the legs is right silly. These here 'ull be a big help to ye."

The big help turned out to be a similar fetter on her ankles as was borne by her wrists. Her feet were pulled to each side and secured, not to stretch obscenely, but to prevent Julie from closing her legs, an insurance against her modesty. Chained thus, her audience could examine her nudity in full detail. Another playful slap on her buttocks signaled the completion of the cure for her maidenly pudicity.

"Don't ye feel bad about this, honey." Mrs. Hammet advised. "There'll come a time when ye'll be glad of this bit o' breaking in, as ye might call it. Ain't nothing worse for a girl that being a 'feared to show herself." She chuckled reminiscently. "Spoilt many a wedding night, so it has."

Julie saw herself as one vast blush. She turned to look back over a prisoned arm. She saw her dress a pathetic small bundle on the floor, and gazed imploringly at her wardress's cheerful visage. She poured the full measure of her desolation into one single word:

"Please..."

Mrs. Hammet gave her another friendly slap and went away, enduring the closing of the metal barred door with a daunting clang. Julie closed her eyes and pressed her forehead against the bars.

"Ain't no sense gettin' all worked up, young'un." It was the voice of the middle-aged woman in the other cell. "What she says do have a lick o' truth in it. Yo' all is goin' ter be bare nekkid whenever

it pleasures the white folks what buys yo'."

"We's all bare." A young voice giggled "Don't bother us none."

"Ifen we had all that white skin o' your'n we'd wiggle our ass real proud. Get us a nice rich gennelmun cum' auction time."

They meant well. Julie was anxious to give them no hint of the added shame she felt before the eyes of slaves. "Why has she made you take off your dresses too?" she asked.

"Don't have ter be no reason. Ain't no tellin' 'bout white folks. Likely 'nuff a buyer wants to look us over."

Julie cringed against her shackles. "You mean men are brought in here to look at us? Like this?"

"They ain't goin' ter buy nothin' lessen' they sees it, sugar."

"But the auction?"

"We's open ter view." A giggle. "Like somepin' in t' store."

Blow after blow! There was no end. To be gaped at by a man – naked, spread, helpless! Julie tugged at her shackles, she could move but little. Whatever happened she would simply have to stand as she was and endure. She could shield nothing. Her distraught gaze sought her companions in bafflement. "Why don't you dress? You're not fastened the way I am. You could."

"Us could iffen' us wanted ter get a whippin'." The voice held an infinity of slave cynicism.

"We don' put nuffin' back on 'till we's tole'."

There would always be an answer. It was all hopeless.

Julie again closed her eyes and pressed her face against the bars to which she was irrevocably chained. In darkness this new and hateful world could be partly erased. It was several moments before she felt the tracery of the fingers.

"Yo' leave her be, Nance. That white skin o' her'n mean' trouble." the older woman's voice admonished.

Julie tensed and her eyes flashed open to find themselves inches from the grinning features of the youngest girl whose fingers were playfully exploring her breasts.

"Don't! Don't do that."

Julie wished she could recall the exclamation. It has escaped the lips of the one time Miss Julia Lindley. She knew it a mistake. The girl's eyes signaled receipt of the message. They became mischievous. The tracery of fingers on the white breasts became intent. Strong fingers and strong thumbs took possession of each captive nipple Julie gasped in outrage and apprehension.

"Mebbe' I pinches' em off, eh, white gal'?"

"No! Please leave me alone. I can hardly move. I'm frightened."

"I jest pinches a bit, see."

Julie squealed. The pain of the pinching had become more than she could bear with fortitude. She tried to back away from the bars but found herself too tightly chained. Such separation as she achieved was nullified by the reaching hands following relentlessly, pulling at the punished nipples as they retreated. She was already heaving at her chained wrists to extract every inch of leeway they would permit, now she tried to kick, to use her legs for any small advantage they might give. But the shackles held her impotent, such motion as she achieved was useless. She screamed.

"Yo' leave that white gal' be, Nance. Yo' wan' ter get all o' us a sore ass."

"Yo' all don' tell me nothin', Beulah. Miz Hammet never say: Nance yo' leave them white tits be."

"She tells yo' with a whip iffen yo' don' show a bit o' sense."

"Ain't every day I get me white tits in black fingers. Lookit her shimmy."

A fierce pride kept Julie from screaming again It seemed impossible that such small fingers could extract such agony from even smaller buds of rosy flesh on the tips of her breasts. In anguish she appealed to Beulah. "Please stop her! Please ... please, please!"

"Scream away, sugar, us don' mind. That there Nance gal' wanna' get her ass beat, us ain't goin' ter stop her."

"It's agony! I can't I can't -" Abandoning speech and pleading Julie screamed again.

"Well, what's the noise about?" Mrs. Hammet sounded grim.

Nance had swiftly retreated from the bars at the first sound of footsteps. "Ain't nothin', Miz Hammet. Jest a bit o' fun."

"What kind of fun?"

Scanning the impassive black features, Mrs. Hammet turned and tilted Julie's chin to meet her inquiring scrutiny. "Supposing you tell me, dear?"

"I'm sorry I screamed. But it was my nipples they were being pinched. It hurt terribly."

"Humph!"

Mrs. Hammet's large finger sought one of the hurt morsels and flicked it. Julie's resultant flinch was eloquent. The older woman grinned knowingly.

"Got a problem, aincha', honey. Bet you figure you'd better not tattle for fear of what they'll do in return but if you say nothing she'll think you're scared or maybe you like it."

"Please, Mrs. Hammet, take me away from these bars. You can easily chain me somewhere else."

"That ain't the idea, love. Hodge and me think ye'd best get a look at things. There's a side to colored girls you likely never seen."

"Don't let her torture me - Please, Mrs. Hammet!"

"That's a mighty big word for a pair o' little pink tits."

"But it's true. The pain was awful. I can't get away."

"I can always whip young Nance's ass. She's the one what done it - you think I don't know. But what I want is to see the lot o' ye get along. I want you forgetting you're naked, and I want them forgetting you're white. Ain't all that much to ask, is it?"

"No, I suppose it isn't," Julie conceded doubtfully. "We'un won't hurt her, Miz Hammet."

"Now that's what I like." Mrs. Hammet declared proudly. "But if I have to come back in here again, I'll be carrying a whip. It won't be just young Nance what gets it neither. I'll baste the lot o' ye." She slapped Julie's bottom. "You too, dear. Gotta' be fair."

With her protector gone. Julie quailed. She was naked and defenceless. She wriggled against the chains holding her against the bars. There was no escaping them. She would stand there, a nude white

sacrifice to cruel black fingers. She wished she knew what to say to make them friends. If they knew her story, they might easily take pleasure in her humiliation. Fastened as she was, she must seem to them an open invitation, a chance to mortify white skin such as might never recur. Her eyes, flitting across the spectrum of their animated regard, were wide with questions.

"Please don't hurt me," she begged. "I can't get away from these bars. I know you can do whatever you like with me."

"Little titties sore?" Nance giggled.

"Best not make her scream." advised Beulah without pity.

"Yo promise now yo' won't holler, sugar?"

Nance's voice was honey. Her eyes sparkled with intent unknown. Julie shifted fretfully in her chains. "I won't scream if you don't hurt me." she promised. "If you hurt me I expect I'll scream. I can't help it."

"C'mon, Tater. Yo' knows what ter do."

The chained and naked Julie watched shrinkingly as Nance and the girl called Tater approached her enforced immobility. When Tater's fingers found her nipples she froze in awful expectancy. But they did not pinch, instead they caressed with a soft and infinite cunning that very soon had Julie panting in an unwilling surrender to a relief she had not expected. The fingers were highly skilled.

Despite the sensory pleasure inherent in what was being done to her, Julie would normally have renounced it and put an instant stop to the outrageous familiarity. Whatever intimacies she and Crystal Eshelby might have enjoyed were never shared with a colored girl. Such a thought was infamous. Yet now she dared not move, dared show no revulsion. In the abnegation of her passivity, inhibitions fled. Guiltily, she knew pleasure. She stifled moans, but they were there.

"Yo' got her goin', Tater."

Nance's exultant whisper reached Julie in the erotic shadow behind her closed eyes It was followed immediately by a fresh sensation she recognized all too well. Fingers were furrowing and playing with her pubic hair, fingers that worked their way teasingly to her most secret place. Despite her wish to give no offense, Julie tensed and sought to close her legs, but already they were tight against their chains. Suddenly, her nipples were once more threateningly clamped.

"Yo' back offen' them bars and yo' tits gets pulled right on through, sugar. Best yo' stan' still."

Julie had never been prey to such mixed emotions. Her femaleness was responding with all the vigor of her youth, to the erotic stimulation of the teasing fingers. But every tenet of her former life demanded that she denounce, demand cessation, or scream for Mrs. Hammet to put an end to this violation of her most sacred being. Fear set all else aside. It was more potent than the shackles on wrist and ankle. She must stand and endure. And, guiltily and ashamedly, enjoy...

For the slaves beyond the bars it was was an amusing diversion in a long period of boredom in captivity. Taking a brief shamed peek, Julie beheld their grinning and intent regard of her naked responses. But quickly she closed her eyes again as though to divorce herself from what was taking place, denying her body's betrayal of her spirit. Helpless, she thrust her nudity against the bars so that her tormentors would have no excuse to inflict pain. Unrestrainedly, she panted under the artificial stimulation of passion.

"She give some nigga' boy fine piece o' ass."

"These tits gettin' hard like rocks."

"No, they're not. And I don't want it. I just don't wan' my ass beat by that there Mrs. Hammet."

The comments were irrelevant. Itwas the fingers that mattered, the fingers that would not stop!

It was after the throes of orgasm that Julie understood diminution in the kinds of attention to her sex. The busy fingers took her over the brink into a writhing and protesting beyond.

"Oh please! That's enough ... oh, stop." The fingertips continued relentlessly Julie tugged at her fetters, she could not help it. She was contorted by an excess of sensory stimulation against which her nerves and glands revolted in their own demand for peace. But the moment she backed away the twin forefingers and thumbs resumed their agonizing compulsion.

"I pulls them pretty tits iffen' yo' don' keep still."

"I can't! Oh, I can't. Oh, stop ... stop!"

Nothing stopped. With a moan of despair, Julie obediently thrust her bare flesh against the metal bars to invite the continuation of what had become unbearable.

"Yo' like ter get a heap o' this, white gal'."

There was a fretful clatter of chains from the fettered negress. "Ah sho' would like ter' get mah' little hands on them flossy tits. Ah'd give her a come what'ud brung her on 'tween them bars. Sho' do wish ah' wasn't chained like I is."

It went on and on in an alternation of ecstasy and agony.

"Gotta' have ye looking yer best, honey." Mrs. Hammet enthused.

Julie stood naked in the tub and washed diligently. Her heart was thumping painfully. Mrs. Hammet had become almost maternal. The slave about to be sold supposed the Hammets probably received a commission on her sale.

"Ye'll look real sweet, girl."

Julie conceded the scanty slip belted in at her waist had the classic virtue of simplicity. Compared to what she customarily wore it was near nudity. But she had expected no better. She did not demur.

The solicitous wardress took much trouble with the captive's hair. There was even a ribbon. Permitted to view herself in the mirror, Julie was not displeased.

"That fust look they get o' you is mighty important, honey. You look good enough to eat." Mrs. Hammet chuckled. "There'll be them as bids what has that in mind. Remember now: stand up straight, head up. And, for pity's sake, shove them tits out. Each o' them there tits be worth a pot o' money."

There was a question in Julie's mind she dared not ask.

But Mrs. Hammet was equal to all occasions. "You're thinking o' standing up there bare naked, ain't you, honey?"

"Yes." The slave eyed her keeper dolorously. "Must I?"

"Depends on the Auctioneer and the o' of the crowd, love. I'd hate to tell ye you'd not be stripped. Pretty wenches mostly are; and you're as pretty a wench as every stood on a block."

"If they do that to me I'm not sure how I'll behave."

"Well, make sure. Tom Baines is crying the sale, and I've seen him lace into a girl real savage if she acts uppity. The riding crop he carries ain't all that kind o' one either"

"You mean ... whip her up there on the block!"

"What the hell else can he do, girl! He ain't about to take her down and have a little chat."

"But it's so cruel, before all those people!"

"It's part o' the show, love. That there audience dearly does enjoy seeing a girl get well striped with Tom Baine's crop. Starts the bidding off real brisk."

"But what if... if she can't take it? Can't stand there naked and be leered at?"

"You thinking o' yourself, honey? Try it and see. Three or four good stripes from Baines's crop and you'll be standing any way he wants ye."

"I'm terribly frightened, Mrs. Hammet."

"Course you are, sugar. Wouldn't like the idea myself. But it ain't going to take all that long. You'll sell like hot cakes. It's being scared what makes these here sensible..."

"Chains! Oh, Mrs. Hammet, must I stand out there in front of all those people with chains locked on me?"

"Now, now. Don't get excited. It's just your hands. It's as much for the look o' the thing as to make you behave. Out with them flippers."

"But how can he strip me with my hands chained?"

"There's a fastening down the back. Don't quibble, love."

Julie held out her hands and watched the fettering of her wrists. It had become an almost familiar rite. The chains were not unduly heavy and were highly polished. She was being sold in style.

"Ain't every day they get a white girl up there." Mrs. Hammet seemed vastly amused by the prospect.

"I've been declared a negress."

"They can declare 'till they're out o' breath. But, honey, you're white, and them as bids on ye will see ye as white. You ain't no nigger wench. Surprise me if ye don't fetch the highest price ever."

"Won't anyone protest that I shouldn't be standing there, a slave?"

"Not likely, girl. You're what most men would like to own. Doubt there'll be a spoil sport in the lot."

"Am I supposed to smile?"

"You said that sarcastic like. But seems to me iffen' I was up where you're a'going, I'd smile real pretty. First, to show 'em they hadn't got me down. And second, to pick out the man I wanted ... I told ye 'bout that. Acting bitchy just ain't a 'going to payoff no how."

Julie looked shyly at the woman who had tended her and whose chains linked her hands. "I think you've tried to be kind to me." she tentatively offered. "None of this has been easy. I think I should say thank you."

Mrs. Hammet kissed her warmly. "You're a real sweet girl. 'Tis a lucky man who'll get you. I wish ye luck, that I do! And remember, love, luck could be a'waiting for you out there. They ain't all bastards."

Julie had her doubts.

It was Hodge Hammet who took her to where she could be instantly produced for the Auctioneer's attention. With her jailer's hand heavy on her fettered arm, Julie heard the hum of a considerable gathering and voice of Baines cunningly extracting the last possible penny from a sale.

Julie had been to slave auctions. They were nothing new to her. She realized that there would be a few shocks for her in what she saw. But this one was different inasmuch as she herself was now the slave. She could think only of the shame to which she was about to be exposed. Feeling her tremble, Hammet squeezed her arm reassuringly. "Ye'll get the richest bucko there, lass. You mark my words."

Her brief passage to the auction was made in a daze of shrinking shame which alternated with some of the most vivid impressions of her life. She was trembling so violently that without the support of Hammet's arm and the reaching hand Tom Baines extended from above she might not easily have mounted the fatal steps. Her worst fears were confirmed when, close within the sea of upturned faces, she focused on the features of a man who had been a guest at Beverleigh often enough on business with her father. He was as embarrassed as she. Both averted their gaze, but wherever she looked there was a familiar face. Most held pity, but some drank in her humiliation with obvious delight. There were the usual sprinkling of women. But Crystal Eshelby was nowhere to be seen.

Julie stood, her chained hands limp before her, and faced the congregation whose main concern she was. She dared not seek the faces that she knew. They could not help her here, nor could she, chained as a slave, implore that aid. She looked above and beyond them into a vision without hope. Beside her, Tom Baines mouthed his eulogy of her attributes.

"One thousand dollars."

The bid was impatient of Baines's rhetoric, and cut it short.

"Two."

The atmosphere was electric. The starting bids had been large. As they mounted. Julie shrugged inwardly in resignation. It was no more than she expected. A white girl! Beautiful! Made slave and now sold. It was a tidbit so as to excite both voyeur and libertine as well as those with a more legitimate interest in her person.

"Ten."

There was a finality about the figure. It was huge. She could feel Baines's sweating excitement beside her. She followed the direction of his gaze and heard his voice.

"Ten thousand I am bid by Mr. Cruikshank, Ladies and gentlemen. May I hear an advance on ten."

Julie knew neither the name nor the face. Elderly, ascetic, he seemed the least likely of the lot to wish to own her. His expression was one of indifference. He did not meet her eyes.

"Eleven."

She watched Cruikshank. He made his bids by curt nods. He made one now. At twelve thousand dollars the auctioneer was meeting resistance. The inevitable moment had arrived. Baines rapped the buckle of her belt with his riding crop. "Off with it, young lady." His voice was jocose.

Julie was ready. She had felt the crop when it was used as a pointer to draw attention to her charms. Both her breasts had been rapped, her bottom and the concavity of her stomach - all prime assets! She had no wish to feel its intentional cruelty beyond that use. She fumbled at the buckle with her chained hands and let it fall. In an instinctive wish to avoid additional shame her fingers flew to the fastenings of the brief sheath that covered her, but the shackled hands fell short. With a practised motion Baines did the small task for her. The scanty textile thing fell to surround her feet which were already bare. Obeying the wordless directive of the crop she stepped away.

Julia Lindley, Mistress of Beverleigh, stood naked.

The inhalation of breath was an errant wind sighing its passage through the huge room. It was followed by deep silence, broken only by Baines himself. He rapped Julie's shackle and commanded. "Clasped behind yer' neck, girl."

It was a cruel exposure. It was also exquisitely lovely.

There are few poses more flattering to the female form. Since she had not choice, Julie did it full justice. Damn them, let them look! She was beautiful. It was her only comfort. She obeyed, with equal docility, the insertion of the crop between her legs. She spread her feet eighteen inches so that nothing of her was hidden.

"Fifteen thousand!"

It was like a shock wave sending its ripples across the assembly Julie cringed at sight of the bidder. She knew him by repute. Jason Downey was not a man any naked girl would wish as her owner. He would use her and beat her and send her into the fields. Her gaze flashed to the lean elderly figure of Cruikshank. His sharp nod flooded her with relief.

"Twenty thousand!"

Downey leered about him triumphantly. It was an incredible price to pay for a slave, regardless of who or what she was. Watching him, Julie knew he already regarded her as his own. No one would top so huge a sum. Catching her fearful look he winked broadly. He had her!

Cruikshank nodded.

"Twenty-one thousand I am bid." Baines's voice intoned with reverence. "Thank you. Mr. Cruikshank, sir."

"Bah!" Jason Downey's exclamation of disgust and defeat swept with him from the room. All eyes turned upon the naked girl whose chained enslavement had elicited the highest price in living memory.

"Twenty-one thousand I am bid, ladies and gentlemen..." Baines's voice held awe.

Julia Lindley had been sold.

She had not known what to expect. But she did not need to know. Others knew and would dispose of her as they saw fit. She was a slave. The man with Cruikshank was one more stranger, a younger edition of Cruikshank himself, severe and impersonal. Under the older man's cold eye the chains were taken from Julie's wrists by a deferential Hammet, and her tunic and belt returned to her eager hand. Quickly donning them, she heard the now familiar words, "Turn round and let's have your hands, honey."

Julie obeyed. Being clothed helped her poise. As her hands were placed palm to palm and her wrists tied by Hammet's capable fingers, her eyes sought those of her new owner. But Cruikshank's regard was completely impersonal as though she was some domestic creature undeserving of further attention. His features told her nothing. But his words gave her little cause for optimism.

"Tie her elbows, Hammet. Fast together if they'll touch. It keeps them docile."

It was her first time. Later, she came to know and fear this tying of her bare arms behind her back so that her elbows were welded asone and her breasts responded with a wanton thrust. But, now, the first agony of the circling strands cinched tight was a shock. She gazed at the watching eyes and said the thing she had to say.

"That hurts terribly."

She might have spoken to the wind. No word was said, Hammet's fingers tugged and knotted until she stood with shoulders wracked back and a sense of physical helplessness as frightening as the pain of the cords were sickening.

"You'll use the carriage, Findley. I want the girl blindfolded. She must be divorced from everything she has known. She'll give you no trouble the way she's tied. If she wishes to be silly, tie her feet."

Cruikshank gave Julie his first recognition, a small courteous inclination of the head. He turned and left.

"I'll say good-bye, Miss." Hammet patted her awkwardly on her bound arm. "You bin' a damn good girl. Mr. Cruikshank's a lucky man, and ye've bin' bought lucky too."

Alone with Findley, Julie felt like a parcel awaiting delivery, a parcel that hurt. She gave him her most docile smile, and said: "I'll try not to give you trouble, but please... my elbows! They hurt so much. Could you loosen them a little?"

"No. They are best as they are."

There was such a finality in his tone. She would not ask again. But it was strange to walk so trussed. It threw her posture out of normalcy. The knowledge it was flattering to her figure was a very small consolation. But she was helpless to step up into the carriage unaided. Findley simply picked her up boldly and deposited her on the seat. "You're riding like a lady," he told her with sombre humour.

"I don't feel like a lady."

He regarded her with grave curiosity. "You have fetched a lady's price, and more."

"What does Mr. Cruikshank want me for?"

He did not answer. He was folding a large black silk handkerchief "My apologies, maam. You are to wear this."

She did not demur. The auction hadbeen her final defeat. The cordsupon her elbows told her bitterly that for there was only obedience. She leaned forward to assist his covering of her eyes. The carriage rolled briskly forward to its unknown destination.

The blindfold made it a far stranger ride than one by which she had been transported from Beverleigh. Her hurt arms made it difficult to sit back gracefully. She wriggled them into a corner as the best compromise for her helplessness. She tried to recognize the sounds of their progress. But Cruikshank had been right, the fold of silk bound across her eyes divorced her from reality. She could recognize nothing. The darkness was demoralizing enough that she felt a great need of communion.

"Please tell me something of what my life may be henceforth?"

"Maam, surely you know - you have owned slaves."

"But... To be bought by a man..."

His voice out of the darkness was tinged with humour.

"I doubt, Miss Lindley, that I escort you to a concubine's couch."

Julie flushed and strained against her bonds. "I suppose that is the question I asked," she admitted. "But if I am not to be used in that capacity, what does await me?"

"You are thinking of the cotton fields, maam. I cannot say you will not work in them. But I do not think it will be today ... or tomorrow."

"Is Mr. Cruikshank one of those men who buys a girl so that he can make her ... make her cry?"

Again the hint of amusement. "You are expecting to be flogged on arrival?"

"Well, is he?"

"No, he is a most abstemious man."

"You're not going to tell me, are you! Then tell me why you just named me 'Miss Lindley'? That's not the way to address ... slaves?"

"I'm simply being polite, Miss Lindley. Other names will come soon enough. I need not coin them."

"I have been bound, and stripped, and chained, and locked in a cell behind bars like an animal in a cage. I begin to feel like a slave."

"It is natural. I am sure the process was intentional."

"I am frightened, Mr. Findley. Is the threat of some awful punishment going to hover over me in my ... my slavery?"

"You are thinking in terms of being whipped and made to stand in the pillory?"

"I suppose so."

"Don't distress yourself, Miss Lindley. These things may happen to you if you transgress, such is the lot of a slave. Without the whip and the stocks slavery would be an impractical institution. I don't suppose you will be whipped any more or any less than any other female slave sold on the block."

It was all part of the pattern, of the helplessness and impotence of slavery. She could not come to grips with this man sitting opposite her darkness. Bound, she could use no feminine wile or coquetry, she could not reach out and touch. In wry amusement she commented:

"I suppose, really, I'm transgressing now, aren't I? I mean, talking to you as though I'm an equal, asking questions?"

"Mmmmm! I suppose you are. But I will not order you whipped."

"But suppose my skin was a different color?"

"You have been reasonably respectful. A negress though would be more respectful still. Yes, there is a difference."

"Something for me to watch?"

"Of course. These first tolerances will wear thin. But your intelligence will aid you. You will force yourself to think as a slave, then acting like one will come easier."

"Does a girl like me have any ... any hope of escape?"

"I have to counsel you against it. The punishments are most severe."

Julie quailed inwardly at the thought of the whipping post. "I didn't mean that kind of escape. Mr. Findley. But doesn't someone ... Isn't it possible for me to be liked ... or pitied ... and set free?"

"It is possible. The chance is remote."

"But what is the chance?"

"The only one I would give much credence to would be the possibility that a free man would wish to legally marry you. The machinery of the Law could then set you free as his wife."

"A sort of conditional freedom?"

"No. Once freed you would remain free." Findley looked at the bound girl with compassion. "But here again I must caution against hope. Free men do not marry slaves. They have no need to."

"They buy my body and use it."

"Don't punish yourself with these negatives. Miss Lindley. Your bitterness is understandable. But most of it will pass. I am sure it will. Mr. Cruikshank is not a cruel man."

"These ropes on my arms are cruel. It was he who ordered me tied in this miserable fashion."

"Newly indentured slaves are often obstreperous. Miss Lindley. It is a kindness to firmly secure them. Mr. Cruikshank has no knowledge of your temperament, nor have I."

Julie sighed. "I've heard that one before. With so much kindness my life is likely to be exceedingly painful."

"I would venture to predict that within a year you will rarely know the bite of rope or chain."

She let it drop. The free world that, for her, had become an amorphous 'They' had an answer to everything a slave might ask. She commented bitterly, "I suppose it could be exceedingly profitable for my owner to compel me to produce a steady succession of white babies?"

"It would be a long delayed return, Miss Lindley. But, yes, you are right, it would eventually lead to a handsome profit. However, the price paid for you today renders so devious a project improbable."

"But if I had a child it would be a slave?"

"That is correct."

She laughed bitterly. "I had best make its father black, hadn't I!"

He did not answer. She sensed his disapproval of her levity. She fell silent. The carriage was moving at a good clip. Julie fell back upon the occupation of twisting her wrists futilely against their bindings. It was something to do. The resultant chafe was a counter irritant against her new condition.

When, after a long time, the carriage stopped, Julie knew a strange excitement. She had been brought to that place where the sentence imposed upon her at the Auction would be executed. "Have we arrived. Mr. Findley?"

"We have arrived, maam. Would you wish me to carry you?"

"Don't be absurd, I can walk! Oh ... oh, I'm sorry!" Findley chuckled. "You are lucky you said that to me and no one else. You must be chary of such retorts."

"Thank you." For a moment Julie had been frightened of her temerity. "I really mean it, I'm grateful you're so kind. My blindfold..."

"It will remain on you for the present. I will hold your arm and guide you."

It was an odd, faintly frightening progression in her darkness. When they mounted stairs instead of descending them, Julie was relieved of a fear of dungeons or odorous kitchens. Even the covering on her eyes did not entirely dissipate her inconsistent excitement. They were in a big house. The rugs beneath her bare feet and such scents as came to her nostrils spoke of wealth. Findley's hand on her bound arm was firm, his low voice directions kind. Julie's excitation grew in the knowledge that whatever her fate was to be it would manifest itself within these walls.

"I must leave you now."

The guiding hand was gone. It had helped her through a considerable distance of halls and corridors and the opening of doors. She stood tense and expectant.

"You will wear the blindfold a minute or two longer. Someone will come and deal with you. Will you stand where you are and wait sensibly?"

That word again. Julie was beginning to dislike it.

"Yes, Mr. Findley, I will be very sensible and stand very still."

"Good-bye, Miss Lindley."

Julie stood. She was lost and helpless. For a moment her unfettered feet prompted thought of escape. But bound and blind she would only hurt herself, every step would be a pitfall. But the blackness that made her doubly captive was daunting. She felt foolish and exposed. The protuberances of her breasts bothered her. For all she knew someone might be sitting close and laughing at her plight. Her whole situation was eerie. She longed for it to end. By the time she heard the footsteps she was in a fine dither of apprehension.

Now it was frightful. Someone was with her, standing close, examining her. She could hear breathing. She wondered if Mr. Cruikshank, or whoever it was, could hear the furious beating of her heart. She almost cried out when deft fingers dealt with the silken knots that made her blind. When the soft square of material was whisked away she blinked and shook her head at the dazzling light, but instantly turned to behold her deliverer.

"Welcome to Launceston." said Crystal Eshelby.

It was a bare stone room. It could be called a dungeon, a cell, a storeroom - anything. Its small recessed window high in the wall was barred. Its door was heavy and forbidding. Against one wall stood a naked girl, her arms were raised to either side and held like extended wings by shackles fastened to the stone. Her head was bowed forward, her hair falling across one shoulder. She was weeping in an extremity of grief.

To Julie the slave, it was one more incomprehensible chapter in a series of the impossible, the unbearable, the devastating. Her fettered hands could not tend her tears, they trickled down her cheeks and fell upon her naked breasts. Her quiet sobbing was absorbed by the silent room in an infinite sadness. Her mind was a chaotic turmoil of impressions. In her present desuetude they were vivid but inexplicable. Her mind roved back, seeking an anchor in a storm of grief. It had begun with the removal of the blindfold.

"Oh Darling!"

Julie was ecstatic. Sight of her beloved Crystal's smiling face was a harbour after stormy seas ... heaven. Her arms made their instinctive effort to embrace which her bonds denied. Crystal laughingly clasped her in eager arms instead ... their lips clung.

"Sweetheart!"

Crystal's whispered endearment was husky in love. She held the younger girl at arm's length and studied her. "Has it been very bad?"

"Oh, Crystal, it's been awful. I've been so ... lost. I wanted you, I needed you."

"And now you've got me, darling."

Julie's eyes were wide and bright. "Was it you? I mean, darling, someone's bought and paid for me?"

"Cruikshank acted as my agent, sweets. He's a lawyer from Mobile. I use him sometimes, You're mine. I own you."

It was too wonderful, too glorious to be true. Crystal had rescued her. Crystal had paid a vast sum so they could together always. Julie's heart melted with a surge of adoration for this lovely creature who had been her lifelong friend until their passion for each other had usurped the lesser glory of friendship and doubled their dependence.

"It was so sudden, Crystal. They ... they just came and took me away. The Sheriff..."

"I know, dear. It's all over. No more men."

Julie's joy had been so all encompassing she had forgotten pain. Now, in the relief of happiness, the agony of her tied elbows re-asserted itself. She turned her back and wriggled her fingers. "Untie me, Crystal, I want to hug you."

Crystal laughed at her eagerness, and with firm sure hands turned her about again so they were face to face. "In a little while. Sweetness. Now, kneel on the rug where I can admire you and we'll talk."

Why not! If her beloved Crystal had demanded she stand on her head, Julie would have tried. What was a little pain if it pleased her love! For the first time Julie was pleased about her breasts. Crystal loved her breasts. Joyously she knelt and faced her seated inamorata.

"What's it like to be a real slave girl, Julie?"

"At this moment it's the loveliest feeling I've ever had."

"Mmmmm, and you don't want it to end?"

"No, Crystal, not ever."

"It won't."

Was it at that moment Julie had known! If it was she ignored it. "Darling, what about Beverleigh? Have you heard anything?"

"Beverleigh's perfect, Pet. Running smoothly, all the servants back where they belong. There's going to a wonderful crop this year."

"But ... but how?"

"Money, Sweetheart. Lots of money. You're damned expensive."

"I'll pay you back - every penny."

"You can't, darling. You haven't any money. Don't fret."

"You mean ... when they took me, they took..?"

"That's right. Bank account, securities, everything. You are a very destitute little waif."

"I'm not, darling, not with you! And anyway, Beverleigh will soon pay for everything." Julie paused in her exuberance, a cloud had crossed her sun. "But I'm forgetting ... just who owns Beverleigh right now?"

"I do, Julie. I purchased it from the State."

There was a silence, a pregnancy of the unuttered.

"I've had the Pillory and the Whipping Post re-built."

The second, silence was as filled with portent as the first.

"I've had that troublesome buck, Roak, flogged, and that impertinent little bitch Nona. It's done 'em a world of good. I had the rest of 'em stand and watch. There's twice as much work being done now as when you ran the place."

"Oh Crystal!" Julie felt things slipping away from her again. She looked up at the smiling face of the woman whose property she legally was.

"Poor Nona, she's only a child."

"Old enough to be impudent. Has it occurred to you, sweetheart, that I could have you standing in your own pillory at Beverleigh?"

"If you wanted me to I wouldn't mind."

Crystal's joke had sounded grim, but Julie was still bathed in a sea of thankfulness. She wished the older girl was not so addicted to discipline. But Crystal was Crystal! On the other hand Nona was a sweet girl. The thought of her back, bloodied by the scourge, was sobering.

"Naked, for the day, the whole staff to look at you?"

"Crystal darling, don't say such awful things. You frighten me. I've been thinking up the most awful things for myself these last few days. Don't you go getting me all bothered."

"Perhaps you should be bothered, darling?"

"I would be if it wasn't you. Will you untie me now, please?"

"No I won't."

"It hurts something awful. My elbows..."

"I expect it does. It's a very good way to tie a slave. You should be naked though."

"Oh Crystal!"

"What d'you say we have Felicia bring us Tea? It will be like old times?"

"I'd love it. But I can't drink tea tied the way I am."

"Don't fret, sweets. I have a splendid idea."

Crystal pulled the bell cord. When a wide-eyed Felicia appeared the orders were crisp. "Felicia, take this slave and clean her and tidy her hair. Chain her ankles, get rid of those ropes, then chain her hands in front so she can drink her tea in a civilized fashion. Oh, and bring her back here with the Tea trolley."

It was all a joke, of course. Julie was determined to enjoy it for dear Crystal's sake. Crystal was obviously enjoying it very much. In wry obedience the uncertain slave followed Felicia from the room,

"It ain't no joke, Miss Julie. Miss Eshelby she got you for sure," Felicia mourned as she brushed busily at captive hair.

"It's just her way, Felicia. I'm so happy to be back. Will you untie me now please?"

"Not 'till I got them feet o' you'n chained, Miss."

"Felicia!" Julie was outraged and hurt. "What a thing to say!"

"I wouldn't blame yer' fer' runnin', Miss."

"How ridiculous. Why would I run?"

"You's white and growed up. You get away from here you might escape for sure."

"You're as white as I am."

"Yes'm. But I tried it once and got a flogging. I ain't tryin' no more."

"Then why tell me to?"

"You's got learnin'. Dressed proper you'd mingle. They'd grab me right quick."

Felicia's seriousness conveyed a message. But Julie refused to examine it. Crystal had saved her from an awful fate. If it pleased the girl she loved to make sport of her she would try and laugh too. Julie had been bathed and tidied and now sat naked before a mirror while the maid worked on her hair. The ribbon from the auction was still serviceable. She watched Felicia make a pretty bow of it.

"Please untie me, Felicia, my arms hurt so much. I'll behave."

"I knows. Miss. I bin' tied like that. They does it ter' make a gal' pay 'tention."

"Get the rope off me." Julie was impatient to be free.

"I go get them chains - right smart."

Julie admired herself in the glass. How good it was to have such civilized amenities again! She was conscious of looking her best. She refused to allow Crystal's eccentricities to mar this glorious day. When Felicia returned with the fetters she must wear she scarcely gave them a glance.

"What about a dress and shoes, Felicia?"

Felicia shuffled her feet. "You don't get no dress, Miss Julie. Miss Eshelby she wants you stark naked. I'se sorry."

Julie laughed. "Why on Earth -?"

"She has me naked too sometimes," Felicia offered consolingly Miss Eshelby likes naked girls." She giggled. "She just purely likes gals'. Any gal' purty as you. Miss, jest naturally ain't goin' ter' get ter' wear clothes much round her."

"I don't mind. Are you ready to chain me now?"

"Sure am. Stick your foot out. Miss."

Julie stuck her feet out and watched them chained with heavy polished metal richly embossed. No doubt this ornate bondage was part of Crystal's fun.

"This goin' ter hurt sumpin' crool, Miss," Felicia warned as she worked on the ropes.

It was hard not to scream when the brutal strands were peeled from within the flesh of her arms. It was at once an awful and a beautiful agony. Julie contented herself with moans.

"I rub them weals fer ye, Miss, after I fix your hands." Julie obligingly held out her hands to be chained. Once again the metal she must bear was a tribute to some craftsman's skill. She was almost proud of the things which would prevent her from separating her hands by more than a very few inches.

"Sure look nice on you, Miss."

Felicia sounded relieved. Had the silly girl actually supposed she might resist! Julie happily delivered herself over to the comforting ministrations of the slender fingers on her wounds. It was a wonderful day. She would not change it if she could!

"I adore you like that. Julie. Here, take your cup. Sit where you like." Crystal Eshelby eyed her new possession with approval.

Julie chose the floor in the same place she had previously knelt. She felt sure the posture went well with the chains and her nakedness. She knew, too, she would look more beautiful than in a chair.

"If you were going to keep my feet chained I'd have to learn to walk all over again," she admitted ruefully. "If it hadn't been for Felicia I'd have tripped all over the place. It's an awfully funny feeling."

"I think you'd better learn, dear. I like you chained."

"Crystal, you don't really mean it?"

"Oh, but I do! You cost me a lot of money. I can't have you running away."

Julie traced the ornamentation of her wristlet with an admiring finger. "Oh, Crystal! What a thing to say! As though I would."

"Slaves have been known to run, darling."

"But I'm not a -" Julie broke off in confusion. "Am I, am I a slave? I mean really truly?"

"Come beside me, Puss."

Julie glowed. The old endearment always touched her, made her feel wanted and loved. Happily she clinked herself over beside Crystal's expensively clad legs. She looked up in amused adoration.

"Puss, you're a slave. Believe it."

"Oh, I know all that paper stuff, and seals and depositions and things. I'm quite sure whoever forged them got me enslaved, but good. But it's you who's got them now. They don't matter any more."

"They matter a lot, dear Puss."

"Why?"

"They mean I can do anything I like with you."

"Of course you can. I want you to." Julie giggled.

"You've been doing it for years."

"I've never kept you chained, or had you whipped."

"You don't need to now, darling. I'll do anything you say."

"Ah, but I do need to."

"Why?" Julie raised mischievous eyes.

"Because I want to. I've always wanted to. You affect me that way. You are my dearest wish ... chained."

There was that in the beloved voice to give pause to the younger girl's effervescence. A hundred visions of Crystal through the years flickered through her mind. Julie felt as though a small cold hand had touched her spine. She looked up into the lovely pensive face.

"You are going to take these chains off me, aren't you?"

Julie's voice trembled. She hoped Crystal would not sense her sudden fear. It could be only a legacy from the Hammets and Nance and the Auction.

"No. I will not take them off."

Julie sat very still. With sudden revelation she knew Crystal was no longer speaking in fun. The simple declaration of her last sentence was like a thunderclap in its portent. Bemusedly, the naked girl sought to reconcile her new condition with the love she and this strangely serious woman had always borne each other. She asked a fearful question.

"You spoke of whipping me?"

"That too. I will have you whipped."

The floodwaters of fear and love and disbelief ebbed and flowed. Once again Julie's heart was pounding beneath her breasts. This could not be ... it could not be!

"It will be more cruel if you are taken to the Post, fastened and whipped by another. I will watch."

Julie remembered Felicia tied to the post, her writhings and her cries, and the scarlet weals on the white skin. She wonderingly lifted her chained hands and examined the fetters on her wrists as though seeing them for the first time. Pensively, she tugged at the short tether between her hands. It was short indeed. She could hold a teacup or such small task. But she was captive. Her gaze fell to her shackled feet. She could not run, she could scarcely walk. She was firmly prisoner. Without hesitation, she looked up at the woman who held the keys.

"I love you. Crystal. I always have."

"I know dear, and I you. It changes nothing."

The slave sat in troubled dismay while her mistress smoothed her hair with a loving hand. She was prey to a confrontation of emotions she could not cope with. Julie's only comfort was the hand in her hair and the absence of decision. She knew herself incapable of judgement in this crisis in her life. But Crystal would know what to do. Crystal always knew.

Crystal pulled the bell cord.

"Felicia. Take Julie to the punishment room. Give her a light whipping. It's her first, so be kind. But not too kind. I will expect marks. When it is done, chain her there."

"I just knew she'd do this," Felicia affirmed vehemently as they made their hobbled and clinking journey through the house and down - always down. Julie stumbling and seeking an arm for support. "I be right sorry but I gotta' do what she say. You gonna' be mad at me?"

"Of course not." Julie was ready to affirm anything, she was so lost and bewildered. "Just tell me what to do and I'll do it." She groped for a missing link. "But why am I going to be whipped? Will it hurt unbearably?"

"It hurt somepin' crool. Miss. You saw me gettin' it not so long ago. Ain't no way it's goin' ter feel good. And fer' why you gets it, well I guess Miss Eshelby done tell you that. She likes having us whipped - does some pin' for her, I guess. Anyways she's the boss."

Always an explanation, always a reason satisfactory to others! Julie was still not prepared to peer too deeply into the abyss. She loved Crystal. Launceston was her second home. To believe that anything too terrible could befall her within its walls was not something she would face. Crystal Eshelby was not an ordinary woman, sharing a life with her could never be mundane. But to be utterly her slave! Julie felt guilty that the shiver deliciously pervading her being was not of fear.

"You want me to get help, Miss Julie?"

"What on Earth for, Felicia? I've told you I'll do what you want, what your Mistress wants."

They reached the fatal room of stone and bars. Felicia shuffled her feet awkwardly. "Bein' whipped ... ain't you scared? Doncha' wanna' make no fuss?"

"You mean struggle and try to get away?"

"I guess so."

"Felicia, you know what's happened to me. Where would I run to? I'm glad to be here at Launceston instead of some of the places I might have been sold to. I was scared to death on that

auction block. Stop worrying."

"You loves her, don't you ... Miss Eshelby?"

"Of course I do. I'll put up with her ... notions."

"Miss Eshelby she love you too. But that won't stop her doin' nothin', You ain't goin' ter be mad at me?"

"Stop dithering. Felicia. What must I do?"

"You stands on that box, Miss and slips yer' chain over that there hook up in the wall."

Her ankle chains made the simple task difficult. But Julie managed, then gasped in surprise when the box was kicked from beneath her feet. She now stood on tip-toe, facing the wall, unable to lift her shackled hands enough to release them from the hook. She was simply and efficiently held. She looked back over her strained shoulder to behold Felicia produce the whip. Demeaningly, she could think of nothing to say. What can a naked girl say when she is about to be whipped! Felicia was equally inhibited. For a moment their eyes met and said all their lips could not. Felicia's arm swung back. Julia turned to the stone and closed her eyes.

Crystal had used a word, a term: "Light whipping".

Julie knew it had sustained her. What was to be done to would be symbolic. In keeping with Crystal's unusual sense of humour. She would be made to smart, to wriggle, her skin would become pink. Afterwards, they would giggle.

The pain was explosive, impossible, outrageous, utterly beyond bearing. Julie squealed in shock and writhed against her prisoned wrists. When the enemy's brand upon her skin subsided from its first awful scald she turned stricken eyes back past the bareness of a raised arm.

She yelped.

"Felicia!" The exclamation held a wealth of reproach. "Yes. Miss?"

"Miss Eshelby said 'light'."

"Sure did, Miss. That one was light."

"It couldn't possibly be. It was ... it was ... I just can't endure another like that."

The first had curled around her bottom, the second bit into the skin across her back. When she once more had control of her responses, Julie protested angrily. "Felicia, are you crazy! Light, light, light! I'm supposed to be lightly whipped. Not these terrible blows. You're being cruel."

"You is mad at me. I knew you would be," Felicia moaned.

"I'm not mad at you." Julie tried, ineffectually, to stamp her foot. "But you mustn't whip me like that. Its ... it's oh, it's beyond bearing. I'll faint or something."

"It's just 'cos it's the fust time. It's pretty terrible iffen' you ain't had it 'afore."

"But you've only struck me twice, and my back's cut and bleeding."

Felicia giggled. "You got the willies for sure. Ain't no blood, an' your back just got a nice little pink line. Just bout right fer Miss Eshelby ter look at. I give you any lighter I get whipped myself too."

The good news was horrific, frightening. With her mental vision of lacerated flesh it was hard for Julie to accept that she was being but 'lightly' punished. Her plaint became one long wail of dismay.

"But, Felicia, if this is what you call whipping me lightly, a real whipping would kill a girl!"

Felicia giggled again. "It don't never kill you, Miss, just hurts more. Hurts pretty bad sometimes."

"But this way you're doing it --"

Julie's expostulation was cut short by number three.

Felicia had a deep respect for her Mistress's temper. She was taking no chances. The simple uncomplicated lash of the 'light' whip curled 'round the chained girl's waist. Its whirring snap held something of Crystal's laughter.

Julie screamed.

Felicia closed the door. "Don't worry none 'bout a bit o' noise, Miss. I often holler' when I gets it."

Julie was panting. A bead of sweat trickled down her flank from her armpit. She was pressing her forehead against the cool s one. Her wrists were on fire. "Oh, this is beastly," she sobbed. "I'm screaming and making as much fuss as a ... as a..."

"Nigger, Miss?"

Julie's admission was grudging. "Yes, I suppose that's what I was going to say. But, Felicia, you're no more a negress than I am."

The fourth blow sought tenderness of the pink cheeks to paint them with a second striation of scarlet. By exerting all her will and expending her anguish in gasping moans and surging contortions against her chains. Julie contrived not to scream.

"You sure is a pretty girl." Felicia said enviously. "You look right sweet wiggling thataway'. Gets me wet 'tween my legs."

"Don't talk that way! But, Felicia, go and get Crystal Miss Eshelby. Ask her to come. I know when she sees how awful this is for me she'll give you permission to stop."

"Cain't do that, Miss. Jest get both o' us in a heap o' trouble. Best I jest whips you and get done the job."

"Felicia, I order you. Go and fetch her."

Felicia's answer was another slash across the white back. Her voice, competing with her victim's moans, was sad. "You cain't order me none. Wish ye could, but you's a slave same as me. I done told you as how you'd hate me fer this."

"I don't! I don't! I like you, you're sweet. But, oh Felicia, it hurts so much I can't bear it. How many strokes are you supposed to give me?"

"Ain't never lessen' twenty. Twenty's easy."

Julie moaned. Such a succession of blows stretched interminably. She could never bear them. Never! "Suppose I faint?" She queries plaintively.

"You won't. Girls don't faint lessen' they's being flogged with the real bad whip."

"What happens when they do?"

"You know what happens, Miss. They dowse a bucket o' water on us and when us comes to they carry on."

Julie did know. She had grown up on a plantation. She was asking questions only to delay her agony and to placate the girl who was whipping her. "Felicia, put the box back under my feet please. My wrists hurt terribly. I promise I'll be good?"

Felicia repaid the request with three swift blows. The thong snapping across unmarked skin with each.

When the anguished screams and moans of the punished girl subsided, she decided unhappily, "Much the best, Miss. I jest whips you proper and be done."

"No! Oh No, Please ... no --"

Felicia's arm began its rhythmic cadence of punishment.

It did not stop.

For a long time after the twentieth slash, the naked girl whose flesh now bore the true insignias of her slavery remained pressed against the stone quietly sobbing. Julie could scarce believe she had been whipped or that she had survived. She was aware of a faint atmosphere of anti-climax. She had not died, she had not fainted. She had lived, no doubt to be whipped and to scream again another time. As the burn of her whipped skin diminished she felt ashamed. She had screamed before a serving girl. It was unforgivable. She should have had more fortitude.

"I'm sorry, Felicia."

"Don't have to be sorry, Miss. A whip hurts a girl. You ain't the fust ter' holler." Felicia giggled. "Shoulda' heard me the fust time."

"What's this about chaining me? Crystal said?"

"I'll do it now, Miss. You just stand - don't know what she got in mind for you."

Julie was almost as grateful for the box beneath her feet as she was for the cessation of the whip. Stiffly and painfully, she used it as a step back to normalcy. Under the amused regard of her companion she bent and twisted to see as much of her wounds as was possible without a mirror. She was chagrined by their lack of gore.

"See, I told you. That's bein' whipped light. Them marks 'ull be gone in three or four days," Felicia admonished proudly.

Julie was lost again. Nothing ever made sense or was as she supposed it should be. She had been whipped for Crystal's caprice - a thing unthinkable a month past, but now it was done. She felt a mild elation. Almost absently she held out her hands and watched Felicia unlock the fetters on her wrists.

"Now you back against the wall, jest here." Felicia guided the striped nakedness as she desired. Julie's ankle chains clinked musically. "'Fraid it's with your hands up, Miss."

The cool stone felt good on Julie's scorched back. She stood in docile obedience as her arms were raised and spread and the shackles snapped upon her wrists. At least she could stand flat footed and not on tip-toe. "You wern't taking any chances, Felicia, you kept my feet chained." she teased mischievously.

"I keep 'em chained next time too," Felicia promised.

She was glad of the happier mood. "Can't never trust no slave girl." She bent and unlocked the shackles from the slender ankles, set them aside with the whip as though for future use, brushed the captive's lips lightly with her own, then fled the room.

Julie stood alone against the wall.

At first she knew only thankfulness that she had been whipped and that it was over and past. Her second thought was a rueful memory of Mrs. Hammet's introducing her to nakedness against the bars of her cell under the grinning scrutiny of her fellow prisoners. Mrs. Hammet had been right. The nakedness she endured now would have been doubly shaming without that awful prelude. Julie knew herself beautifully and cruelly exposed. She tugged at the metal on her wrists. She was firmly fastened. Her vision flitted briefly to Crystal. Crystal was having fun with her. Dear Crystal!

The fatigue came slowly, but inexorably. Shift and squirm as she would, she could ease it little. She looked longingly at the open door. Open, no doubt, to tease. The chains would hold her well without

a lock. It was several hours before she began to cry. She let her head fall forward, she sagged against the chains and quietly wept. She was lonely, hurt and frightened. Immured in her desolation she scarcely heard the sound. When she raised her head she gasped in an agony of shame.

A man stood regarding her with intent interest. It was Lionel Eshelby.

"Don't be silly, Julie. You can't possibly stop me having a good look at it."

The amused male voice baffled the captive girl momentarily. Then, with a shaming blush, she uncrossed the legs that had instinctively sought to shield her pubic hair. Her breasts were defenseless. She had no hands with which to cover them.

"Go away. Lionel."

The younger brother of the House of Launceston frankly appraised his sister's slave. His attention lingered long upon the chained girl's breasts and on that between her legs which she no longer tried to hide. Julie scorned to visibly squirm, but inwardly she was one huge cringe.

"You're really beautiful with your clothes off, Julie. Always knew I'd see you naked sooner or later." He was cool and poised.

"You shouldn't see me like this, Lionel. Go away."

"Those breasts! A man would die for 'em."

"Leave them alone. Don't touch me."

Julie had a hundred memories of Lionel. The most vivid was when, about the age of thirteen, he had tied the pubescent quadroon to the tree and whipped her raw with a succession of willow switches he had cut and trimmed before the pleading girl's eyes. When Julie had striven to intervene he had overpowered her and used his necktie to bind her hands behind a sapling so that she must be an unwilling audience to his cruelty.

"If I give you a good feel up. I suppose you'll tell big sister on me? Eh, Julie, you always did?"

The object of his scrutiny clenched her hands in impotent anger against the shackles that held her exposed for his pleasure. "Cover me," she pleaded. "Oh, Lionel, don't have me stand like this. You shame us both."

"You know I'm shameless and beyond the pale, chicken. You don't think I'm going to cover a pullet like you. Besides, Crystal must have wanted you like this. I'm sure you didn't get like that by your own efforts ... Dammit, you really are gorgeous."

"Let me loose, Lionel. The key must be around her somewhere. Set me free, then we can talk."

In her distress, Julie had turned against her bonds. The watching male caught sight of her striped skin. His eyes lit up. "She's had you whipped, eh."

"Oh, Lionel, don't be a beast. Yes. I've been whipped. But that's Crystal's affair, not yours. If you won't help me, at least have the decency to go away and leave me alone"

"Hurt much?"

"Oh, Lionel, it was awful. I didn't think anything could hurt that much. Now, please go away."

"Make your cunt wet?"

"Lionel!"

"I'm an absolute cad, y'know - no gentleman." Lionel assured her imperturbably. "But you've always known, so don't be prissy about the best name for what you pee through. You've heard it

before."

"You're deliberately being unkind. Don't you like me enough to stop talking dirty and to get me unlocked?"

"Poppet, I love you. In fact, now I've seen you naked, I love you more than I ever did. But you belong to my sainted sister: the holy, sacrosanct Mistress of Launceston, the pride of the South. If she has chained you there, that's where you stay."

"Lionel, stop being clever. Help me."

"To escape!"

Julie squirmed beneath his sardonic scrutiny. Lionel might be made of lesser stuff than his sister, but he was no fool. He had a quality of his own. Perhaps his own strange loyalty. As a naked slave chained to a dungeon wall, she realized how little she knew of his depths or ambitions.

"I can't escape. It ... it ... it wouldn't be right. It would be unfair. Besides. I love Crystal. No, not escape. But help me in this enslavement. I am a slave ... you know that, don't you?"

"The whole county knows it."

"I'm scared. Crystal has just had me whipped. Not because I've done something wrong, but because it pleases her. Look at me now, chained like this. I'm lost ... Be kind to me."

"I'm looking, sugar. What man wouldn't!" Lionel became suddenly sober. "Look, Julie, you know what I amount to in Launceston: nothing. Crystal owns everything. I'm here on sufferance. Any kindness I might be able to show you would probably end up by getting you punished." His scrutiny lifted to her face. "She will punish you, y'know. Darling Crystal is going to turn you into the most obedient slave that ever was. I know her. She loves you in a different way from how you love her. She can easily reconcile her affection with the cruelty of breaking you."

"Breaking!"

"Yes, that's what she'll do. She wants all your obedience: mind, body and spirit." He laughed bitterly. "The same as she has mind."

"Lionel, cover me ... please?"

"No. Why should I! I like you naked. Darling sister's making me a present of you." He laughed again. "She doesn't know it. She thinks I'm away somewhere."

"Lionel, please!" Julie tugged against her chains to emphasize her appeal. "Stop being cynical and bitter. Be nice. If you can't free me, then at least cover me."

For the first time his eyes showed compassion. "Poor little Julie." He tilted her chin and lightly kissed her lips. "Cruel Crystal, and lecherous Lionel. Not much of a future for you, is it!"

"You're both lovable when you want to be."

Julie had the absurd conviction that, chained to the wall, whipped, enslaved, she was in some ways maternal to these strange siblings whose possession she had become.

"If you think I'm going to cover that lovely nakedness, you're crazy. Julie darling. It wouldn't be a kindness. My guess is Her Ladyship will keep you stripped. You may as well get used to it."

"But you're a friend."

"Very well, then get accustomed to friends having a good look at your cunt and your breasts and your tits."

She shrank as from a blow. She knew her nakedness was total. It was cruel to emphasize it. Yet there

was nothing in Lionel's past to give her cause for optimism. She wished Felicia or Crystal would come and rescue her from his avid scrutiny.

"Very well then," she acknowledged coldly. 'I'll stop appealing to your decency. Can you help me by telling me what to expect and how best to behave?"

"You can expect this." Lionel picked up the whip discarded by Felicia. "It would be vastly amusing, don't you think, if I whipped your breasts?"

Julie's heart pounded. Her breath came in choking gasps. The enormity of Lionel's casual suggestion left her without defense. "No, oh no! Oh, Lionel!" She gazed at him askance.

"It has pleased your Mistress to have you chained in that position. I would merely be working on the material available." His tone had reverted to the insouciant.

"Oh Lionel... my breasts! Oh don't!"

"And why not, poppet! You're a slave."

"Not my breasts!" Julie was distraught. "Your cunt then? I think I can manage?"

Perhaps he was teasing. She could not tell. But even that was brutal. Lionel's eyes and sight of the whip set Julie to trembling. She was vulnerable and helpless. Girls were not whipped on their breasts... Or were they! She realized her innocence. Perhaps it was a common enough practice on slaves. Slaves could not complain. If a slave girl's back could be flogged, why not her front!

"Alright. Lionel, you've got me deathly scared. Is that what you want?"

"What I want is to take you to bed, you nude nymph. You're still a virgin, aren't you?"

"Do you want me to start screaming?"

"I can close the door and gag you."

She pulled hopelessly at the shackles holding her outstretched hands. It was infuriating to be rendered helpless by so little. In this enforced pose Lionel must see her as offering herself, her open arms an invitation. She knew enough of men to realize the stress upon whatever chivalry he might possess her flaunted nakedness imposed. He was toying with the whip. She remembered his erotic response whenever he watched a slave girl flogged. To behold white skin flayed would double his strange lust.

"What do you want me to say, Lionel? I can't do anything, so I've only got words?"

"You could plead prettily, the virgin sacrifice."

"I have pleaded. You pay no attention."

"I have cherished every word."

"Why must you make me hate you?"

"It's more positive and satisfying than the indifference you and my beloved sister usually vouchsafe me. I'm hopeful that when I whip your breasts you'll notice my existence."

"Oh Lionel!"

His smile was sardonic, his voice bitter. "You see, in that exclamation you have managed to infuse all the scorn, the righteousness, the rejections women offer men in place of their cunts. It puts me in my place: a small grubby boy with a dirty mind."

Julie was faintly touched. Lionel's place in Launceston had always seemed to her ambiguous, his true character a question mark. If Crystal was capable of enslaving her, what might she have done in more subtle ways to this boy of Julie's own age who had mostly been excluded from their intimacy?

She stared at him.

"Lionel, why do you watch girls whipped - or whip them yourself? Why this talk of whipping me?"

"It gives me a magnificent erection."

Julie flushed. But she had invited the vulgarity. She twisted unhappily against her fetters and knew not what to say. She look at him reproachfully. "Is that all ... Is it that important?"

"It's beautifully logical, Julie. The perfect and inevitable Grand Finale." He smiled at her evident distaste. "But you've never been fucked, so how can you know!"

"That... that business... It's terribly important to men?"

"Important enough that when I've whipped those lovely breasts you're sticking out at me. I should do it to you."

"I'm not sticking them out at you on purpose, its the way I'm chained! And that other ... it's not possible -"

"Oh, but indeed it is! It's true that, with you fastened like a shirt hung out to dry, we can't enjoy a nice conventional mating."

The naked girl looked at him askance. She was beginning to come by a chilling conviction that Lionel actually would use the whip on her twin mounds. And after... Seeing the play of emotions on her face, he laughed and reassured:

"I can pierce you standing as you are. But it's a damned ludicrous coupling. Your holy hymen deserves a more dignified rupture."

She would not reply. What was the use! She was a naked slave, chained. Lionel was the Male of Launceston. He could do as he wished with her. The years of their childhood would count as nothing against her fettered nudity. Lionel was flawed. In the past years the increasing intimacy between Crystal and herself had isolated him. Julie longed to bridge the gap, but knew her wish too long delayed.

He read her mind. But there was no longer a need of words. In anticipatory joy he ran the slender leather of the whip through his fingers. When his arm swept back so that the lash streaked its rearward snap in readiness for the first blow. Julie closed her eyes, clenched her teeth, and thrust her breasts forward as her head strained back in fear that an errant slash might find her eyes. An inhalation of pure fear flared wide her nostrils...

"You bastard!"

Crystal's furious exclamation froze motion in the room.

As its impact seeped away, Julie relaxed within her bonds, her eyes wide in speculation, knowing that for the moment she was but a spectator of a matching of hostile wills. She was irradiated with rapture by her rescue.

Brother and sister spoke no word. They stood like opponents in the ring, assessing, seeking advantage. Both glared at the other in cold anger. Then, in a gesture of disgust and inevitability, Lionel threw the whip to the floor and strode past the Mistress of Launceston and from the room.

"Oh darling!" Julie's thankfulness knew no bounds.

Absurdly, she pulled against the shackles on her wrists in a futile effort to embrace the woman who had saved her breasts from the whip.

"Did he touch you, Julie?"

Lionel had not touched her. His abstinence from her availability now seemed strange. "No ... he wanted to whip my breasts. Oh, Crystal... oh. Crystal, I'm so glad you came."

The slave girl was enveloped in tender arms and the familiar scents of Crystal. They kissed hungrily.

"That young pup, he was supposed to be off hunting."

Absently, as though performing some routine necessity, Crystal replaced the fetters on her slave's ankles. With the same air of inconsequence she freed the captive wrists. "Hug me properly, you erotic little beauty, I positively lust for you. Dammit, Julie, there's something about you."

They repeated their embrace. The freed arms were ardent and strong in their affection. Replete with kisses. Crystal took her slave's arm and turned her about. "Let's see if Felicia did you properly or if the little minx has earned herself a whipping."

Julie had forgotten. For a moment she groped, then remembered she had been whipped; remembered vividly her agony and conviction she would die; that her pain was beyond human fortitude. Now, in but a few hours ... It seemed impossible. With a new pride she stood erect and raised her arms so that her weals might be inspected.

"Should be twenty, dear," Crystal murmured thoughtfully as her finger traced the scarlet of each lash.

"There are twenty, darling." Julie was still glowing in gratitude for things past and done with. "Felicia was very careful to space them on me ... She said you'd wish to count."

"The little baggage did well." Crystal approved. "I suppose you thought she was killing you?"

"Yes ... oh yes! Crystal, darling, how do your know?"

"I know you. I know slaves. I've whipped a few from time to time. They always know they're going to die the first time. Did you hate me, or was it Felicia you hated?"

"I didn't hate either of you - not even when the pain was worst of all. Why should I! I love you both. I say, Crystal, why have you chained my ankles again?"

"Because you're a slave - and new at the job," Crystal chuckled, "Mustn't take chances, y'know."

Julie accepted the casual reminder of a condition about which she was still uncertain.

"Am I really truly a slave, darling? I mean, I know all about those papers and things and about you buying me. But are you going to keep me ... like this. Or are you going to set me free?"

She waited for an answer.

Crystal looked shrewdly at the sparkling eyes. "Does it matter, dear? If I pushed you out the door fully clothed and with a thousand dollars, what would you do?"

It was a question Julie had asked herself. She was not sure of the answer. "I expect I'd come back in." she vouchsafed brightly.

"You're a natural born slave. You always have been, darling. I'm sure the world saw you as a slightly regal young Mistress of a great Estate. But I always knew." Crystal patted Julie's bottom tenderly. "You wear whip marks exquisitely. Come up to my room and admire yourself in the mirror before they start to fade. Felicia was careful none of them are wounds."

Both had forgotten: Julie's first forward step sent her tumbling to the floor. She sat there crestfallen. Then looked up in laughing apology. "I'm sorry, darling." She kicked the chain between her legs petulantly. "I haven't got used to these yet."

"You will, dear."

Julie gave her best 'girl to girl' look. "But, Crystal, must I! I mean ... you're not going to keep me chained?"

"Did I say that, Pet?"

"Noooo, but you aren't, are you?"

"Why not! You're a slave."

"Oh, darling, don't be unkind. I suppose I am legally your property, but I've just told you I won't run away, so why have me chained?"

"For the same reason I have you whipped, dear. It's the only way you are truly going to know what you are."

Julie supposed there was no use arguing. There never had been any use arguing with Crystal. She looked ruefully at her chained feet, then stood gracefully erect. "I'll take pretty little slave steps," she promised. "I don't really mind being chained, darling, as long as it's you who wants me that way."

It was not until she had made her hobbled way to Crystal's bedroom and was wonderingly admiring the twenty scarlet lines Felicia had drawn across her back and buttocks that Julie became aware of a germination of consciousness that, once again, placed a small cold hand upon her spine.

"They are exquisite on you, darling," Crystal was saying. I'll never allow you to be free of some. You wear them like jewels."

In the midst of pride in what she bore and her manner of bearing them. Julie did a quick calculation. Felicia had said three or four days only until the whipmarks faded. Equated with Crystal's laughing promise meant she would be whipped again within the week. She looked at the girl who owned her doubtfully.

"But, Crystal darling, if these fade so quickly, that means--"

"That's right, dear, we'll have to give you some more quite soon." Crystal beamed approval.

Suddenly, the naked girl was back chained on tip-toe against the wall with the lash cutting at her naked skin. She remembered her screams, her belief she was suffering the ultimate, the unbearable. And then the loneliness ... spread and chained! Crystal's vibrancy had dissipated the clinging mists of pain and desuetude, but now they flooded in a tide of rejection. The chains joining her ankles took on a true Significance.

"Crystal! You wouldn't! Not so soon ... and without me being bad, or something?"

The older girl tilted Julie's chin and kissed the pouting lips. "Frightened?" Her eyes shone with amusement. "I'm really being very kind and allowing you to adjust gradually."

"Whipping me! Chains!"

"How else? Darling, think a bit and tell me how I can do it any other way?"

"But we're friends ... we're more than friends. You're all I've got."

"That's right. If you think a bit you'll realize what's past won't affect us now."

"Don't you love me, Crystal? Didn't you ever?"

"Of course I love you. It makes you more delicious." Julie glimpsed vistas of Crystal through the years. The actualities of the older girl's nature, and of their relationship, began to fall into place. She approached comprehension hesitantly.

"It gives you pleasure to be cruel to me, doesn't it. Like whipping Felicia. You're like Lionel - he'd have whipped me terribly if you hadn't come."

"Yes." Crystal's voice became vehement. "But I love you - I do! I'll never let you go. You're mine."

Julie again beheld the abyss. She sank to the floor and clasped the knees of the woman who owned her, rubbing her cheek against the softness of Crystal's dress. "This is what you always wanted, isn't it?" The words were like footsteps in the dark. "I've always let you boss me all around."

"It's your nature, dear."

"It's not my nature to be chained and whipped, and stripped and all the other beastly things."

"Are you sure, Pet? Think a bit."

"Alright! So you're the stronger of the two of us. I can't help loving you! I just do." The naked girl hugged the legs of her Mistress in a welling over of passion. "You always wanted me to come and live with you at Launceston, well I'm here. You've got Beverleigh too. You've got everything - even my promise to be whatever you want. But, darling, please set me free ... I don't mean these chains, I mean those horrible legal papers and things?"

"No."

"Don't you trust me?"

"Of course I trust you, sweets. But truly owning you is so ... so ... Oh, can't you understand! It's the loveliest feeling I've ever had. Nothing, nothing can take you away from me."

"I might have married?"

"That, yes. Or a silly quarrel."

The captive's mind was racing, her whole life was in debate. "But, Crystal darling, suppose -- suppose something happened to you! I'd, I'd be put up on the block and sold again. I'd still be a negress. I'd never ever be free."

"Nothing will happen to me, Julie. And now I want to take you a step further. I think it best you stop calling me by name. You will address me as Mistress. Understood?"

"No it isn't understood at all! Crystal, stop this nonsense. Set me free." Julie's anger overruled caution.

The beloved legs separated themselves from the loving arms. Their owner sauntered to the dresser and opened a drawer. The reclining slave watched her Mistress in a dawning desolation.

"The same sort of whip Felicia used, dear. It's not too cruel unless I use it all out." Crystal ran the supple lash through her fingers. Her eyes glowed.

"Crystal, please, no!"

"I can't possibly be sending you to the servants all the time to be whipped. Besides, mostly a flogging won't be called for. You and I can look on this as a sort of reminder, a correction. You won't make me use it much ... will you?"

"Crystal, it's so unfair. My feet are chained."

"Oh that!. You mean you're thinking of running."

"I don't know what I'm thinking of," Julie protested petulantly. "But I don't want to call you that - that silly name, and I don't want to be whipped. Crystal, have a heart."

"Don't you think you're lucky to have a choice, dear?"

"These beastly shackles don't give me any choice."

"Call me Mistress. Say it."

"I won't!"

The lash snaked across Julie's back with a now familiar agony. She yelped in outrage and anger rather than pain. Before she could struggle to her feet a second cut wrapped around her thighs. Erect, she sought to clutch at the punishing thong and hold it against another blow. But it pulled free, burning her palms, then cut two streaks of sickening pain around her legs. Seeking evasion of the next blow she tripped against her hobbled feet and fell. With a moan of desolation she curled herself into as small a compass as she could contrive and lay there, a small pathetic curve of female flesh, while Crystal whipped her defenseless back.

"Well, darling?"

Julie came back into the world. The whip had ceased to find her but she was vivid with pain. She uncurled and looked up doubtfully and in wonder at the woman who had purchased her. "Alright," she said listlessly. "I'll call you Mistress. I suppose it doesn't matter."

"There! Now you see how important the whip is for us?"

"Yes, I see." Julie was dazed with pain and grief. "Didn't you forget?"

She had forgotten. Hastily she amended: "Yes, I understand, Mistress."

"That's better, dear. You'll learn quickly."

Julie hated herself. No matter how much she loved Crystal she surely should never so demean her pride! She looked at the whip dangling from the slender hand, and shuddered.

"You are a slave?"

"I am a slave, Mistress."

"You will obey me implicitly?"

"I will always obey you, Mistress."

"Good. Go and lay on the bed." Julie obeyed. She watched her Mistress unlock a shackle and re-lock it to the bed rail so that she was held prisoned by one ankle.

"Now service me." Crystal was suddenly naked. "No, no, no! Oh, darling, not like this ... No!" The whip curled viciously.

The slave girl, Julie, felt certain it was the strangest relationship two human beings had ever evolved. Cruelty and love. Affection and anguish. The alternations by Crystal's caprice breached all defenses. Seared by the whip, then healed by tender lips and moist thighs, she consciously knew herself molded to her Mistress's desire. Half lovingly, and half in bitter resentment against her lot and her Mistress's total ownership of her body and her obedience.

Her days were never empty. They passed in a kaleidoscope of humiliations and vouchsafed joys. Always she was chained. Never, never was she given total freedom of her person. This loss of liberty had ceased to matter. She wore the metal bands and the links attached to them with an increasing insouciance. The servants accepted her. To them she was neither white nor black. No doubt they had their own opinions. Sometimes she inadvertently transgressed. When reproved at such moments she was apt to forget her status and revert to being Miss Julia Lindley.

It happened now. She stood glowering at Crystal's amused regard.

"That wasn't a very slavelike word, darling."

"I don't care."

Crystal pulled the bell cord. Julie quailed.

On such occasions, Felicia always looked cheerfully expectant. She did so now.

"Tie this stupid creature's hands behind her back, Felicia."

With a shrug of disdain, Julie turned and crossed her wrists. She was annoyed with herself for losing her temper. Now she's be taught another lesson. There seemed no end to them. She winced under the expert twists and knotting of the cord.

"Take the dear child and place her in the pillory for the afternoon."

"Yes, Miss!" Julie rose in pure horror. The Pillory was the most public object in all of Launceston. She turned to Crystal a face of abject surrender. "Mistress! Oh don't! Don't send me there. I'll be ... Everyone can look -Oh no!"

"It will do you good, dear. Your first time."

Julie tugged at her bound wrists, her shoulders weaving.

"But not naked ... not naked."

"Naked, dear, of course. Felicia would be naked if she was going to stand in the stocks, wouldn't you. Felicia?"

"Yes'm. Girl allus' bare when she gets punished."

Since the time of her enslavement Julie had become grudgingly aware of the rationale of nakedness. It engendered a state of mind, it kept her flesh constantly available for the whip. To clothe a slave seemed silly. But to be exposed shamefully in the pillory! That was something else again.

"Please. Mistress, I apologize. I'm sorry. Please forgive me."

"No."

"Don't have me put in the pillory, Crystal. I beg you?"

"You used my name. That's an extra hour. Felicia, take her away before I feel sorry for her."

Julie walked to her punishment knowing the futility of remonstrance. Her hands were securely tied at her back. Her feet were hobbled by the shackles which had become a part of her, so rarely were they absent. She clinked along beside Felicia who held a hand upon her arm in a quaint mixture of assurance and authority.

"Ain't much fun in that there pillory, Miss."

The title of 'Miss' from a fellow slave was beginning to sound absurd. "You'd better call me 'Julie', Felicia. I'm just a slave, same as you."

"You awful good natured slave, Miss Julie. You sure does love that woman what owns us."

"Has anyone ever fainted while fastened in the pillory, Felicia?"

The younger slave chuckled. "Don't pay to faint, Miss Julie. Girl liable ter' hang herself. Ain't never heard o' it. Mighty miserable though. I'se stood there a few times."

There were the usual children to watch the untying of her hands and the raising of the sinister yoke. Julie already felt like a fish in a bowl. "Aren't you going to ask me if I'm going to run?" she asked

mischievously.

"You ain't runnin', Julie. I leaves them irons on yer' feet."

Julie looked askance at the engine of her confinement.

It seemed like a giant predator with open jaws. "You want me to stick my head and hands in those slots now, Felicia?"

"Guess you better, Miss. Us 'un's ain't 'sposed to stan' and talk."

It took an effort of will. The stout timbers scowled at her like an enemy. To place her nudity within their grasp was a hateful thing to have to do. The delinquent sighed. Leaning forward she adjusted the slenderness of her neck and wrists into the waiting half circles. Her heart was thumping painfully. She wondered if she could avoid blushing.

"Thisn's made for females," Felicia volunteered.

"Mighty snug fit. Here, I puts yer hair down one side o' yer face owta' the way."

The closing of the yoke of timber had a worse implacability than the bolts of a dungeon door. The punished girl cringed as the wood, polished by many female skins, closed upon those portions of herself she had offered for its maw. Contact was total, it might have been made to measure. Julie dolefully looked sideways to behold her hand, prisoned like her neck, and beyond the cheerful features of Felicia as she closed the hasp and snapped shut the huge padlock.

"I gives the key to Miss Eshelby," The younger girl stood awkwardly as though wishing to ease the punishment or offer cheer. "Ain't nothin' else I can do, I guess. Sho' is sorry, Miss." She went dejectedly away.

The staff were kind. They looked at the prisoner of the Pillory as they went by, but they did not form a circle or a group. Julie guessed that most of them would have stood as she was standing at one time or another and thus felt sympathy. Her permanent audience was the children. They regarded her with large solemn eyes and sucked their thumbs. Perhaps they saw themselves standing there within the span of a decade.

The yoke by which her neck and wrists were confined was low enough that the captive girl could not stand erect. She was forced to bend. This made her captivity more tiring and protruded her bottom. It was a posture she had seen employed for the caning of a slave girl's buttocks. It was cruelly effective. Crystal had not mentioned anything corporal, but Just suppose ... Julie shivered. At any rate it was an extra misery.

Julie stood. There was nothing else she could do. The hobbles on her ankles prevented her swinging a leg or kicking at a sniffing dog. In its own way, the pillory was her worst confinement yet. Locked within its timber embrace a girl was without hope. It was pitiless. Time passed with punitive sloth. Her back began to ache. Her view was restricted to the ground before her feet.

"Part of your training, Julie girl?"

Lionel had approached from the rear. He would now be standing and admiring her bottom. It was the last straw. She maintained a hurt silence. Damn him! If he wanted to talk, let him come into her limited range of vision.

"Quite extraordinary, dear girl. A naked you minus head and hands."

"Useless to ask you to be gentleman, I suppose?" Julie inquired icily.

"As useless as asking me to set you free, dear heart. I am lost to shame and do not have your key."

"If you want something, let's deal with it. You can then leave." Julie was furious with her vulnerability. She was sure he was having a good look at those parts of herself she did not wish him to

see.

"As a matter of fact I did have something in mind, he admitted in a more serious tone. "I'd like to fuck you."

Julie gritted her teeth. Why, oh why did Crystal subject her to this! "You've been wanting to do that ever since you were an objectionable small boy." She told him, refusing to grant him shock at the hated word.

He growled.

"And you've been refusing to let me, poppet. Now that sister dear has purchased you, cunt and all, my chances are less than ever."

"Good!"

"Bad." His voice had a new quality. "Don't tell me you're enjoying this afternoon?"

"No, I'm not. But I enjoy you less."

"That's because you've been standing there only an hour or so. Wait awhile. About five P.M, you might be glad to see me."

"Go away."

"Is your bottom going to be caned?"

"I haven't heard it mentioned. Lionel, leave me alone."

"I haven't yet said what I came to say, sweetheart."

"Don't call me sweetheart. And hurry up and say it."

"Will you marry me?"

His question had the same impact as her first blow from a whip. His sober voice made it doubly potent. The helpless girl looked sideways to observe the man who wished to marry her as he came round the side of the pillory to meet her eyes. For moments they stared at each other. Julie was speechless.

"Choked with joy. I expect?" His tone had regained some of his usual bitterness.

"Lionel, that's terribly unkind."

"Damn good offer if you consider it."

"Do you enjoy taunting me while I'm helpless?"

"I made you a serious offer. It still holds."

To be held thus when a man proposed to her! Naked, scarce able to move, shamed. Julie was close to tears. "Lionel, please! Stop it."

"Look at it this way, poppet," he said conversationally_ "The only way I'm going to get to fuck you is to marry you. It's something I sort of want to do anyway - marry you, I mean. Dammit, you're probably the most beautiful girl in the State toss-up between you and Crystal."

Julie remained silent, shifting unhappily against the thing that held her helpless. She longed to run to the safety of Crystal's arms.

"D'you want to be whipped and stood in the pillory all the rest of your life, Julie?"

"Crystal won't be that cruel. This is only because it's all so new to me ... being a slave."

"She's treating you worse than she treated Felicia. Felicia was just a whipping girl. Now she slakes her lust on you. And incidentally, we all know what the two of you get up to in Milady's bedroom - the two longest tongues in the South."

Julie could blush no more. She squirmed in misery.

"I'm a slave. You can't marry a slave."

She had said it believing it a clincher. But in the silence that followed her exclamation she came face to face with a breath-taking realization. Her dawning comprehension must have shown on her face. Lionel laughed sardonically.

"Just struck you, eh! I can marry you. But the wife of a white man cannot lawfully be a slave. You'd be a free woman."

Julie was wise enough to understand that the cruelty of the decision thrust upon her was not entirely Lionel's fault. Most of it arose from her emotional involvement with Crystal. She could believe that some other slave standing as she stood now would jump at the offer considering herself the luckiest girl in the State. It seemed so plausible, so easy.

"You'd be a laughing stock, Lionel. Married to a slave girl."

"You 're no more a slave or a negress than I am. I'm damn sure my lovely sibling paid a lot of money to have those papers forged. She's always wanted to own you. I'd like to get the proof of it. Damned exciting sight: dear Crystal behind bars."

He was strange, unstable, an idle man seeking a thrill. To be married to him might be worse than being Crystal's slave. Julie still clutched and cherished her love for the woman she now called Mistress. Things would straighten themselves out. She was sure of it. These bizarre punishments were a testing, a training that would come to an end when she was completely moulded to Crystal's heart's desire. Besides, it was impractical. Lionel could not even free her from the pillory in which she was now fastened. She looked at him in pathetic disarray.

"Lionel, it's no good. It's all hopeless. I can't even think properly locked in this beastly thing. But any way, I belong to Crystal. I don't mean just being sold to her at the auction - I've always belonged to her in a sort of a way every since we were kids. You know that. I'm sure I'm silly and ungrateful, but there it is."

His voice turned scornful.

"You like the whip. Yeah, sure as hell do. You sure like anything that bitch does to you. Standing in the pillory there you're probably wet between the legs knowing it was she who gave the order."

She could say nothing.

"Damn you! I don't know why I bother." He glared at her fiercely, then turned and strode away. Her anguished eyes followed his retreat for as far as the stocks would allow. When her gaze returned to the small patch of soil now dampened by her tears she had a premonition. It was borne upon her that the angry immature male would seek revenge. Lionel's presence in Launceston was a threat. If only she could get to her Mistress! But the pillory held her. The pillory would hold her for hours to come. Julie wept. The children watched, enjoying the drama of the free show.

"Crystal, you're a bitch. Why d'you have to put that poor kid in the pillory? I was just by there."

"None of your business, Lionel." Crystal looked at her brother shrewdly. "Admiring Julie's naked assets, I suppose?"

"Don't blame me for that. It's you who put 'em on view."

"Stay away from her. I've warned you. She's mine."

"Let me ravish the sweet child just one. You'll never miss her maidenhead."

Crystal Eshelby examined her brother with cold offensive eyes. She went to a drawer and turned back to him holding her riding crop. Lifting it to view, she asked quietly: "How old were you when I last used this on you?"

Lionel waved away her implied threat with an impatient gesture. "Don't be Colonial, Crystal. You've got Launceston and Beverleigh. It wouldn't hurt you to share the spoils a bit."

"You can have Felicia. The dear child might feel honored."

"I don't want Felicia. I want Julie. The way you're breaking her down. I'd have thought a good fuck might have been appropriate."

"You don't change, do you! Filth."

He winced beneath her vehement scorn. He leered sneeringly. "The fair maid herself wasn't all that averse."

"What d'you mean? She doesn't think any more of you than I do."

"Ah, but our Julie is not a fool. Standing out there in the stocks she's been doing a bit of thinking. She's come up with something I've been thinking about myself. Ever occur to you that this swindle you've perpetrated on the poor girl has a weak spot?"

Crystal tensed, her eyes narrowed. She should have rid herself of him long ago. "Well?" she demanded tersely.

"How'd it be if I married her?"

Her breasts heaved under her sudden inhalation. She said nothing, but her eyes probed him fiercely.

"Foolproof actually, y'know. No wife of a white man can lawfully be kept slave."

"You bastard! Get out. Pack your things. I'm sick of you. I'll put some money to your account every month so long as you stay away."

"Hold it, beloved!" Lionel held up a protesting hand.

"You've got it the wrong way 'round. I didn't proposition Julie. Julie propositioned me."

"I don't believe a word of it."

Their hostile eyes locked and challenged. "Go and ask her." Lionel suggested suavely. "Julie's been a pussy cat for you up to now. That pillory has turned her into a tiger. She wants out."

She measured him. Their hatred of each other was almost visible. Lionel laughed mockingly at his sister's repressed fury. "Lost yourself the best tongue --"

Crystal's crop slashed his face. Moaning, his hands flew to cover his cheeks. His sister's next blow cut his back so that he screamed and, turning blindly, absorbed her next furious slash across his chest, his open shirt cushioning none of it. As the blows fell more swiftly and more viciously he sank to his knees and then fell supine on the floor. The thing that had been a man had dissolved into a hurt and frightened child, all arrogance departed.

"It's been too long," said Crystal, panting.

"Not any more, sis. No more --"

Once again the rain of searing cuts. Crystal's face was alight with unholy glee. Her brother writhed, emasculated on the rung. He crawled to her feet as would a dog. She slashed again.

Lionel Eshelby lay quite still.

It was very hot in the sun. The bolls of cotton were endless. Picking as hard as she could, Julie never managed to pick enough. Always when it came weighing time at night, she was short of her quota. The quota set her by the Mistress of Launceston and of Beverleigh.

"Can't no how let ye off another time, gal'," Randall had told her soberly that morning when she had gone out with the rest of them with her empty, empty bag. "Eighty-five pounds, the Missis say. You ain't got it yo' gets a whuppin'."

Randall was huge and black and powerful. He ruled the slaves with a rod of iron. Crystal Eshelby treated him with a grudging respect. He made her money. Julie had looked up at him pathetically and explained.

"It's the chains, Randall. No one else is chained the way I am." She held up her linked hands and kicked at her chained feet. "Let my hands free and I'll do better. I promise."

Randall was not unkind. But he had enough of recalcitrant girls of all shades of color. "Yo' ain't the fust gal' with a pale skin what wears irons," he had explained. "Yo' musta' made the missis mad. I gotta' give report on ye each day. Tonight ah whups ye iffen' yo' comes in short."

Listlessly Julie went about her task. Her quota was hopeless. It was beyond her ability to fill. She had no skill, nor the stamina, for so long a day beneath the sun; tugging at the huge bag became increasingly heavy as the day wore on. She had come to hate the shackles on her wrists. She suspected Crystal had had them riveted on her out of pure spite to ensure that she should be forever delinquent and therefore always afraid of Randall and the punishment.

Crystal had been furiously angry. Released from the pillory, Julie had gone to her with joy. But, instead of love, had found accusations. Instead of forgiveness, she had been belabored by recriminations. Lionel had planted his seed too well. No protestation of Julie's had touched the angry woman.

"I didn't, I didn't!" Julie had wailed. "It was him, not me."

"So you want to be free of me," Crystal had fumed.

"Let's see how you prefer cotton. Think of me sometimes when you're out there with your bag. And don't expect an easy quota. I'll get my money's worth."

"No, no. Please Mistress."

"And at Beverleigh. On the fields you used to own, Julie. I'll tell Randall to have old Josh take you to the smith."

It had been the most bitter shame to be escorted by Old Josh to the blacksmith shop to be ironed with slave gyves that had no lock. To stand or crouch beside the anvil while the heavy iron was riveted on her wrists and ankles. The new fetters had seemed to weigh a ton. They clutched and weighed her down as she reached for the fluffy white blossoms that might save her from the whip at night.

She had tried so hard in the first days. She was still sure of Crystal's love. Somehow Crystal would learn the truth and take her from this agony. She had supposed her quota within her capacity to fill. She had been horrified by how far short she fell. And even more appalled by being forced to witness the flogging of a negro girl accused of laziness because she was fifteen pounds light. But now she recognized defeat. She would be flogged nightly as the scale betrayed her inadequacy. Dejectedly, her chained hands plucked the white puffs and dropped them in her bag. She was without hope.

"Yo' all ain't doin' so good, missie."

The dark skinned girl had worked up beside her in the next row. Her hands were busy as she talked. Her limbs were free of fetters. Julie smiled in a wan thankfulness for communion, "I'm no good at it," she admitted. "And these chains..."

"Boss Lady mad at yo', Us all knows. Randall, he bin' goin' easy wiv yer 'cos he know yer' can't make it. But Miz Eshelby, she go in ter be there tonight when us'un's weigh in. Ah sure do feel sorry fo' you."

"You mean I'll be whipped?"

"Most like. Or mebbe the stocks fer the night. It's bin mighty rough on us slaves since they took you. The missis' had me hung by my wrists all one night. It was powerful bad."

"But with that treatment how can you work the next day?"

"Us don't. Us gets tied up tight, hands to feet behind and left lay. Mebbe' we sleeps a bit. Mostly it hurt'."

Julie remembered buying this girl. It seemed a century ago. She remembered the name. "Lucy, is there any way I can escape?"

"Oh, missie, best yo' don' talk o' that. Yo' gets flogged half to death. Ain't no way."

"But there must be ways. Would Randall help?"

Lucy evidenced surprise. "How you know 'bout Randall?"

Julie did not know. She knew nothing, but was anxious to find out. "The way he acts and talks to me," she said cautiously. "He isn't just what he seems, is he?"

"Randall, he wunnerful man." Lucy pronounced proudly. "When he whups me he don' do it no harder than he must. Mostly he lets us off. Randall he got sumpin' cookin'"

"Will it be Randall who whips me tonight?"

"Mebbe. But likely he give yo' to a girl to look after. Don' do no good though. Pore gal' so damn scared o' not doin' good she half kill us."

Julie sighed. Whichever way she turned it was hopeless. Only Crystal could take her from the cotton. Memory of Crystal's fury was still frightening. Tonight she would see Crystal for the first time in days. She longed for the refuge of Crystal's arms. Slavery had enveloped her utterly. She would quibble about nothing. Lucy's reaction to the word escape showed plainly how silly a dream it was.

"How long will they keep me chained like this, Lucy?"

"Long time, missie. They knows you' run iffen yo' could. Them chains on yo' hans' is cause o' boss Lady's made em be."

"But, Lucy, do you get chained like this?"

Lucy giggled. "Not like that, missie. That time yo' bought me, Old Josh he keep my feet chained a whole month. I go trippin' over 'em all de' time."

"Don't you want to escape? Don't you think about it?"

"Where a gal' go, missie. I runs someone grabs me. Then I'm for it good. Yo' seen a gal' flogged. Yo' knows."

Julie knew about the flogging. It was standard procedure on all plantations. But now, for the first time, she saw with a terrible clarity the utter hopelessness of being a slave. Even if escape was contrived, there was nowhere to escape to. Society condoned her slavery and would, with smug righteousness, return her to it as an act of good faith. Her hands reached out against their chains in a mechanical simulation of Lucy's busy fingers. She would pick what she could. Perhaps Crystal would see it as enough...

The line was long. It trickled past the scale and Randall's tally. Approval of their day's labor sent each slave scurrying to the pump or to the cookhouse. Later, their ankle would be chained for sleep in the big shed. As the weighing-in progressed you heaved your bag along with you. Most of the sweating workers had an air of complacency. They knew they were safe, but here and there was visible apprehension. Julie wondered if hersshowed.

Crystal's carriage was in evidence and so was Crystal.

She stood, enjoying the day's contribution to her wealth, her eye keen for anything subject to criticism. Julie was certain the Mistress was there for but one reason: herself. As she got closer she could feel between them an acute awareness of each other. She longed for the confrontation, yet cringed from it.

Beside the other, Julie's bag was pitifully small. In numbed resignation she heard Randall's chant:

"Forty-seven 'gainst eight-five." Passively she allowed herself to be led from the line. The line was done with her. The line had found her delinquent.

"I make that thirty-eight pounds you owe me, darling." Crystal was as beautiful as ever. Her expensive perfumes mingled oddly with the odor of slave sweat. Julie made a pathetic attempt to tidy her hair as she stood, sweat stained and chained, before the woman who owned her body and her land.

"I wasn't untrue to you, Crystal. I wasn't, I wasn't! I didn't ask him that... that awful thing."

The words poured from Julie's lips in a torrent. She expected at any moment to be dragged away to be whipped. Pathetically she held out her shackled hands in a gesture of love denied and of her total abnegation. Surely somehow she could touch her beloved Crystal's heart!

"A stroke for each pound short, dear, remember?"

It was a terrible punishment, a fearsome cruelty. Julie looked her Mistress in the eye and said simply, "It could kill me."

Crystal laughed delightedly. "Don't worry, darling, I'm not going to lose twenty-one thousand dollars worth of slave just because you're a lazy wench. I'll take care the whip and the arm that wields it ensure your survival. You'll pick cotton tomorrow."

"Crystal, I'm innocent. I love you."

"And I you, darling. I'm just removing the sound of wedding bells from your pretty little mind."

"Crystal, I can't pick cotton chained like this. You know I can't."

"That's evident, dear. Thirty eight strokes on that sweet back will inspire you."

"Crystal... Oh darling, if you won't take the chains off my feet, at least take them from my hands so I can work for you."

"Sorry, darling. I want you as an object lesson. You make a very pretty one. The sounds of those chains will compensate for the wedding chimes you had in mind."

"But Crystal - Mistress, that means I'll be whipped every night!"

"Makes a break in the monotony. Pet."

"But, Mistress, our love?"

"Felicia's got a marvelous tongue. She's doing nicely." In a wave of desperation the soiled slave girl flung herself at her Mistress's feet. In a welling need of affection she clasped the firm warm legs and lung there, sobbing.

"You make a shockingly erotic picture, darling."

"Take me back. Please, Crystal, take me back. Punish me as much as you want, but take me home with you. I need you."

"Darling!" Crystal trilled acerbic laughter. "You are being punished. Don't you recognize punishment when you see it. Don't worry about needing me, I'll always be around."

"But I can't reach you. I'm a prisoner."

"There'll be visiting days, Pet." Crystal patted the damp hair. "If you think you'll be lonely I'll be glad to arrange with Randall to have you well fucked every evening. Would you like to be staked out to entertain half a dozen fucks every night?"

"Crystal... no!"

"I'll make damn sure you get no female tongues, lover girl."

"Don't have me whipped tonight - not in front of... of... everyone. Crystal, I beg you."

"But darling, you're among friends! This was your Estate. These were your slaves. You wouldn't begrudge them the pleasure of seeing the young Mistress whipped naked, would you!"

"Don't be so cruel to me. Oh Crystal, I love you. Take me home."

"No."

"You've got a dungeon. Chain me in it. Please."

Crystal smiled.

"My, my! We are upset, aren't we." Crystal's voice was mocking. "And all about a little whipping, and a bit of cotton picking. Why, Pet, I'm ashamed of you."

"You're making fun of me. You know how awful this is."

"But you can always escape, sweet. Why not marry Randall and produce some lovely pickaninnies? They'd fetch me a fortune in about sixteen years. He's amazingly well hung."

"Don't torment me. Even if I did marry Randall I'd still be a slave."

"Ah, ha, so you've thought about the idea!"

"I haven't, I haven't! Oh, Crystal, there's nothing I can say that's right. You twist everything, you punish me for everything. Can't you see how awful it's going to be for me if you leave me here? You're all I've got, you're everything. If you go away and leave me I'm just a naked girl who can expect to be whipped at the end of each day ... a nothing."

"That's right, darling. You're catching on nicely. I told you it would take a long time for you to know what you are. I'm really pleased with your progress. The whipping you're about to get will be another step forward."

There comes a time when pleas fall flat, when the one who utters them recognizes their futility and accepts what was inevitable from the start. Remnants of pride emerge, or perhaps a negation of the stress of hope. It came to Julie now. She clung to the regal knees and wept, her shoulders shaking with

the intensity of her grief.

The Mistress motioned with her hand.

"The Post. Tie her to it so as to shield her breasts. I don't want her breasts marked. Not yet."

"Yes'm."

"She's to get thirty-eight. Use the lightest whip. That's a lot of cotton she didn't pick."

"Sho' is, Miz Eshelby. We fix her good."

"And naked. Not a stitch."

"Sho' nuff'. She be bare as a melon."

Julie let them take her. Her chance had gone. It had availed her nothing. She gave Crystal one last appealing glance before she turned towards her punishment. Crystal smiled warmly in return. But if the smile was of love, that love would not be allowed to interfere with the events in motion.

"Sho' is sorry, Miz Lindley." Old Josh was embarrassed. "Randall, he tell Lulu here to whip you. Lulu does it light's she dare."

Lulu's hand was warm on the delinquent arm. She was a well formed negress without illusions. "I gotta' do it, missie. But if'n Miz Eshelby ain't watchin' too close I'll whup yer light as I kin."

Julie cringed. "Is Crystal going to watch me?"

"'Specs so, missie. Makes it bad."

It was a long walk for the fettered feet. Upon reaching the hated Post she had once abolished, Julie raised her chained hands to allow the brief bit of material fastened above her breasts to be loosened and taken from her. It had been little enough covering for her secrets. Now they proclaimed themselves blatantly. She was totally naked. Old Josh, with a sense of decency all his own, went away.

"Yo' lets me tie yo', honey?" Lulu asked anxiously. For answer, Julie placed her forearms vertically against the wood. Chained as she was it would be the best way to secure her to stand for the whip.

"Yous a mighty nice gal', missie. Here, I jest shows yuh how ter keep 'em while I ties 'em tight so yous don' make no trouble."

Lulu gently separated the ironed wrists and the passive elbows. Using a length of sleazy rawhide she bound them fast against the post. At wrist and elbow Julie was held standing, her bonds visible before her eyes, but beyond her ability to loose. She knew herself delivered completely to the lash that would curl and bite her where it chose.

"Yo' keeps them sweet tits close on yo' arms, honey."

Lulu advised. "Thataway iffen' ah makes a bad slice they don' get cut. But ah's pretty good wiv' the whip," she added comfortingly. "Ah sho' get' lot o' practice since Miz Eshelby takes over."

There was to be the usual wait. Dejectedly and bereft of hope, the captive slave girl stood against the post, her arms tied tightly to it but the rest of her simply standing and waiting to be whipped. It was bizarre. It was unbelievable! Miss Julia Lindley stood naked in her own slave yard, tied to her own whipping post to await infliction of thirty-eight lashes from a whip she herself had paid for, wielded by a female slave she had once owned. It was the stuff of a nightmare.

A terrible nightmare.

It was a sad and humiliating wait. The tied girl tried to divorce herself from the surrounding scene and the knowing eyes by leaning her head against her bound arms and closing her eyes. She fought

bitterly against the intruding visions of the whip and the sounds of the screams she was sure she would send pealing across the yard. They would come soon enough. She wanted, now, a moment's peace and such rest as her enforced pose would permit. A day in the cotton field was tiring.

It was some time before she sensed the atmosphere, that electric something in the air by which our primal instincts may still be warned. The familiar sounds had changed. Julie tensed alert against her bonds and looked around.

Nothing had changed ... Or had it! The usual group of curious urchins was absent. That in itself was something of note. Perhaps standing alone had sparked the rising hairs at the nape of her neck. There was an ominous quiet in the immediate vicinity, but from afar there came sounds. The sounds of human voices and human cries out of keeping with the time and place. Julie wondered miserably if some huge audience was being mustered to behold her shame. She explored her freedom, there was almost none. She could not leave the post by even a single step. But she would writhe unhampered, it was the only latitude her bonds sanctioned.

The sounds became coherent. It was the noise of a crowd happily excited. It was approaching rapidly from down the road that led back to Beverleigh's Big House or to Launceston. The captive girl standing naked at the post was obliged to look back over her shoulder to observe whatever might be taking place. When the crowd of joyous negroes came into full view the object of their excitement came with them. What Julie now beheld froze her into stunned disbelief.

It was Crystal Eshelby. Crystal Eshelby was naked.

Crystal Eshelby's hands were tied behind her back, a collar was buckled around her neck. From it rope tethers snaked to either side. They were held by grinning blacks so that, no matter which way the captive woman lunged or fought, she could be easily controlled. She strode forward under compulsion. She exuded fury but was helpless to vent it.

The Mistress of Launceston and of Beverleigh was captive.

The revolt of the slaves of Launceston made no headlines. The Militia was unaware of it. It made no ripple on the peaceful surface of the South. It was but a mild precursor of the bloody conflicts that were to come at a later date. Its motives were perhaps unique. They concerned a woman.

"Yo' don' git no whippin" missie."

Randall towered over the girl tied to the post, a girl now bitterly frightened. But the huge black was smiling the quiet smile of power as he loosened the rawhide by which Julie was bound.

"We uses this on that there Miz Eshelby 'stead o' yo'," he confided. "Yo' bin good ter us and we ain't forgot. We goin' ter do a heap o' things ter her, but we jest keeps yo' so's yer cain't run off nowheres." He grinned confidingly. "Ain't nobody goin' ter know what's happened 'till we teach that there Crystal Eshelby what it' like ter be a slave."

Dazed, Julie stepped away unscathed from the post against which she had expected to be flogged. She was still heavily chained.

"We gets them irons offen' yo' wrists, missie when we git's 'round ter it. Them on yer feet stays."

"Thank you, oh, thank you." Julie gazed up at her deliverer and felt lost. What words were there for a time like this! She knew of none. Distraught she turned her face to Crystal who stood helplessly awaiting the pleasure of her captors.

"What are you going to do with her. Randall?" Julie asked fearfully.

"First off she git's whipped." Randall took her arm and led her slowly a distance from the Post and Pillory. "Now yo' stan' right here, eh? Don' let me catch yo' doin' no runnin'. We wants yer to see what we does ter the white bitch."

Julie stood, at first alone but soon surrounded as part of the circle forming to watch the punishment of

a woman who had earned their hate. Chained, she could do little. Any purposeful motion she might essay could only end in shaming indignity.

Two actors held the stage. The bound white woman and the black Randall. Each fully understood the implications of their roles.

"You could be executed for this. Randall."

"Sho' could, maam."

"Set me free now and I promise immunity."

"Fust we whips yo'."

"Don't be absurd. You can't possibly whip me!"

"Why?"

The single word defeated. But Crystal did her best.

"Whip me and you'll be flogged within an inch of your lives - all of you. There'll be an army of white men with guns."

"But not in time ter save yo', white woman."

Crystal ignored the obvious. Her eyes roved. "What are you going to do with the white girl. Julie?"

"No concern o' your'n, woman ... She ain't gettin' no whippin."

Crystal Eshelby knew a stark and terrible fear, but was determined not to show a trace of it. Her bound hands, the collar and tethers on her neck, her nakedness, were having a most potent impact on her assurance. Never had such a thing happened to a white woman such as herself. That she had made it happen to Julie was a guilt she would not face. Passionately, she did not wish her white slave girl to behold her thus. Still imperious, she faced her captor.

"How much do you want? Quote me terms."

It was a total surrender, but not the one Randall sought.

"Yo' ain't got nothin' ter bargain, woman. Us takes what us wants."

Crystal knew defeat. She was still concerned that her pride should not be a casualty. Thought of screaming under the lash or writhing naked before these avid curious eyes was intolerable. She had whipped others while her own person had remained inviolate. A shocking conviction was forming in her mind that she might be of the same clay as those ... It was unthinkable, but suppose!

"Randall, whip me if it pleases you. I expect I can bear it. Then let us come to our senses. Set me free and I will still promise immunity."

"Whippin' yo's jest the start, Miz Eshelby."

"You bastard!" said the Mistress of Launceston. "You absolute bastard!"

Julie watched, as in a dream, while the woman she had loved took her place at the post to be whipped. Crystal fought furiously against her new bonds, but soon stood with a wrist tied to each side of the wooden pillar. She was even more exposed than Julie had been. Her nudity was exquisite. The watching girl wondered if any present noticed or cared.

Crystal Eshelby had made her last plea. She had recognized an inexorable quality in Randall against which she could only suffer shame. She was steeling herself to suffer what she must with whatever courage she could command. Let them see her nakedness! Let them whip her! Damn them all ... damn them! She tugged at the rawhide on her wrists and knew herself lost. Her eyes sought Julie. She

smiled.

Randall was clever with the whip. The Mistress of Launceston was flogged with style and finesse. He had disdained the most severe instruments of corporal punishment and contented himself with a simple tapered leather thong by which Crystal's travail might be entertainingly prolonged. She looked back over her shoulder at it, recognizing its quality and intent. Their eyes met before she turned back to face the post - they understood each other perfectly. Julie paid a grudging tribute to Lionel in her astonished comprehension of how beautiful it was to watch the whipping of a naked girl. Crystal's female response to the lash sublimated her nakedness into an art form, a symbolism of vulnerable femininity, a thing to stop the breath and clutch the heart. The first cut across the white and defenseless back brought Crystal tautly erect, head high as though visibly absorbing an agony unworthy of any more demonstrative attention. Her eyes were on a distant horizon only she could see.

That a big man holds a whip does not mean his use of it must match his size. Skill, artistry, mischief are all a part of the flashing whining thong. Deliberately, Randall snapped his lash beneath a raised arm so that Crystal's right breast was indented by the flickering tip. Her nostrils flared, she twisted erotically within her bonds. She made no sound. Julie could easily imagine the shock and agony of such a violation of her flesh. Crystal looked back over her bare shoulder at the man who had hurt her, and said tonelessly. "There is still time, Randall."

He whipped his Mistress without a pattern against which she could brace her defense. A singing slash across her back might be followed by another of the same or a mere flickering intrusion of some secret place. The Mistress of Launceston soon learned not to separate her legs. To do so instantly invited the biting thong to bury itself within her sex. When this happened Crystal screamed, a scream of outrage and fury more than pain. The controlled writhings of the white loveliness she adored held Julie breathless.

Little by little, Crystal tired. The fatigue of pain is relentless. Under any particularly cruel cut she screamed. The motions of her nakedness as it tugged against her prisoned wrists became more and more abandoned. The Mistress travelled further and further into her land of pain - a private place in which she became oblivious of the world and the watching eyes. Randall whipped her slowly without cessation, his eyes glowing with a total understanding of the woman he had once called Mistress, but who now was an exquisitely twisting nudity held helpless to his will.

The Mistress of Launceston had been whipped.

The smithy was a busy place. When Randall led Julie there, he tired of her hobbled pace and picked her up as he might a doll and carried her. "We knocks off them irons, missie," he chuckled. "Should put 'em on the white bitch back yonder but she got work to do."

"Randall, may I be with her? She's terribly hurt"

"Cunt lickin'?"

Julie flushed scarlet. Everyone knew! There were no secrets from slaves. She could deny nothing. "She needs me in other ways." she said lamely.

"After what she done ter yo'?"

"She was angry. She's strange."

"Yo' be with her sure 'nuff. Don't aim ter hurt yer none, but us all want's yer to see what she gets."

"I'm a prisoner, Randall?"

"Guess yo' is, missie."

The Blacksmith shop was a busy place. Men and some women, were carrying shapeless bits of wood and metal. All were grinning widely. They had an air of purpose. When the last of them were gone,

the naked white girl knelt beside the huge anvil as before an altar and placed her shackled wrists upon its surface.

"Now missie, afore' us tak' them irons offen' ye us best unnerstan' the spot yo' in" Randall's voice was genial but firm.

"Yes, Randall."

"Us aims ter punish Miz Eshelby good. But us ain't 'bout ter punish yo'. Trouble is yo's white. Yo' git a chance yo's gonna run?"

"I can't run with my feet chained, Randall."

"Mebbe' not, but there's ways. So us keeps yer close by Miz Eshelby. That way us'uns watch yer both."

"I won't leave her. I promise."

"Yo' damfool gal'. But that yo' bizness." Randall's voice hardened. "What ah' gotta' tell yer is iffen' yo' mak' one bitty try fer escape, or cross us blacks anyway 'tall, yer gets the same wot Miz Eshelby git."

"You'll whip me. Alright, Randall. I understand."

"There's other things 'sides whip, missie."

"I'll obey you. And Randall ... thank you."

His grin was wide. He nodded to the waiting smith.

The chained girl watched, fascinated, as the hammer beat metallically upon the punch and the punch indented and drove down the rivets from the shackles that for many days had become so much a part of her and which had seemed likely to link her hands for life. When the clanking things fell away, Julie massaged her chafed wrists in wonder. Whatever Randall might be or do, she must be forever grateful to him for this.

The cage was pure inspiration. The smith had fabricated its parts so that it could be assembled anywhere. It stood in the open yard not far from the post and the pillory. It was very public, its bars and timbers were in the shape of a bird cage. It was not large. A diameter of perhaps eight feet. It had no floor but, even as Julie watched, it was being anchored to the soil by hooked rods driven deep.

"Yo' got yo'self a home, missie."

Randall held open the crude barred door on which there was an ominously large padlock. Obeying the courtly motion of his hand, Julie clinked her way into her cage. He closed the door but did not lock it. Attention swung to the naked woman still tied to the whipping post.

Julie felt ridiculous and cruelly exposed. She was more naked than naked. No one had thought to return the scrap of cloth taken from her at the preparation for her whipping. But what was taking place beyond the bars drove other considerations from her mind. Her now free hands clutched the metal rods as she peered into the dusk.

Crystal had regained consciousness. When the rawhide was cut from her wrists she slumped to the ground and crouched there panting. She would meet no avid gaze. One unbelieving finger traced the scarlet of a wound where the lash had bitten the length of her upper arm. But that was all. She seemed stunned.

"Woman! Tell us what yo' is."

Randall's voice was triumphant. This moment was his.

A deep and vibrant murmur came from the crowd. As though awakened from slumber, Crystal

raised her head and surveyed him listlessly. She did not answer.

"White bitch, I ask yo' somethin'."

The whip striated loveliness tensed. Crystal's eyes glinted in a return of spirit. Julie felt certain the Mistress of Launceston had no illusions about the intent of her slaves. What she fought now was a battle within herself. Her voice was guarded. "I am Crystal Eshelby."

"Not yo' name, bitch! What yo' is?"

"You call me bitch. Leave it at that." Her voice was a sneer.

As if by magic the whip was back in Randall's hand.

"Yo' knows what us wants ter hear, woman. Say it."

Crystal neither spoke nor moved. The whip sang its bitter song. The naked girl screamed and clutched her new wound.

"Well?"

"I am a slave."

Julie breathed a vast sigh of relief. If Crystal would deign to assuage hurt pride and hostile memories she might avoid much pain. The blacks desired her humiliating abasement. Julie knew that she herself would give it them rather than accept the whip. But Crystal was different. Crystal's pride might earn her untold cruelties.

"Call me Master and ask me nice to fuck yo'."

Julie moaned inwardly. Crystal leaped to her feet and ran. The circle blocked her and tossed her back upon the ground. Randall's whip sliced at her from every angle as she twisted. When, once more, the Mistress of Launceston lapsed into the darkness, they threw her inside the cage and closed the door. The click of the closing padlock told Julie the futility of hoping for escape.

"There comes tomorrow." Randall said meditatively before he strode away.

Later, it was Lulu who thrust the bread and water through the bars. She smiled cheerfully at Julie and grimaced at the slowly recovering woman on the ground. "Yo' gets the most whoppin' big prick there be. Yo' mighty lucky gal', Miz Eshelby." She went away, giggling.

"They've got us, damn them." Crystal's anger seethed.

They had eaten, and gratefully drank of the water. In an abandonment of joy at being close to the beloved flesh, Julie was licking and kissing her Mistress's wounds. They were many.

"Why bother with me, darling?" Crystal asked somberly. "I'd have had you whipped, just as bad as I've been."

"You were angry, and you believed Lionel. That's over now." Julie was happy to forgive everything so long as she herself was forgiven.

"That bastard did lie, didn't he! I should have known." Crystal's voice was heavy with guilt.

Julie continued her ministrations. Her companion was obviously fighting a battle.

"Forgive me, Julie." A small silence lengthened. "Look, darling, maybe we'll never get out of this ... this rotten mess. But if we do I'll still be a capricious bitch and you'll be my slave girl - all nice and legal."

"Of course, Crystal darling. I don't mind."

"Oh dammit, Julie, I'm trying to tell you to make a deal with Randall. Get him to free you so you can run away ... run away from me. There's no hope for me but there is for you. They don't hate you."

"I can't run away, my feet are chained. Besides, we're both in a cage and the door's locked." For the moment that was now, Julie was happy.

"Try to wheedle him somehow - or one of the others: Old Josh or Lulu. Goodness knows what they've done with Felicia."

"I can't, darling. Randall has warned me: no escape. If I give them trouble I get punished terribly. That's why he's left my ankles chained. It's so I won't be tempted." Julie was struck by an anomaly. "But darling, they haven't chained you!"

"Humph! Can't you guess why?"

"Oh Crystal, no!"

"It's 'oh Crystal yes'!" The older girl's voice was bitter.

"They want me so I can spread my legs. I'm going to be fucked by every black in the two estates."

Julie bathed Crystal's weals with tears. She was realistic enough to guess the truth of it. "But why not me! Why not me too!"

"Don't fret, love. If they tire of me they may. You're a tasty morsel. Keep on the right side of Randall, it's your best bet."

"Darling..." Julie's words came hesitantly. "Don't fight, them. They love an excuse to hurt you. Neither of us have the faintest hope of getting away. It's best to be obedient."

"For you perhaps. You've got a gift for obedience, Pet. But he'll goad me. He's clever."

"But if we do what they want, it disarms them. They'll tire of their game. We're in this cage, but they'll get as bored with peeping through the bars as we will."

"You're a wise little Julie. I adore you. But we're foxed. They understand us and how we think. We're in for a bad time; at least I am. I'm trying to make up my mind how humble I can really be and get away with it. They're going to break me, but they'll want their money's worth of entertainment out of making me crawl. Oh damn!""

Julie gave her Mistress joy with her tongue. She cared not for the watching eyes. She knew that for her there could never be anything again in life but slavery. Since that moment when Jacob Burlow had given her the fatal parchments she had travelled a road leading forever down so that she understood how deeply she was inured to being owned, a property to be bartered or chained or whipped ... or even loved. In her heart Julie did not believe the chains linking her feet would ever be removed. She was a slave. Surely, she recognized how much life was simplified by knowing what you truly were.

"It's the last night, sweetheart," Crystal murmured huskily. "I won't have your lips on my puss after those swine have pumped me full of their black sperm."

They loved each other for a long time, careless of the watching gloating faces that, one by one, went away into the dark to leave them finally alone. The cage held them safe.

They took Crystal in the morning, locking the cage door back upon a bereft Julie who watched, in a desolation all her own, the thing that happened.

"Lay on yo' back and spread yo' pretty legs, white gal'," Randall ordered without preamble. "Us carries on where us left off last night."

Crystal stood, naked and defenseless. "You'll whip me to death if I don't," she said tonelessly.

"Yo'all's so right, white bitch."

Crystal lay down on her back. Her eyes never left those of the watching negro. There remained between them a communion of shared knowledge. She spread her legs and bent her knees in the age old invitation to mate. She threw her arms wide so that a heartbroken Julie saw her Mistress as an impaled butterfly upon the soil.

Randall took her. His phallus was as huge as he himself. It thrust at her greedily and brutally and seemingly forever. His naked victim lay with closed eyes and did not raise her arms. She came to orgasm but made no cry, she would give her ravisher as little pleasure as she could. Stony faced, she cleansed his maleness with her lips when he was done with her and gave the lascivious command.

"Yo' lick me clean, gal. And yo' says a nice thank yo' master."

Crystal did both. Julie guessed her agony.

"Stake the bitch out."

Randall might be done with her but others were not. Eager hands had ready what was required. In but a few minutes the Mistress of Launceston lay naked and stretched wide upon a low wood bench. The apex of her thighs protruded beyond its lower rim. Her feet were dragged obscenely apart and staked toward the ground, the harsh bands of rope drawn taut as bowstrings. Her hands were treated in the same way, drawn high above her head and then taken wide and staked so that she lay motionless upon a small hard couch, bowed and stretched and utterly open. Her pubic hair was a black bush demanding attention.

Crystal Eshelby spoke no word.

They took her as they pleased. There was no jostling for precedence. There was plenty of time, and a woman's vagina possesses an infinite resilience. The crowd applauded each male thrust. The female orgasms Crystal was unable to control invoked the clapping of hands. The children aped the responses of their elders, but their eyes were as solemn as ever in wonder at the strangeness of this sport. Julie watched in agony. When she turned away she was warned. Watch or share. She was only human. She watched.

Sometimes Crystal struggled. It was after an orgasm when the pounding at her sex went on and on. Her head would toss wildly, hair in disarray, her muscles and tendons would tense and strain against the taut naked skin. But that was all. She could not move. She was held available. Open to all.

The dog was by way of an intermission. It was thrust into the ring by helpful hands. It was huge and eagerly prurient. Seeing its approach, the tied girl uttered a pitiful "Oh no ... oh please! No, no, no!" But thereafter kept silent. It licked busily and gratefully at the open cunt so thoughtfully provided.

The crowd commented and made comparisons. Crystal heaved at her tethers without avail. The dog was exhorted to more ambitious acts. When its tongue had punished her enough it was raised and positioned for the final act for which it was now quite obviously well equipped. It fucked her lustily with that far away absent minded look canines project when in their slow and deliberate throes of coitus. Crystal moaned in her defilement. When the animal slunk away appeased there was another round of applause.

"Yo' think you bin well fucked, white gal.?"

Crystal Eshelby looked up at the black and demanding face. She had no way of knowing what might remain in store. Cautiously she said, "Yes."

"Yes what, bitch?"

"Yes, Master. I have been well fucked."

"Good! Now yo' stays like that fo' the day."

"Thank you, Master." Crystal was using her only weapon.

"Don' do ye no good bein' humble, gal'. Us goes right on teachin' yo' a lesson."

"Thank you, Master."

Tears brimmed Julie's eyes. To see her beloved thus! It was too cruel. She knew herself punished for being white - that she must watch... How Crystal must hate being watched by her own slave. But then, she was but one of many. Crystal had owned them all. It was a strange and disquieting thought within the Law she owned them still as they made sport with her helpless flesh.

Randall ensured that workers went to the fields and the affairs of the estate bore a semblance of normalcy to any inadvertent eye that might stray near. But there remained a constant coming and going so that the woman stretched upon the bench should know neither loneliness nor rest. Crystal Eshelby would be made to plumb the most utter depths of degradation. Stray dogs were not kicked aside.

"Don't take on so, darling."

Crystal had turned so that she could give a wan smile to the girl behind the bars during one of the periods of inattention. Again she tried to move, but could not. "These bastards have tied me so damn tight I'm splitting."

"But... but it's so cruel, so awful! Oh Crystal - and to you of all people!"

"Why me, Pet?"

"You 're so immaculate, so lovely."

"To you I am, but not them!"

"It's because you're so beautiful that they're doing these beastly things. Shaming you so..."

"Not really, sweetheart. But let 'em think so. I've been fucked before. I've even let a dog have a go at me just out of curiosity. A girl's cunt takes an awful lot of abuse. It never wears out." Crystal grinned reassuringly at her slave girl's stricken face. "I expect I've shocked you, darling. But I am a bit of a bitch, y' know, and I've never told you everything."

"I love you, Crystal. I don't care."

"I'm damn lucky in you, Julie. If I was a nice girl, I'd now promise to tear up your papers and set you free when we get out of this jackpot - if we do! But I'm not nice. Fact is I want to hold on to you more than every. I suppose I need you... Sort of the way you think you need me."

"I do need you. I won't even think of escape. Oh Crystal!"

"You're safe enough in that cage and with those irons on your feet. Safer than me maybe ... If I could only find a bit of slack in these damn ropes! The bastards sure know how to tie." Once more the pale grin. "For you and me, darling, escape is a naughty word."

The punishment of Crystal Eshelby was by no means exclusively male. When the men went about their affairs the women and the children took over the torment of the naked female thing bound upon the bench. Fingers probed the no longer secret place. Nipples, now forfeit, were tweaked and tugged. Orgasms were induced by one artificial ingenuity after another. Julie, holding disconsolately to her bars, could never be quite sure whether Crystal's moans and cries were real, or simulated to appease her enemy's lust for her discomfort. When at night the victim of a diversity of rapes was untied and tossed contemptuously into the cage, she fell to her knees and reached hungry arms for the only friend she had. They clung together as though fearful to let go.

But the day's travail was not yet over for the Mistress of Launceston. When Lulu brought the water and the bread, she brought also the key and strips of rawhide. "Randall he say I gotta' tie yo' arms, Miz Eshelby. He say Miz Julie do fo' yo', don' need no hands."

The caged and naked girls looked at each other in despair. Both eyed, the strips dangling from Lulu's hand with loathing.

"Yo' going' ter let me tie yo', Miz Eshelby?"

"I suppose so." said Crystal wearily.

"I gotta' unlock the cage - you two makes a fuss us all gets inna' heap o' trouble?"

"Don't worry, Lulu. We don't want trouble any more than you," Julie placated. "Come on in and tie us. Tell us what to do."

"Ain't like that, missie. Yo' don' git tied, jest Miz Eshelby." Lulu grinned apologetically. "Randall, he says ter tell yo' iffen yo' unties her in the dark yo' bofe' gits the whuppin' o' yo' lives. An' after yo' gits tied, the two o' yo', but wuss."

There was nothing to say. They were trapped. The enemy had thought of every contingency. Shapes were visible in the gloom. They were being watched, no doubt with high amusement or the hope they would resist. Irritably, Crystal stood as the colored slave desired.

Julie cringed at what she was compelled to watch. Her darling was going to be in agony, and she would be helpless to give aid. The edict was one neither of them would dare contravene.

"Ah ties yo' hans' flat like so, Miz," Lulu explained redundantly as she cinched a knot. "Now ah ties yo' pretty elbows behind yo' back. Ah uses more'n one bit o' rope so's not to cut yo' too crool. There, yo' looks right purty wiv' them tits stickin' way out. My, my, yo' sho' did get a lickin', didn't yo'! Lookit them weal!"

"Thank you, Lulu." Crystal had nothing to lose by offering gratitude.

"Yo' sure is welcome, Miz. Lulu don' think yo' git loose."

"I'm sure I won't, and I promise not to let Julie untie me."

Sadly the two captives watched the careful locking of their cage door and the disappearance of their jailer. Crystal grimaced. "The dirty swine!" She twisted her shoulders and spread her hands against the rope upon her wrists. "I'd no idea this could hurt so bad. Oh damn! They'll have me pleading if this goes on. And how the devil am I supposed to eat and drink! I'm helpless, I can't do a thing."

"I'll do everything for you, darling," Julie said gently as she held water to the parched lips. She forbade to speak of the times when she, too, had been tied thus at her Mistress's behest.

Crystal pondered and exclaimed: "I had this done to you, Julie. Why don't you hate me?"

"I don't know," Julie confessed wryly. "It hurts enough to make anyone hate anybody. I'll untie you in the night and put it back on before morning."

"You won't, Pet. I don't want you getting what I am. Feed me some bread now. I've had a hard day."

They did the best they could with their night.

"Wouldn't be right nohow not ter pick the cotton." Randall proclaimed grandly. "That pore Miz Eshelby, she need the money bad."

Julie had already been given her bag and stood waiting while Crystal endured one more of her interminable humiliations. She watched while her despondent beloved was provided with a bag of her own. Randall was obviously enjoying himself.

"What yo' say fo' a quota, Miz?"

Crystal tried to stare him down, then blurted: "I don't know."

"Seems like yo' give a pore gal' in full irons eighty-five pounds. Thass right, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Big healthy gal' like yo' wi' no irons a'tall, she orta' double that, wouldn' yo' say, Miz?"

Julie groaned inwardly. Crystal twisted unhappily. The weals of the rawhide were vivid on her arms. She knew she could say nothing right. "Whatever you say, Master."

"Ah's glad yo' agree. One hunnert' an' seventy pounds." Randall made the notation on the tally sheet. "Miz Julie don' have no quota, but she gets a whuppin' iffen she help fill yo' bag."

"I won't let her, Master."

"An yo', Julie gal', yo' ain't gonna' cheat?"

"I promised to obey you, Randall. I will."

The three of them paused, an unspoken thought urgent in the mind of each. Crystal put into words.

"It means I'll be whipped tonight, doesn't it, Master?"

"Not iffen yo' work hard."

"No girl can pick a hundred and seventy pounds."

"No white gal' wi' heavy irons like' to pick eighty-five."

It was useless. She was self-condemned. Crystal nodded, stony faced, and turned away. The two white girls made their way out into the field, but a hail from the man who was now their master brought them back.

"Ah forgets." Randall smirked. "Yo' needs ter remember, Miz Eshelby, what yo' good fer. Any nigger boy want ter fuck yo', he does it, see. Any boy comes an' tell yo' lay down, yo' lay down quick and part them legs. Unnerstan'?"

"I understand, Master. I will let them fuck me."

"Fust thing we knows, yo' gonna' be right smart gal'. Iffen yo' picks cotton good as yo' fucks yo' mak' damn fine slave."

Randall departed chuckling at the crimson he had evoked on Crystal's cheeks. Julie wondered how long her Mistress could endure the shaming speech and humble mien. She knew the humility was simulated. Crystal Eshelby was a survivor, she would yield what she must in order to fight again tomorrow. Crystal was fighting for everything she had every owned - perhaps also for her life. Julie realized that, armed with the assurance of her contempt for lesser breeds, Crystal would wash away the defilement of her flesh as she might wash the stains of labour from her hands. Crystal Eshelby was strong.

"The son of a bitch!" Crystal's busy fingers plucked the white fluff and thrust it into her capacious bag. That the cotton was her own made her task doubly distasteful. "He knows I can't make it. He wants me to work out here in the sun knowing I'm going in tonight to get a flogging. There'll be so many strokes due me I'll pass out again."

"I won't let him." Julie protested stoutly. "Somehow I'll get through to him. Any girl who's flogged every night is going to die."

"That could be what he wants. It might take a week, but it would satisfy their grudge."

"I'm going to put half of mine into your bag, Crystal. No one's close enough to see."

"No you won't! Don't you see, they allow us to be together so we'll be constantly tempted. They want to catch us out in things ... The consideration they show you is probably no stronger than a thread. Don't test it."

"Crystal, you're not chained. The Burgoyne Place is only about three miles across the fields..."

"Don't think I haven't thought of that. Pet. It's a slim chance - I could never outrun any of the bucks. I'd have to contrive some sort of a head start, an advantage." Crystal sighed and kissed the nape of Julie's neck. "But he's got me foxed there too by those chains on your ankles. There's no way you can run with them on you and we can't get 'em off. What an idiot I was to have them riveted on you! If I run, they'll take their anger out on you. Those shackles on your feet hold me as safely as they hold you. Randall's laughing."

"But Burgoyne would get help. This horror would be over in a few hours. I don't think they'd kill me in that time."

"Ah's got me a hard on, white gal'."

The deep laughing male voice intruded on their debate.

The black was striding over the cotton bushes, grinning hugely. He looked down at their stricken faces with all the assurance of possession.

"You want to fuck me?" Crystal asked equably. "Thass' right, white gal'. Down yo' go."

Crystal went down. She arranged herself for the black boy's pleasure with the same casualness as if preparing for sleep. She even smiled.

Julie beheld the potency of that smile. It robbed the male of his ascendency. But his virility remained. She watched in loathing as the thrusts drove her loved one into the soft soil and drew from her the gasping tributes to his mastery. She watched, too, the shaming ritual of the cleansing of the phallus with female tongue and lips. It seemed a thing impossible. She doubted her own ability to perform such a task; she would retch, vomit, run.

"Yo' good piece o' ass, missie."

"Thank you, Master."

Crystal watched her retreat with bitter hate. Her confidence seemed to go with him across the cotton. She was still kneeling after her shaming task. Her picking forgotten. She looked up to Julie's anguished eyes and announced with finality, "I thought I could let them do it to me, that it wouldn't matter. But I've had enough. If they kill me, they kill me. I'm going to run."

Julie nodded in acceptance. There was nothing to say. "I'll crawl between the rows. You go on picking and act as though I'm still here, as though I'm working low down on my knees. It may deceive 'em for long enough. There's some tree cover between here and Burgoyne's."

"I love you."

They said it in unison. A moment later Crystal began her crawl.

Julie picked like fury, and carried on simulated words and acts as though she still had a companion in the next row. Her heart thumped alarmingly as she watched the white whip wealed slenderness of her Mistress retreat between the foliage of the plants that had once made her wealthy.

It is possible that Crystal Eshelby's attempt to escape might have succeeded had it not been for the flock of grouse. They arose with squawking cries and 'a great whirring of wings that drew instant attention. Two blacks took tentative steps. Crystal leaped to her feet and fled.

All work stopped. Every eye was focused on the race that could have but one end. They caught Crystal within half a mile and led her back to slavery. She was weeping unashamedly as she walked

between them, her arms held viselike by powerful hands.

It was Lulu who came to fetch Julie. "Yo' goin' ter git it good now, missie, 'she advised cheerfully. "Here, ah carries yer bag so's yo' walk quicker in them chains."

"What will Randall do to me?"

"Mebbe whip. Mebbe' sumpin' wuss."

"What has he done to Crystal?"

"She waitin' in the cage. She all shook up 'bout bein' caught."

"Oh Lulu, what's going to happen to us? All this whipping, we'll die."

"Us hadn't meant to whup yo' afore' this." Lulu's tone was reproachful. "Ah knows how you's feel 'bout Miz Eshelby. But mebbe' Randall don' make no 'lowance."

The huge negro also voiced reproach. "Yo lets her go. No shout nor nothin'?"

"I'm sorry, Randall. But I'm guilty. I won't argue."

"Ah has to whip yo'. Wouldn't be fair not..."

"I know, Randall. It's expected. Don't worry about it."

"Ah don' want to." He stubbed a calloused toe in the dirt. "Las' thing Randall wanna' do is whup you, missie." His sincerity sparked inspiration. Randall was basically a kind man ... The Plan unrolled within Julie's mind with a neat clarity of logic.

"Randall, can I ask you something? It's not about being punished. I know I have to be whipped..."

"'Corse yo' can, missie."

"This ... this ... thing! Revolt, rebellion - whatever you want to call it, it has to end sometime. Most likely there'll be bloodshed. Suppose I could show you a way out? A way to let things return to the way they were, but with you away from the State, free and safe and with money?"

"Yo' dreamin' fo' sho', missie."

"It's easy, Randall!" Julie was infecting herself with excitement. "You and I dress properly: take money from the Big House: take the carriage and drive away."

"A pair o' slaves!" His voice held pity for her stupidity.

"No! Oh, don't you see! I'm white. If we stay away from contacts in the County where I'm known we can pass as a traveling white woman and her colored coachman. We can drive clear into one of the free States and never be slaves again."

She had caught his interest. Nodding quietly he examined her strategy. But then shook his head sadly. "Yo' mebbe' got somepin' missie. But ah cain't nohow leave the folks. They needs me."

"They'll only have you for a little while. When the Sheriff and the men come with their guns, you'll be the first to die. A lot of your people will die too. Don't let it happen."

"They let Miz Eshelby loose, she whip 'em all half to death."

"She won't. I'll write her a letter they can give her when they set her free." She looked at him squarely. "Crystal loves me."

"Yo', a white gal'! Yo' do this... !"

"Randall, I'm a slave! You know how I've been made into a slave. I'll be escaping just the same as you."

"Yo' damn fine woman."

"I'm a damn poor slave."

She watched him ponder, but knew that she had won.

When his eyes sought hers again he was embarrassed. "Ah'm gonna' do it, missie. Ah can't see no fault. We makes it, yo' an' me." Again there was the awkward shuffling of the foot. "But ah cain't pick yo' up and run right now. Yo' nows what ah gotta do... ?"

Julie sighed. She knew! "You have to punish Crystal and me, don't you. It's a sort of justice. Your people expect it. We can't go until it's done?"

"Thass right, missie. Ah sho' is sorry."

"I don't mind. Randall, I don't mind. Just don't half kill me. And ... and..." She looked up at him humbly. "Please be as easy on Crystal as you can. She's already been terribly punished."

"She deserve it."

Julie shrugged. Crystal was hard to defend. "I can't go away from here knowing she's more dead than alive."

He laughed at her seriousness. "That woman don' die easy. She pick a lot o' cotton 'afore they turns her loose. Take more'n the whip I uses on her to give yo' need ter worry."

Strangely they shook hands on their bargain.

Crystal was in the cage. Her hands had been tied behind her back. She stood erect and angry watching the construction.

At first Julie thought it a gibbet, appropriately within view of the pillory and the cage. Two uprights and a crossbar well braced. A span of perhaps twenty feet.

"Us knocks them irons offen' yo' feet 'afore ... 'afore..." Rather than pronounce the dreaded sentence Randall picked Julie up and carried her to the smith. "Before you have me whipped." she mocked him.

He sat her on a box so that she could place her shackled ankles on the anvil. The captive watched in pure delight as the hated rivets were driven from her flesh. The first free step she took held unreality. She longed to leap and run. "Thank you, Randall," she said fervently.

"Cain't be wearin' 'em fer what yo' aims ter do, missie." Randall said with dry humour. "But right now..."

Crystal hung suspended from the heavy crosspiece. She was naked. Her wrists had been bound, from them she swung like a pendulum. Her toes were six inches from the ground. Her head was back so that her hair cascaded down to partly hide the weals of her previous whipping.

"Ah gives yo' ter Lulu, missie." He seemed suddenly shy.

"You'll get things ready?" Julie asked anxiously.

"Thass what ah'm gonna do now. I'se feared yo' gonna' hang awhile."

Julie scarcely cared about her punishment. She was agog with excitement. "Don't forget clothes and money. You can ask Felicia."

Randall nodded and went away.

"Yo' an' him got somepin' cooking, Missie?"

Lulu was in high good humour. Julie wondered how much she knew or guessed. She was obviously the Mistress of Ceremonies. It seemed evident she was going to share Crystal's fate.

"I've just been unchained, Lulu. Can I have a minute?"

"Sho can, Missie. Lulu know' what it like gettin' outta' irons. Feels like yo' wanna' fly."

Uncaring for the amused stares Julie kicked and jumped. She dared not catch Crystal's eye - not yet! She gave her attention to Lulu. "What do I have to do?" she asked breathlessly.

Julie, helpfully, held out her hands to be bound. The punishment she was about to endure was a thing best got over and done with. Understanding theneed of it she refused tobe distressed.

"Yo' sho' is one happy gal', missie." Lulu was puzzled. "I expect it' getting rid of the chains."

"Lulu. I've had to wear them so long. It's a beautiful feeling."

"What yo' gits now ain't noways beautiful."

"I'm sure it isn't. But I expect I deserve it. Is it you who's going to whip me?"

"Thass right. An' I cain't give it yo' easy. There be a lot o' folks a'watchin'. They'll want yo' whupped right."

A cloud passed over Julie's sun. She understood why Randall had absented himself. He wanted no reproachful eyes. She saw that Lulu was being kind. She was being bound with wide soft strips that would cut her wrists as little as possible. She had forgotten her wrists. A lady of quality would not have wealed wrists! She wondered if Randall or Felicia would think to hunt up gloves.

"Why are we being hung up like this Lulu?"

Lulu chuckled. "Yo' all think o' a better way to whip a gal'?"

"I suppose not." Julie looked doubtfully at Crystal's strained nudity as it hung awaiting its pain She had a sudden percipience. "You're going to leave us like this aren't you?"

"Sho' am, missie. It powerful good fo' a gal's soul to hang thataway. She do a lot o' thinkin'."

"And we get whipped as well?' "Sho' do. Dunno' jus' when."

Lulu had help for the suspension. A box for Julie to stand on and a man on a ladder above. When Julie stepped onto the raised surface and lifted her bound hands she had the familiar sensation of participating in her own execution. As the rope tightened and she was asked to stand up on her toes her visions of tomorrow were obscured by a now acute awareness of what she would have to suffer today. She stole a glance at Crystal and received a sad hopeless message of pity.

It was strange to hang. It was surprisingly painful.

Wracked shoulders, tractioned arms and cut wrists. It was a punishment in itself without the whip. Julie found herself gasping in shock and dismay. As with her first whipping, she was sure she could not survive. She would be bedridden, perhaps permanently injured. Her wrists which now were bands of fire might bleed. Tomorrow receded into infinity.

"Sho' nuff' bad, eh?" Lulu inquired.

Julie was about to cry her anguish, but suddenly realized that Crystal was accepting this punishment in stoic silence. If her Mistress could remain mute, so could she. She contented herself with an easy response: "Oh, Lulu, it's terrible."

"Thass' the way it's 'sposed ter be." Lulu grinned and went away.

"Your shoulders get used to it but your wrists don't," Crystal said with faint comfort. "Dammit, Julie love, I'm sorry! I'm so damn sorry!"

The two girls had been suspended close enough that their voices could reach each other clearly. Others might hear too, but what did it matter! It was easy to understand the need of space. When Lulu whipped them she would need room to swing.

It was strangely demeaning to have the freedom of her legs. It meant she would kick and cavort when she was whipped. It also tormented her with a compulsion to try and hide her pubic hair which seemed to the tractioned girl to flaunt itself unnecessarily. Julie took a quick look at Crystal and confirmed her fear that the black bush did indeed proclaim its presence and the existence of that which it failed to hide. Lulu had thoughtfully pulled her hair back across a bare shoulder, explaining that everyone enjoyed seeing a good pair of tits. The naked victim awaiting her fate resigned herself to total exposure. She also discovered it all hurt less if she kept quite still.

"Don't feel sorry about me, darling. I wanted you to run just as much as you did. I expect I'll survive whatever ... well, whatever they do to us. I don't think Randall wants either of us dead."

Julie wondered if some trace of elation might reach her Mistress in her voice. She was puzzled to know what she should tell. Crystal Eshelby's capricious temper produced surprising reactions. It was probably best to say nothing of her deal with Randall. Cringingly, she knew how easily her Mistress might jump to a wrong conclusion and suppose the two of them had eloped or in some dishonorable way escaped without concern for her.

Lulu gave them water to drink. Julie took it as a good sign, and hoped Crystal did too. "How many strokes do we get, Lulu?" Crystal asked after she had swallowed.

"Don' know, Miz Eshelby. Boun' ter be plenty." Crystal was irritated with her former slave. "Well, d'you know how long we have to hang here like sides of beef?"

"Best I don' tell yer, Miz."

"Look, Lulu, you don't have to punish Julie as bad as me."

"Dunno', Miz. Up ter Randall I 'speks. She sho' goin' ter hang right 'longside."

"Well, give her a rest sometimes, eh?"

"Ah sho' would push the box back under, Miz. But ain't not kindness. Juss' makes it wuss when yo' steps offen' agin'.

"Oh shit!" Crystal exclaimed vehemently. "They can think of more things!"

Crystal was miraculous. Julie hung beside the lovely nakedness and adored. Without Crystal's calm contempt for pain and those who inflicted it on them she would have become hysterical or given way to whining pleas for mercy; pleas that would have been laughed at and ignored. The slave girl drew strength from her Mistress. She supposed, wryly, that was the preordained destiny of slaves. A slave girl without a Mistress was lost.

"Which one o' you wants it fust?" Lulu inquired amiably.

The crowd had been increasing. The ring had formed.

Julie eyed the whip. It was the one with which a girl could be whipped for hours yet still not die. She turned a stricken eye to Crystal.

"Neither of us." said Crystal firmly.

It was a cruel question to watch the agony of another and know it awaited you! Lulu knew perfectly

well what she had asked. She looked up at her favourite prisoner and asked, "How 'bout you, missie?"

"Yes, whip Julie first," said Crystal with equal firmness.

How strange an honor. Yet Julie was almost glad the time had come. They had hung for hours. They were tiring fast. But, no doubt, nature would provide them with adrenalin under the stimulus of pain. She tried to smile acceptance to the girl who held the whip.

It curled round her thighs. Julie squealed shamingly in surprise and shock. Her legs flailed. The crows tittered and approved.

"Can't you hit her in the proper places?" Crystal demanded.

"Yo' all mean her tits mebbe?" Lulu asked mischievously.

"You know I don't! We've both got backs and seats."

"Yo' back mighty well 'tended to, Miz Eshelby. So's yo' ass."

Crystal bit her lip. A captive could say nothing right.

Perhaps when her turn came she would be grateful to be whipped upon her thighs.

Julie screamed. The lash complying with Crystal's wish cut her across her shoulder blades, its tip flickering on the slope of her breast. Tomorrow vanished in a mist of pain. Those who watched applauded.

Lulu whipped the delinquent slave with careful deliberation, striking the writhing nudity with just sufficient force to forestall complaint from her fellows. The slave herself embraced her agony and found what comfort she could in writhing and moans. At the end of the tenth stroke Lulu asked brightly, "Us got a young'un wants to whup a white gal. How 'bout I let her have a go on yo'?"

Julie was lost and uncomprehending. "If it's what you want." she gasped, uncaring.

The girl was a lanky fourteen year old. She was pushed forward from the circle and approached her heart's desire shyly. She was obviously entranced.

"Betsy she git whupped lots. She think white gal's real mean." Lulu offered in explanation.

"Betsy can whip me," Crystal demanded. "Julie's never hurt her."

"Betsy don' like no white gal'."

"Betsy!" Crystal was peremptory. "It was me who had you whipped, not Miss Julie."

"Ah knows that, Miz Eshelby. But I whips yo' bofe." Julie screamed anew. Betsy's aim was poor, but her intent was childishly vicious. She wanted to whip a white girl on her breasts and pubes; she proceeded to do so.

Lulu kept a careful watch and made admonitory suggestions. Betsy's arm lacked vigor. The weakness of her slashes might compensate for her choice of targets. The crowd offered encouraging suggestions and applauded vociferously whenever a scarlet line sprang into life on the chosen bit of female flesh.

To Julie it was a new agony. It was evident no one was going to stop the child in her cruelty. The only defense was to seek evasive action by writhing and twisting. Sometimes this diverted a blow to a less sacred place, sometimes it failed. But the audience enjoyed the action. Julie knew she might defeat the child by hanging supine and inert, without response. But this was beyond her stoicism - perhaps beyond that of any girl. The lash followed the suspended nakedness. The crimson lines formed on the white skin like angry protests.

The whipped girl knew it absurd to be grateful when Lulu once more took possession of the singing thong. Betsy had hurt, there was something shaming and disgraceful about being lashed by a child.

"How many more?" she moaned piteously.

Lulu laughed and snapped a ringing stroke across the curves of the taut bottom. "That better, missie?" she asked cheerfully and struck again.

Julie did not die. She did not even lose consciousness.

She lost count of numbers and of coherence about anything. She was punished, punished, punished! That was what mattered - to be punished as the slaves wished her punished and to have an end to it. In spite of the mercy of her bonds her wrists bled. When Lulu stopped whipping her she had no hope it was ended.

"Yo' gits ter watch Miz Eshelby now, missie."

Julie was panting, her nakedness streaked with sweat and scarlet lines. She turned bereft eyes upon the girl she loved.

There could be no doubting that the whipping of Crystal was the main course to Julie's aperitif. Since she was already well wealed Lulu saw fit to seek fresh fields. After a frightening number of lashes the awful command rang out. "Spread them legs, white gal'."

It was no more than Crystal expected. She well knew the tenderness of the inside of the female thighs. Mutely she obeyed, but could not remain voiceless when the thong cut her softest flesh. She screamed.

"Yo' found the place, Lulu."

"Hark thet gal' howl. Hit her agin."

"Git the bitch's cunt. It ain't had nothin' outside." There were roars of hilarious approval. Crystal was compelled to open her thighs again and to receive the thong upon her thatch. She wept and screamed as Julie had done before. All courage has limits.

They whipped the Mistress of Launceston insensible by the end of the afternoon. Both girls were left to hang there in their misery. When after many minutes, Crystal struggled back to awareness they were alone.

"Is it over, darling?" Crystal's voice was husky.

"I think so. They've gone away."

"And we just hang!" The Mistress's voice was bitter.

"Maybe they'll put us in the cage soon," Julie offered hopefully.

"I'll never have you whipped again, Julie. It's too awful."

"Yes you will, darling." Julie promised in an absurd effort to cheer.

Crystal managed a grimace. "Do you know what you just said?"

"Well, I mean it," Julie affirmed stoutly. "This will pass - it just has to. There's bound to be a rescue sooner or later, then everything will return to normal and you can have me whipped all you like."

"No. Never!" Crystal managed vehemence. "No matter what you do."

In spite of her still miserable plight, Julie's spirits were beginning to rise. She longed ardently to give comfort. "Well, you can whip me on your birthday, darling," she declared sweetly. "I know you adore doing it, so it makes a lovely present. Slaves don't have any money to buy things."

"You're just too precious, Pet."

"So are you. Mistress."

They left it at that.

Julie was too excited to sleep soundly. As an additional mark of disfavor the wrists of both girls had been tightly tied behind their backs before they had been locked in their cage. This was no aid to slumber, and for many minutes they had tried to free each other with groping fingers. But they had been too cleverly tied, the knots defied them. They relapsed against each other's nakedness and fell asleep. Crystal, in a deep pain induced fatigue, and Julie in a nightmare ridden excitement.

It was still dark when Randall's hand touched Julie's foot. She separated herself from the warm nakedness without disturbing her loved one's oblivion. It was strange to step through the cage door and watch it locked again behind her. For the first time in a long while she glimpsed freedom. Finding her bound, Randall picked her up and carried her to the Big House.

It was all there. Everything she would need had been laid out on Crystal's bed in Crystal's room. Bags had been packed, awaiting only the closing of the lid. There was a purse and money, and a coat against the chill of night. Even more importantly was a tub and warm water. By the time she was finished with herself it was like meeting a stranger, a lovely and exotic stranger in the mirror.

Randall had done himself proud. Except for color he could have been any southern gentleman. As a Coachman he would command respect. They admired each other with a new affection. As though they were fugitives they hurried to the waiting coach. The most important letter Julie had written was placed in the willing hand of Old Josh. They bowled down the driveway of Beverleigh in regal style.

It was a strange journey. There could be no pursuit, but upon them was the urgency of light. They drove long hours each day. Julie wished she could share the driver's seat. It was lonely in the coach. But when isolation permitted they talked. The hostelries wherein they stayed the night accepted them as what they said they were. Julie's plan was sound.

That which happened to them took place at Greenville, South Carolina.

Some business affair had filled the town. Had they been less impressive they might have been refused accommodation. When it came time to eat her solitary dinner the head waiter apologized: "You could wait, madam, or share a table."

Julie elected to share. She wanted sleep, not waiting, Tomorrow would be another long day. Tired, she followed the obsequious back and accepted the withdrawn chair.

The man who rose in polite greeting was Jacob Burlow. Julie was glad of the chair. She was trembling. Once more her world was in ruins. Burlow's smile died as he resumed his seat. His lips compressed. "Perhaps you'd do me the honour of explaining?" he asked guardedly.

Julie told him the truth, omitting mention of Randall or the carriage, Let him suppose she had travelled by other means.

At the end of her story he sat, poker faced, and tried to stare her down. "Poppycock! Do you take me for a fool, Miss Lindley?"

Sight of his disbelief made Julie realize how little chance she had of being listened to with credence by anyone. Randall had executed his rebellion well. No hint of it had gone beyond the boarders of the two estates.

"I will let you have your table." she said primly, and rose to leave.

"Sit down."

It was easy to obey. Julie's legs were shaky. Her gaze was imploring.

"You're an escaped slave."

"Those papers were forged."

"Show me a supportive document from Miss Eshelby."

"You are insolent. You cannot touch me."

"Nay, but the sheriff can, young lady. Give me no airs and graces."

It was then Julie caught sight of Randall. He had come on some errand and was respectfully standing beside the door. She caught his eyes and shook her head She could tell by his frown he recognized trouble.

"You're thinking of a reward?" Her voice was icy. "I'm afraid you'll be disappointed"

Burlow laughed harshly. "You ask me to believe Miss Eshelby is relinquishing twenty-one thousand dollars?"

Julie sighed She could understand his incredulity.

"What do you intend to do?" She was fighting hard not to show her fear.

"Turn you over to the Sheriff, of course."

"Here, in this dining room!"

Burlow chuckled at her dismay. "Nay, I'll save ye that, know the Manager here, he'll lend us his office. Follow me."

Julie hated his confidence that she would follow. But it gave her a chance, as they passed the waiting Randall, to hand him her purse and whisper: "Run" None noticed the exchange.

Julia Lindley marched forward to one more captivity.

"I don't like it. Be damned if I do!" The Sheriff looked across the table at his fashionably attired prisoner. His gaze switched to Burlow. "I've heard of such cases," he admitted. "But this lady here ... He shook his head "I am prepared to make an affidavit, sir."

"Aye, and ye'll do it. But in the morning. In the meantime what happens to Miss Lindley?"

"I presume you have cells in this jail?"

"They are hardly appropriate..."

"Come, Sheriff, you're letting a pretty face get in the way of duty. You've no option, man."

"I tell you I don't like it."

"Damn your likes, sir! There's men a'plenty in Greenville who'll vouch for me. Can this baggage say the same?"

The Sheriff sighed. He handed Burlow a slip of paper.

"Here's your receipt for her: One 'alleged' female slave. Color: White. You'll get the reward." He frowned and added coldly: "If there is one."

With Burlow gone, the frosty office seemed less menacing. Julie managed to smile into the Lawman's troubled eyes, and to ask, "What happens to me now?"

"I'm damned if I know." Sheriff Waddel thumped his desk angrily. "If ye was some nigger wench I'd know well enough. But you're quality. I smell trouble. Can't ye think up a better tale?"

"Please send me back to the Estate from which I am alleged to have escaped."

"That's the last thing any slave wench is going to ask."

"I do ask it. Unless you are willing to return my freedom?"

He waved the thought aside. "I send a deputy with you to Launceston and it costs a mint. I'd look like a fool: no poster out on ye, no nothing Best we use the mail to learn the rights of the whole business."

"But, Mr. Waddel, that will take days!"

"Oh aye, that's what's bothering me. This jail's no place for a girl like you. All I get here is niggers and drunks."

"Thank you for caring."

"See what I mean! No slave's going to say a thing like that."

"I'm doubtful of Mr. Burlow's honesty, aren't you?"

"Supposing I am! The mail will take as long to check him as it will to find out about you."

"In the meantime I rot in jail?" Julie smiled wanly. "That is the expression, isn't it?"

"And it ain't that far from the truth," Waddel admitted sourly. "I'd sooner put Burlow inside instead of you." He suddenly brightened as though just glimpsing daylight. "There's a State Farm for Women. It's just up the road."

Julie did not like the sound of any of it. She kept silent.

"It's probably no picnic, but ye'd have women tending ye. Better than this place. Might get an answer in a week?"

"If you won't set me free, Sheriff. I'm your prisoner. You must lock me up wherever you deem best."

"Should have thought of it before. But we've time to drive out there tonight. It's just a couple of miles." Waddel looked at Julie uncertainly and opened a drawer.

She might have known! Julie began to feel that metal possessed an affinity for her. She held out her hands without protest. She was tired.

"I've got to put these on you, Miss Lindley. It's the rules that all prisoners in transit be gyved." He locked the handcuffs on her wrists awkwardly as though he seldom used them. "If it makes any difference, I wish I didn't have to use them on you."

"It doesn't," Julie said indifferently. "All I want to do right now is get some sleep."

The Prison Farm for Women was not pleased with Julie. The Matron had been thinking of bed, and the wardress had supposed her duties over for the night. Neither of them approved her beauty or her expensive clothes. They obviously considered her status as a runaway slave absurd. Waddel got his papers signed as quickly as possible and made his escape. He even forgot his handcuffs. Julie still wore them.

"Could I have these off please?" She held up her chained hands.

"Shut up!"

"You call us, maam." said the Wardress. "And you speak when you're spoken to."

The Matron gave an exasperated glare all round. "You got an empty cell. Hazel?"

Hazel was exasperated too. "Only the one with the broken lock."

"That don't matter. Bring the damn girl in there. You can fix her until morning. We'll deal with her then"

"I'm sorry to be such a nuisance." Julie offered innocently. "I assure you I won't give you any trouble."

"For damn sure you won't!" The Matron disposed of her with a wave of the hand. "Get rid of the little bitch, Hazel, and let's get some sleep."

The cell was small. It was clean It was unpleasantly antiseptic. "Get them clothes off -- what's your name? Julie?"

The newly created convict held up fettered hands.

"Oh shit!" Hazel fumbled and found a key. "Get to it, girl. Strip."

"Everything?"

"Ain't that what I said!"

Julie stripped. It seemed she was to be forever grateful to Mrs. Hammet for that initial training in nakedness. She was tossed a scrappy cotton nightgown.

"Gimme' your hands."

"Please, must I be handcuffed? I won't try to escape and I'm very well mannered," Julie protested. She was weary of chains.

Hazel looked at her as though she was a species from a foreign planet. "Didn't you hear? Ain't no lock on the door. And, what's more, I don't want no lip."

Julie held out her hands.

The Wardress looked beneath the narrow cot. "Well, thank goodness," she exclaimed thankfully as she dragged into view a shackle and chain. "Here, stick your foot out. Whichever one you like."

The captive did a quick calculation and offered her left. The cold metal felt familiar as it circled her ankle and gripped and clicked.

"Water and slops." Hazel indicated two pails, one with a lid. "You make trouble you'll be sorry." She departed huffily. The lantern went with her.

Julie stood desolate. She kicked her fettered foot. It quickly snubbed. Feeling beneath the cot she found the ring set in the concrete. She could forget escape. It says much for her descent into slavery that she was able to get beneath the single blanket and go instantly to sleep.

Morning brought indifferent food, release from her chains, and an escort to the washroom by Hazel. The Matron was already holding the hose. "Off with it, girl."

Julie's nakedness, revealed in the full light of day, received an almost awed reception. "Well, I'll be damned," from the Matron.

"The little bitch's been whipped half to death," from Hazel.

"You still want to tell us you ain't no proper runaway?" the Matron demanded triumphantly.

"Ain't no fine lady ever gonna be marked up like that," Hazel chuckled. "Whoever done that to you knew what they was about. Look, Bess, they even got her tits and her cunt."

The two harpies gloated. Julie knew herself that they certainly were a badge of slavery - her wounds. In the time since they had been etched upon her flesh, her stripes had turned to varying colors. She wore a veritable spectrum of punishment. She miserably consigned herself to the prison farm for an indefinite stay. "You won't believe anything I say," she admitted sadly. "Sure I've been whipped, terribly whipped. But I wasn't whipped as a slave."

The Matron sighed happily. She approved of striped female flesh. "I'll let Waddel know about this," she said happily. "It'll set the old fart's mind at rest. He's been thinking you're a lost duchess or some damn fool thing."

"A pretty face sure does get the men," Hazel scorned. The Matron turned on the hose.

The Prison Farm for Women turned Julie into a Thing.

Having scarified her with very cold water and harsh soap, it tossed her a severe small tunic in lieu of clothes.

"But it's too short!" Julie protested.

Two lewd chortles disposed of her complaint. "That's so's to keep your ass handy," the Matron informed. "You don't jump when Hazel says jump, you bend over and get five. Hazel carries a right mean switch."

Julie shrugged it off. After total nakedness it was at least a partial covering... and she was the captive of women.

"Put them handcuffs back on the little bitch, Hazel." Julie made no demur. Nothing mattered She looked at her chained hands in rueful resignation.

"What d'you think now?"

Hazel considered the slender cuffed captive. "She's a damn sight too pretty for my liking, Bess. A pretty face means trouble."

"But I won't... I won't! I'll do what I'm told," Julie wailed.

"See, butter wouldn't melt in her mouth," Hazel proclaimed as though her prisoner's pathetic words had proved a point.

The Matron shrugged. "Do what you like with her. We're stuck with her for a week or two. But, for Pete's sake, don't let her get away. I'm going back to the office."

Hazel and Julie eyed each other doubtfully. They had become adversaries. "You ever had your feet chained, girl?" Hazel inquired cheerfully.

"Yes."

Julie realized instantly her honest admission had been a mistake. Hazel crowed, "And you saying you ain't no slave! You learned how to walk with chained feet then?"

"I'm afraid so."

"Don't be feared of it, girl. Saves you falling on your face."

"Please don't chain my feet. There's really no need."

Julie held up her already chained hands. "With these locked on me I can't possibly escape.

"Keep your trap shut. Pretty gal' like you could talk a man into anything. A set of shackles on them trim ankles though, that's different. I'll sleep easier knowing you've got 'em on."

There was no use arguing. Julie watched Hazel rummage in the big cupboard. Its contents was grim. The restraints selected were no better or worse than the watching girl had feared When they were safely locked on her ankles, the old familiar dejection of total helplessness settled itself upon her consciousness. She was led back to her cell. The Wardress seemed pleased that she did not stumble.

"You want to eat, gal'?"

The question seemed odd. "No thank you. I've just had breakfast."

Hazel looked at the new inmate quizzically. "You acting dumb?"

Julie smelt trouble. The metal on her limbs became doubly menacing. "I'm not sure I know what you mean. I'm really not hungry."

The older woman laughed caustically. "You ain't telling me a gal' pretty as you never had to do a bit of nibbling?"

Julie felt foolish and then disgusted. It was so blatant, such a brutal abuse of authority. And Hazel herself was not of the stuff to inspire concupiscence. 'Please, I'm just a prisoner here," she said hesitantly. "Must we speak of such things."

to me?"Well, blow me down!" Hazel professed outrage. "You uppity little trollop! You talking down

"I don't do that - if that's what you mean."

"Don't do what? Come on, Miss prissy pants, tell me?"

"I don't... I don't... Oh I don't know what ugly thing you want me to call it -- I don't service women." Julie closed her mind to memories of Crystal, and hoped her deceit did not show.

"How about men?"

"Of course not! I don't think you ought to talk to me like this."

"You don't eh! Mean to tell me you don't use your cunt or your lips? Come on - the truth now?"

"I don't do any of those things. I'm a virgin."

"With that striped hide! You've been around." Hazel smirked. "And around, and around. Look, sugar, you got a free choice here. Get under my skirts or take a little trip with me downstairs. We got a room!"

"You're saying that unless I perform an indecent act you'll hurt me?"

"Don't be so damn prissy with them words. But yes, that's what I'm saying. You want to be hurt?"

"Of course I don't."

They eyed each other in silence. The little cell was too small for Hazel and a prisoner. When the captive girl volunteered nothing, the Wardress said angrily, "Your choice, honey. Come along."

Julie walked in hobbled misery down the dreary corridor and the forbidding steps. The hand of Lawful Authority was harsh upon her arm.

It was a room of stone. An abundance of light came from barred windows high in its walls. Its single significant furnishing was a square post with a crosspiece to form a 'T'. At each end of the crosspiece was a strap and buckle. The solid structure screamed its function.

"I do declare, you girls are more damn trouble!" Hazel pursed her lips irritably. "Gimme'

those hands again."

Julie surrendered her handcuffs without gratitude. She would have preferred to wear them. She wondered what Crystal would do in her place. She did not know. She was obliged to ask herself the wisdom of heroics or the sense of a clinging to purity in the face of what she beheld. The cross was daunting. It was maliciously punitive. But she knew her answer, it was a loyalty born of her love for Crystal Eshelby. To remember Crystal, and then to look at Hazel! The surrender demanded of her was beyond 'her temperament to give.

"Strip."

The familiar word. Her chained feet did not prevent her stepping out of the Prison farm's small tunic. They did, however, effectively dampen any thought she might have of putting up a struggle. More and more Julie was coming to understand why the chaining of a girl's ankles was a convenience for her captors. Ruefully, she supposed she might approve it herself if the roles were reversed.

"Do I have to tell you what to do?"

Julie did not push what ever infinitesimal bit of luck might still exist for her. In docile but joyless obedience she faced the post and inserted a hand on either end of the cross inside the waiting circle of straps. With swift harsh motions, Hazel buckled the slim wrists tight and firm. No matter how hard she might now be whipped, the naked girl would stand helpless with arms outstretched "Feel like changing your mind?"

"I'm sorry, I just can't. Please don't whip me."

"What the hell d'you think you're fixed like that for, you stupid heifer, posing for a statue!"

Julie twisted against the straps. She knew that to be whipped like this was going to be horrible. She wanted to cry. It was all so unfair. She was beginning to believe life was no more that a girl's lips and the hole between a girl's legs, and that if she was unwilling to make them available to all and sundry she could be punished forever. As life was presenting itself to her she could imagine a girl longing to become old in order to escape the whip. But for a female slave! Perhaps this was normal.

"I'd have thought the last thing you wanted in this fix you're in was a whipping." Hazel's voice had become sober. "You've got the marks of a good one on you now, but dammit gal' don't you realize what's waiting for you when you get returned to your owner?"

Julie tried to twist in her straps. Hazel's question was one she would rather not contemplate. "You're going to get the flogging of your life, that's what. For the sort of escape you staged, no gal' is going to get less than fifty with the cat. You'll probably be branded too. Teach you a lesson."

Julie knew the statement was no exaggeration. Fifty would be the minimum. Slaves who had tried to escape were never good for anything for a week after the flogging they got as a welcome on their return. But would Crystal give it to her! Or would she be welcomed with open arms and loving lips! It was incredible but with Crystal she could not be sure. In her present dilemma, Julie deemed it best that Hazel believe she would indeed be cruelly punished. She said nothing.

"Well, not much to say, eh! Anyways you're lucky in one thing: I ain't going to use no whip on you," Hazel snickered. "I got me something better. Real humane it is. Take a look at this."

Julie looked. She had no choice. The supple heavy strap was dangled for her inspection. It was not as frightening a thing as a whip, but she liked not the look of it. It had the appearance of having been much used. It would most certainly hurt.

"Got to look after our gals." Hazel chuckled.

"Inspectors don't want no cut skin. This little beauty makes a lovely sound when it connects with a gal's rump."

The word 'Inspector' gave Julie a faint hope. "But aren't I supposed to have done something bad in order to be punished?" She asked tremulously.

"Oh, but sugar, you have." Hazel's voice oozed satisfaction. "Don't you remember your first order here: to call the Matron and I 'maam'? You haven't done it once. You're too damn anxious to be snotty to think of it."

Julie quailed. As with slavery, there would always be an answer. She looked at the hard cold eyes surveying her and swallowed apprehensively.

"Paying a bit of attention now, eh." Hazel had seen the flicker of fear. "Let me tell you something, sugar. You can offer to munch my cunt now until you're blue in the face and it won't save you from a single stroke."

Julie was searching her mind for a plea when the strap struck her across the ripest curve of her bottom. The crack was indeed resounding. It was a frightening sound like a peal of evil laughter to accompany the pain. Despite stoic intent she tugged wildly at her strapped wrists and writhed in anguish.

"Warms you up a bit more than you thought, eh, gal'!"

Hazel delivered another ringing impact, this time across the already wealed shoulders Julie moaned.

"Glad you've got a tongue, sugar. I'll have you screaming in a minute. Try this one."

When the screams got too hard to contain, Julie pealed them out. Why cherish her misery! It proved nothing. The strap was worse than she had supposed. A quite new and different kind of pain. Each blow sent scorching waves of agony in every direction through her punished flesh. Finally her tongue spoke against her will.

"No more! Oh please not again! Please stop. Ohhhh!"

"Makes a nice introduction to The Farm," Hazel commented conversationally. She did not even pause. The strap slapped in delight on Julie's nudity.

"It's too awful. I can't bear it."

"You're doing fine, sugar."

The strap splatted where it chose. Held only by her wrists, Julie was able to provide writhings and twistings and the rattle of her ankle chain in a manner deeply gratifying to the woman who strapped her. "Which would you say you prefer, sugar, this or a whip?" Hazel sounded clinically interested.

"I don't know. I really don't - oh stop ... please!"

"I'd like an answer. For the record, you might say. Fine intelligent gal' like you ought to come by an opinion. I'll just keep letting you have it. I don't mind the work; it's in a good cause."

Julie knew there would be no right answer for her.

"The whip is the worst." she said bleakly, uncertain if she had lied.

"Glad to hear it, gal'. Sort of makes me feel easier about using this strap. I can hack away at you for an hour with a clear conscience."

The blows continued. The sound of some was as potent as Julie's scream.

The girl strapped to the cross did not faint.

Sheriff Waddel deputized a woman as Julie's escort back to Beverleigh. Julie knew he meant well, but she would have preferred a man. She had had her fill of female authority at The Prison Farm for

Women. She wanted no more. Her eleven days there had been one long misery of chains and punishments.

"This here Miss Crystal Eshelby says to send you back. She guarantees all costs and expenses. Here, Miss, read for yourself." Waddel passed the missive across his desk to the handcuffed girl.

Julie read the familiar script. Crystal's letter was curt and businesslike. She urgently required the return of one slave girl (white) answering to the name of Julie. She would pay all costs. If the Law required her to pay a reward she would pay that too. Julie was glad the letter was not addressed to her. It was too cold.

"I'm damn sorry," Waddel looked at her pityingly. "I suppose you know you'll be flogged?"

"Yes, I know."

She longed to show him her body now. It was cruelly bruised. Hazel had strapped her more than once. But what was the use! For better or for worse she longed to get back to Launceston. No more delays.

Marjorie Moffat was a surprise. A youngish widow, personable, poised. Obviously strong and competent. "You'll be alright with Marge. She'll look after you, Miss," Waddel encouraged.

The two women shook hands. It was absurd but it happened. Julie had never shaken hands while wearing handcuffs. It felt strange. "I shall keep them on you, dear," Marge said without rancour. She omitted the amendment that it would be for Julie's own good.

The train tickets were a shock. The prisoner looked at her smiling escort askance. "I'll sit in public like this!" She held up her joined hands. "For everyone to see."

"Any other suggestions, dear?"

There were none. The carriage was gone. Julie's own clothes had been returned to her. A mental vision of a pretty girl fashionably attired sitting in full public view with her hands chained together was so utterly shaming she could not bear the thought. "I'll give you my word - oh please?"

"I can't take it, dear. There's regulations. I'm supposed to put something on your feet but I'm not going to. We can put a shawl or something over your hands."

"Everyone will soon guess. Oh Marge'!"

Marjorie Moffat looked at her charge with pity. "There is something." she admitted hesitantly. "I've never used them, but perhaps -"

"Anything!" Julie wailed. She raised her hands and gazed at her handcuffs bitterly. "I can't... oh, I just can't sit in a train wearing these."

"We've got to go back to the hotel to get your things, and I've a room there." Marjorie Moffat smiled at her disturbed prisoner sympathetically. "I've got an idea."

A shawl, loosely covering her chained wrists got them to the hotel room without comment. Julie's face was scarlet. She wryly recognized the inconsistency of her shame. She who had been a chained and naked slave, to be distraught now over the clasp of a pair of handcuffs! Yet to be seen as she was! It was unthinkable.

"It's the only thing I can think of except the way you are," the Deputy mused. "You absolutely must be confined - it's my job. I like you a lot and I feel sorry for you. But after all, I don't know you, do I!"

"You're being sweet to me."

"You may not think so, dear. But you can have a choice." She grinned ruefully. 'I'm not sure which one I'd take if it was me."

Julie looked doubtfully at what lay upon the bed. She glimpsed its purpose but found no comfort.

"It fastens round the waist of a female prisoner." Marg' explained. "But the only way I'll use it on you is to have you naked to the hips."

Julie's eyes widened in pure horror.

"Don't be alarmed. But here's the offer: You wear a skirt, stockings and shoes, everything nice and normal below. But you're bare above beneath a cape that fastens at your neck and covers you and the restraint completely."

"But why bare?" Julie was lost again.

"To keep you from asking for help or allowing men to be attentive. The last thing you'll want is for the cape to be disarranged or removed. It will keep you a good little girl every bit as much as will those hobbles. That's what they call them."

"I know you're being kind." Julie searched her mind for alternatives but could find none. "Could we ... could we try it?"

"You're really very sweet." said Marjorie Moffat.

They worked together at the job of Julie's confinement. "Mmmmm, you've got lovely breasts, dear. But thank heavens they won't show under the cloak. Now, the belt laces like a corset. After I've knotted it and clipped the ends its hard to undo - safer on you than a buckle. My, my, what women wouldn't do for a waist like yours. Good thing this is the smallest size."

The leather band about the prisoner's taut tummy was tight. She would not be able to move it. Standing passively half naked as the Deputy's strong fingers did their work, Julie wondered if perhaps the simple handcuff might not have been best after all. When her wrist was firmly placed and firmly strapped at the side of the belt she shuddered.

"Want me to drop this?" Marge's question was solicitous.

"No, I'm being silly. It's just - well, I suppose it's so new and I feel so ridiculous. Please finish fitting me."

It was soon done. Julie looked down and tested a binding such as she had never heard of. The belt or band was wide so that her confined fingers could do no more than explore its shining surface. The straps that buckled a wrist on each side were soft and broad. Her hands could touch nothing, nor could they reach each other. She could contrive small motions with her elbows, but that was all. Her semi nakedness would deter her from doing that. The whole effect was to rob her of her hands and arms and freedom but to leave her in perfect comfort. Her middle was cinched in tightly but nothing hurt. She went and stood before the mirror. Now that it was fastened upon her the restraint even possessed a faintly aesthetic neatness.

"What do you think, dear?"

"Oh yes, I'll wear it."

There was something feminine in Julie's acceptance of the restraint as opposed to the cold metal of the cuffs. The straps and belt confined her far more stringently than did the bit of chain but she found them less demeaning and they had come to her from a woman! When the cape was clasped around her neck all doubt fled. This was the manner of her return to slavery. "Thank you," she breathed gratefully. "Oh, thank you."

The Deputy dropped her handcuffs in the bag. "I'll have to feed you and tend to you, dear. Don't worry. I'm expert."

"I don't expect to be hungry." said Julie sadly.

"Will the prisoner be subject to the usual penalties for a runaway, Miss Eshelby?" Marjorie Moffat enquired forthrightly.

"Naturally. It would be unfair to the other slaves if she were exempt - bad for discipline. Have you a concern in the matter, Mrs. Moffat?" Crystal's voice lacked emotion.

"It is just that she has been so sweet, such a model prisoner ... I'm sorry. We are warned against involvements."

"She is the sweetest child I have ever known." The Mistress of Launceston turned to where the re-captured runaway stood awaiting disposal. She was still tightly strapped. "If you'll allow me I would like to purchase from you those things she is fastened with."

Julie had never felt more inadequate, or more lost. The Randall rebellion had passed without a trace. Everything she had yet seen indicated a return to normalcy. The staff had eyed her with pity but said no word. Crystal Eshelby was in full command, more poised than ever. For the benefit of the Deputy she was very much the Grand Dame. Her eyes had glinted approval when the cape had been whisked away to reveal her errant slave semi-nude and firmly strapped.

Marjorie Moffat was impressed. Launceston was magnificent, its owner regally exquisite. "The harness can be included in the Statement. I am glad you approve." she paused hesitantly, "My brief knowledge of the girl inclines me to ask for clemency." Again a hesitation. "She is so remarkably well behaved."

"I am sure she was -- strapped tight!"

"Even before, she gave no trouble."

The Mistress smiled. "Julie has that effect on all of us, Mrs. Moffat."

"She is so young, and she's white. The things done to runaway slaves are very terrible, are they not?"

"She will be soundly flogged before the entire staff. Then branded."

Julie flinched. Crystal sounded convincing. And yet...

But her owner's next words caused the helpless slave girl to quail inwardly in a terrible fear.

"You see, Mrs. Moffat, Julie did not only run away herself. She seduced a negro survivor into accompanying her. She also stole a pair of horses and a carriage, and money."

It was a pronouncement of doom, the misinterpretation she had dreaded. If Crystal truly believed that she and Randall had abandoned her and fled from Launceston in a unity of purpose all their own, then indeed she was lost. To be rejected in favor of a runaway liaison with a male negro slave was a thing a woman such as Crystal Eshelby could not be expected to forgive.

"I am indeed sorry! I had no idea." Mrs. Moffat was embarrassed.

"Would you care to stay over and witness Julie's punishment?"

Again, the listening slave was unsure. There was that in her Mistress's voice! A glint of humour, or her own brand of cynicism! It was hard to tell. She listened dolefully to Marjorie Moffat's businesslike disposal of the matters in hand and her brief farewell. Wanly she accepted a parting kiss that could have been warmer.

She knew herself fallen from grace. While the Mistress of Launceston did the honours with her departing guest Julie the slave stood alone in the office, half naked, strapped up tight, condemned.

When Crystal returned, she stood a moment in the doorway enigmatically eyeing her delinquent

slave. Suddenly she burst into an explosion of loving arms and ardent lips. "You darling, darling, darling girl!" She hugged and kissed and squeezed until both of them were breathless. "Oh, I've missed you. I've wanted you so."

"But Mistress!" Julie was dazed with happiness.

Crystal laughed gaily. "Your punishments! Pouf! They were for poor Mrs. Moffat. She is nice. She is good. She will be happier if she knows you a bad, bad girl brought to justice."

Wonderful Crystal. She was always right.

"Unstrap me, darling. I want to hold you and love you to bits. Oh. Crystal, I'm so happy!"

"What! Take off that lovely harness!" Crystal pretended to be shocked. "Here. I'll show you what I will do." Her hands busied themselves so that a moment later the slave girl stood naked but still constrained. "Oh darling ... those awful marks!"

Julie told her story, and then: "Let me loose, Crystal darling. I can't love you properly without hands."

"Yes you can. I'm never, never going to take those lovely straps and that beautiful belt off you. I adore you like that: and I've bought the thing, so we may as well use it."

"Oh darling!" Julie's wail was not entirely anguished.

"Yes, you'll wear it always. I've just decided. I'll feed you, and Felicia will do the rest. You're gorgeous."

"But Crystal -" The slave girl was close to tears of joy.

"No buts, you precious slave."

Crystal clutched the beloved nudity, then led her slave girl to her own bedroom. For hours they writhed together on the bed and on the floor. Never once were Julie's hands returned to her, they remained safely buckled. She did not mind. Never once did she mention the helplessness that seemed inapplicable to their act of love.

Afterwards they talked, replete, happy, fulfilled. They examined each other's weals. Both nudities were well marked.

"The slaves told me," Crystal explained. "Told me your Plan and why you crept away. How you wanted to free me."

"It could have gone on for days or weeks, Mistress. I couldn't bear to see you like that."

Crystal kissed her. "My clever, little slave girl! And my darling Pet." Her voice sobered. "I can't forgive Randall though. There's a warrant and a search out on him."

Julie had expected as much. But surely Randall would be safely in the North by now. She devoutly hoped so. "Don't blame him for the carriage and the horses." she pleaded. "It was my idea. I'd pay you for them if slaves were allowed to have money."

"Well they used to belong to you, Pet. Not that it changes the legal aspect. I'll take the cost out of your pretty hide after the marks you've got now fade. Happy?"

"Wonderfully, beautifully happy. Mistress."

And so it was! They were both happy beyond dreams.

The days passed in pure joy. Julie no longer wondered whether she was slave or free. She was in limbo, nothing mattered except their adoration of each other. She became as accustomed to wearing her harness as she had been with the chains upon her ankles, mostly she was unaware of it as she was unaware of constant nudity. The idyll might have gone on forever had it not been for a caprice of the

Mistress.

"Oh Crystal!" Julie knew herself forever making exclamations. Being owned and totally subject to another's will seemed to generate them. "Oh, Crystal darling, not the cage!"

"And why not! It will be full of memories. Pet."

"All alone. All night?"

"I can't very well share it with you, darling."

"I suppose not. Do I get my hands back?"

"No."

Julie sighed. It was a beautiful game, even if sometimes it hurt. "I'd have thought this was the first thing you'd dispose of?"

"I thought so too. But it's a work of art, and damn useful. Felicia hates it. All I have to do is mention the Cage and she perks up. I intend to put you in there from time to time. There's something delightfully appropriate about it."

"Do I get in there now?"

"Of course. It's evening. They'll only stare at you an hour or two. You're a lucky girl. You get a blanket to lie on."

Julie watched the unlocking of the door. She knew it useless to argue. And if it was to be considered a punishment at all it was certainly very mild. She was half inclined to share her Mistress's giggle. She stepped obediently inside the bars and knew an absurd sense of coming home. Even the closing and locking of the door was without menace. She watched her Mistress walk away, then kicked out flat the blanket so lovingly provided. She looked at the usual audience of children, and stuck out her tongue at them. If she had possessed her hands she might have fingered her nose.

The touch came in the dead of night just as Randall's had done a century past. Julie sprang awake only in time to receive the gag, a bit of rag stuffing her cheeks and compressing her tongue, a cord bound it tight. She had no chance to see her attacker before the blanket enveloped her head and shoulders and was also secured with a band of rope. Whoever the enemy was, Marjorie Moffat's harness had delivered Julie into his hands. She was picked up and carried a long way, then set on her feet and propelled forward by a hard grasp upon her arm.

It was a long walk. Sometimes she was picked up and carried, presumably over difficult terrain. No word was spoken. The naked girl was desperately afraid, but she was also furiously angry at her own impotence. It was absurd and unfair that she be so neatly packaged for abduction. Her kidnapper had not even had to exert himself to make her prisoner. When, for the last time, she was carried and put down it was with a board floor beneath her feet and the odors of human habitation. The blanket was loosened and tossed aside as a mocking male voice declaimed:

"Miss Julia Lindley, I believe."

It was Lionel Eshelby.

Julie's courage soared. She glared at the cynically smiling face revealed by the dawn light that had caught up with them in their journey. When the gag was plucked from her mouth she refused to speak.

"Not pleased to see me?" He cocked a quizzical eye at his captive. "Surely this humble dwelling is better than a cage?"

"Well, what are you going to do with me?" She tried to sound bored.

"Whip you and fuck you." he said cheerfully. "To what better use can a slave girl be put."

"Crystal will kill you."

"No she won't. She'll give me my half of Launceston to get you back. You don't know it, poppet, but my beloved sister needs you more than you need her."

"I'll be found. What is this place?"

"A shanty I've known about for a long time. Very secluded. I've furbished it up a bit for your benefit. Lovely collection of chains and whips. There's a willow close by; cuts nice limber switches. They'll take that bored look off your face."

"Don't tell me this kidnapping happened by chance?"

"No, poppet, I've had it in mind from the first. I've got a friend or two at Launceston and Beverleigh. A few gifts and they think I'm less of a bastard than Crystal. Just been biding my time."

"Do I have anything to say about your fun and games?"

"Not really. Unless you want to invent new ones."

"I'm tired. May I sit down?"

"I do believe I should warm your seat first."

Julie sighed. Here it was again! She was frightened, but not to the point of panic. Lionel might be manageable, he was predictable up to a degree. But Julie had an unhappy memory of his features when he watched a girl disciplined. She and Crystal had hurt his pride too often. He would believe he had old scores to settle. The harness round her waist held her helpless for his pleasure.

"What's that thing you're laced into?"

"Crystal liked it. She bought it for me."

"Too prissy, sweetheart. Nothing like a good bit of rope to make a girl pay attention."

"Lionel, you're gloating and enjoying yourself. Go ahead. Be a cad. But can't we be civilized. You don't have to keep me fastened. And may I please have something to wear?"

"Two negatives, poppet. You'd run like blazes if I gave you the chance, and I enjoy you naked. You're damn beautiful."

"If you'll give me some sort of covering I'll take it off from time to time to appease your lust."

"Well said! It would be a prelude to your fuck."

"Lionel, I'm a virgin."

"Ridiculous at your age. Will you want it lying down on your own, or shall I stake you out?"

Julie knew he might do it. Certainly he could. With words her only defense she was cruelly vulnerable. Her harness was no longer a bond of love. It held her wrists immobile and delivered her to him. She scorned to reply.

"Bend over please while I select a suitable instrument."

Julie leaped out of the open door and ran. Lionel captured her within a hundred yards and led her back with a firm grip on her hair.

"See what I mean, poppet. You're not to be trusted." But she had seen the locale. Scrub trees and brush.

A bit of wasteland. No tracks or roads. Lionel's choice was clever. She stood, panting, in the middle of the big room with its stove and table and chairs. Dolefully she watched her captor select a thin crop.

"There's a motion before the house, Julie. Something about bending over?" Lionel was loving every minute.

"Lionel, I suppose you can do whatever you like with me. I seem to be quite helpless. But I'm damned if I'd volunteer to bend over or lie down or any other beastly thing you think up. For goodness sake be half decent with me."

"You mean insert it gently, sweets! That comes later. For now, I want you to bend well forward and protrude that insolent bottom."

"I won't."

The cut was across the front of her thighs. Julie had seen it coming but had been unable to turn fast enough. The pain was excruciating. It was one spot on her never previously punished. While she twisted in agony Lionel managed a full stroke across her bottom. She yelped in distress and backed against a wall.

"Perhaps you glimpse the advantages of obedience, Julie darling. Those two don't count."

"Lionel, don't be so beastly to me. That hurt like fury. I've never done anything like that to you."

His grim chuckle was bitter. "Oh sure! Just help big sister put me down for the last fifteen years."

Julie knew his trauma. Knew, too, she was surrogate for the Mistress of Launceston who the weakling brother could not touch. He would beat her now as he wished. There would be no escape. Perhaps after he had expended his cruelty he might relent.

"Lionel, if it gives you happiness to hit me with that wicked thing I'll try and bend over for you. But it hurts so much I'm sure I won't be able to keep still."

"Is that a request to be rigidly bound, sweets"

"Oh alright!" Ungraciously, the captive bent low and extruded her bottom. "There, how's that."

The blow sliced her instantly. It contained all the bitterness and frustrations of Lionel's futile life. It drove the helpless girl to her knees moaning. Her hands tugged frantically at the straps holding them at her sides. "Oh Lionel... Lionel!" Her naked breasts heaved gaspingly.

"Ups-a-daisy. No penalty."

"I can't. Oh, Lionel, you've no idea how that hurts. It just curls me up inside. Please! If you have to do it, please, then hurt me some way I can bear it."

"I will count to five, sweetheart."

The glance Julie slanted at her childhood playmate was a mixture of fury and appeal. But inside she was afraid. She was so utterly delivered into hands that might know no mercy. In anguished acceptance of her helplessness she got to her feet and again bent to invite pain.

But it was the same thing again. Lionel hit his slave with such brutality that she screamed and fell writhing. He stood, looking down at her, his eyes glowing. He was reaping his harvest of the years on Julie's flesh.

"It's no good, I just can't," the naked girl sobbed. "I would if I could. Oh, Lionel, I think I know what this means to you and I'd go along with you on it if I could. But I can't. I'm only a girl... not a horse."

"If you were a horse, darling, I'd use a milder whip."

"Use a milder one on me. Maybe then I could stand still."

"Would you sooner be triced up and flogged? There's some rafters to hang you from."

"Lionel, I'm trying to be rational. Don't you think I understand the spot I'm in. You've got me. I almost have to obey you. If only you'll punish me within some sort of tolerance I'll try and help. I mean, I'll try and obey and not scream and make a fuss any more than I can help."

"Obedience." Lionel savoured the word. "Come here and turn 'round."

Fearfully, she did as he asked. A few moments later her hands were free for the first time in many days. Marjorie Moffat's harness was tossed aside. Her tummy and her wrists proclaimed its intimacy.

"Get our breakfast, slave. And make it good."

Without the harness and strapped bands Julie felt doubly naked. Human reactions are forever strange. Being completely free, the impulse to leap through the door again was overpowering. It seemed almost immoral not to. But Lionel would catch her and punish her brutally. She would await a better chance. Doubtfully, she turned her attention to the stove.

"I suppose I should institute penalties for sloppy work," Lionel mused happily. "Never a kindness to pamper a slave."

"Am I allowed to ask where things are?"

"No. Find them yourself. And by the way, call me Master."

Julie flinched. It was going to be bad. The stove was obstinately belching smoke.

"Never heard of flues and dampers and drafts, slave?"

Lionel inquired caustically.

Julie's hands flew at a foreign task At least it felt good to have the use of them. "I was never a kitchen maid, Master."

"Do I detect sarcasm?"

"No, Master. I'm just not well trained."

Lionel joyfully lashed the air with his crop.

"Wonderful trainer, this. The coffee had better be drinkable and the toast unburned."

"I'll try, Master."

"Bend over, Julie."

"But what have I done?" Julie's cry was anguished.

"You condescended to merely try. A slave's answer would have been a firm affirmative ... with emphasis."

"But, Lionel - Master, I'm doing something I don't know much about!"

"You should be grateful for the tuition. The friend I hold in my right hand will be your inspiration. Bend."

Julie felt only exasperation. She was trying hard to please. The silly oaf lolled there in his chair laying down his stupid rules. She was sure that any woman who had to stop in the middle of getting a meal

in order to then be whipped by some arrogant male would feel a similar irritation. "Couldn't I finish getting breakfast first, please?" She pleaded. Then added, as an afterthought:

" ... Master?"

"You will now get two instead of one."

It was hopeless! Julie bent. The crop whistled and cut so that she stumbled and cried out. But she managed to receive the two awful strokes without adding to the score.

"Does it occur to you to thank me?"

Julie longed to slay him. "Thank you for whipping me, Master."

Lionel visibly glowed, preening himself mentally. His unwilling slave wondered if she could escape the worst by gorging him with her shame. Her bottom burned fearfully. When she placed the food upon the table and filled the coffee cups, Lionel produced a piece of rope. "Stand still and face away from me, Poppet."

It took him but a minute to hobble her. Its very simplicity was demeaning. A piece of rope tightly and intricately knotted round her ankles with a span of about eighteen inches joining the two. It was thus a farmer hobbled a horse.

"You may share my humble meal, slave. I cannot yet vouch for its quality." Lionel was in his element.

Julie sat, burningly aware of her roped ankles. She wondered why he had not used a chain.

"It's to keep you on your toes, Julie dear." Lionel had read her thought. "You'll be constantly thinking you can untie them and run. Gives you a constructive interest."

"Lionel, why prove Crystal right when she calls you a bastard?"

"Do you call me one?"

"No..."

"You said that with some doubt. You also forgot to address me as Master. Stand up and bend over."

What a way to eat breakfast! Dejectedly, the slave girl positioned herself and clutched her roped ankles. The cut bit her scorchingly.

"Thank you, Master."

"I should think so! All this trouble..." Lionel resumed his seat with an injured air that belied the joy in his eyes. "Sit down, girl."

Gingerly, his slave obeyed. Her bottom hurt. Sitting on it did not help. "Keeps you in a proper state of mind," Lionel advised sagely. He had not failed to detect her wince. "By the way, love, has your cunt been whipped?"

"Yes - Master."

"Nearly forgot, didn't you! Did you enjoy it?"

"No, Master."

"The friction didn't juice it up for you!"

"Lionel! Must you! Oh damn!"

"You learn slowly, poppet. I'll demonstrate my affection for you by not punishing that one."

"Thank you. Master." Julie's tone was sincere. Her bottom was pleading for caution.

"You're going to wash and scrub and floor, y'know." Julie knew that had it not been for the rope on her feet, she would have runand fought with all her strength. Instead,she wept. She buried her face in her hands and gave herself over to grief. It was all too much. "You're going to break me, I know. Break me bit by bit," she sobbed. "I'm not going to fight. Go ahead and kill me. That's the way it will end using that whip on me the way you do." She allowed her desolation full rein, uncaring.

A woman's tears are potent. Lionel shifted uncomfortably. "Finish your breakfast." he said, upset. "I'm not going to kill you, and you know it. I'll make a slave of you, that's all."

Julie sniffed, and was thankful she had her hands.

"How long?" she asked brokenly. "You can't hide me here forever."

"I don't care. I don't know. If it's a day or a month or a year; it's all profit. I've had nothing." He eyed her assessingly. "That bending over there you, didn't take to it! I'll be more genteel."

A doubting eye raised itself above Julie's fingers. "What do you mean? It's all some sort of torture, isn't it?"

"Deal with the breakfast things. I'll show you."

Julie performed the domestic task beneath his sardonic eye. Her rope hobble was a constant warning. In stumbling she broke a dish.

"We'll include the dish in your flogging, Poppet," Lionel produced more rope. "Hold out your hands, love. You'll feel better about it if you're triced up neat and shipshape - more dignified."

"Lionel, you're going to hang me to the rafter?" Her cheeks flamed. "Before you do that, will you, may I..." He laughed delightedly. "You want to pee?"

Julie gulped despairingly. "Yes."

"It's the bushes here, y'know?"

"I know. If you'll just let me..."

He took the rope from her feet and replaced it with a length of chain on one ankle, padlocked. "There you are! Don't say I'm not a gentleman. You can approach your flogging in comfort."

Julie eyed the pile of links in puzzlement. "But why a flogging? It's a beastly word. Why? Why?"

"Because it will give me pleasure. Now, d'you want your time in the trees or not?"

"Oh yes! Oh, thank you..." Julie was still looking at the coils of metal to which her foot was padlocked. "I don't think I understand all this chain - is there something I ought to do with it?"

Her naive query intrigued him, "Do what you like with it, poppet. But you have to drag it along. It trails way out behind. You can't run. And if you don't make a show in a reasonable time I'll pull on the end that's showing and disturb your ladyship's toilette."

Julie bit her lip. He could be less kind. She turned and made her way towards the bushes. Behind her the chain uncoiled and became an increasingly inhibiting load upon her foot. There was no hope!

The two rocks were a beckoning providence. Refusing to think of consequence, Julie placed the padlock on one and struck it with the other as hard as her young strength could pound. The lock opened. She fled. Behind her the snakelike length of chain lay inert upon the ground.

It was a blind flight without direction. Lionel might have heard the impact of the rock. Her lead, at

best, would be only a few hundred yards. Her best ally would be the shielding scrub.

The swamp was a shock. A tuft of grass sank beneath her weight. She saw the ooze too late to halt. Under the spur of a doubled fear and her own impetus, she leaped from tuft to hillock like stepping stones, leaving behind the black and purple slime squeezed up by her thrusting feet. Here was one more evidence of the isolation of Lionel's shanty - no one liked a swamp!

Her heart was, pounding with a sickening fear when she reached firm ground. Looking back, she beheld the clear evidence of her flight. Lionel would see it to! He would suppose she had continued on in the same direction. In hopeof deception she changed her course.

Julie had run some distance before she heard Lionel's shout. Fearfully, she looked back, but her pursuer was off to one side, gesticulating and shouting as he ran. Julie did not pause. His words had been only a cry above her own laboured breathing. It was not until his shouted commands altered in tempo and volume that she again looked over her shoulder. This time she stopped.

Her new direction had flanked the swamp so that it lay between her and the man who would make her prisoner. Lionel was already knee deep in the oily ooze. Nature's trap for the unwary was evidently far more sinister there than at the point of her own alarm. With breasts heaving and eyes dilated Julie beheld the last moments of Lionel's life. Floundering he sank. A moment after his head had disappeared the quiet of the wood re-asserted itself. A rolled patch of dirty black water gathered to

mark the spot. That was all.

Julie made her way back to the shanty. She was dazed.

What had happened was horrible beyond words. But she was free! Lionel and his passing was like a bad dream, a nightmare. She was naked but without a bond. She would search the small edifice for clothes, for food, and hopefully for a direction that would lead her back to Launceston or any human contact. Her mind a turmoil of conflicting emotions, she pushed open the door.

A man turned at her entry. It was Randall.

It was warm and comforting and deeply satisfying in Randall's arms. Upon the shanty's only bed, Julie cradled her head upon a muscular arm. She had never known such happiness. The day and the night had passed as fleeting centuries of joy. They had made their discovery of each other with that unique sense of magic that comes to few, and to them but once.

"Wern't no way I was goin' to leave yo' Julie, gal'." That he was risking capture and perhaps death flooded her mind with wonder. Because of loyalty.

"Sold them horses and the coach. Got me enough. Folks at Beverleigh tells me 'bout Lionel and his shanty..."

"Can we stay her. Randall?"

"'T'ain't safe. Julie. Best we take what we can and git to the railroad. Us can play the same game. Ain't got no coach so I'm your foreman."

It would be so easy! Julie could see how easy it would be. With Randall all problems slid away.

They heard the noise too late. Startled they looked up from the bed. Two men were surveying them with an equal astonishment from the open door. One was Sheriff Dureault, the other wore theuniform of a Captain of the Militia.

"Good morning, Miss Lindley." The Captain's voice held all the contempt of the Confederacy.

"Don't try nothin', boy!" The sheriff's gun was pointed at Randall's chest.

Naked! Both of them naked - and in bed! All the implications and interpretations fell upon Julie's horrified awareness like the weight of the world. Again the abyss!

Randall in trousers, his own. She in a strip of sheet wound 'round her nakedness and pinned above her breasts.

"Ain't got but one pair, Cap'n." Dureault produced handcuffs.

"Put them on the negro, the man."

There was a troop of soldiers. Several had entered the big room where Julie stood, steeped deep in misery. They surveyed their captured quarry with approving interest. At a gesture from their officer, one of them found cord and took Julie's arm. His voice was gloatingly malicious. "Hands behind your back, nigger girl."

Without protest, Julie allowed herself to be bound. She knew the bite of rope on her wrists was but the prelude. Randall was safely chained and had been taken outside. She held back the words she longed to utter, they would only fall shattered against these men's certainty of her turpitude. Their eyes were hurt and hostile - they saw her as white.

"Don't punish him. The fault was mine." Her eyes pleaded with them piteously.

"If you say so, maam." The Sheriff was cold and distant and puzzled.

"Tie her elbows too. Compton. This girl's proved herself slippery." The Captain was taking no chances.

How familiar the pain! And the wrenched shoulders.

How cruelly intimate the ropes within her flesh. The ropes that denied her all possibility of freeing herself. Julie wished the Sheriff had brought a second pair of handcuffs.

The soldiers left. Julie stood in the center of the floor, inadequately clad, without defense, helpless. The two men surveyed her from across the table. She realized in a cold desolation that she was a prisoner before the bar. Believing herself already condemned she had nothing to lose.

"You don't need to have me tied like this." She looked at them accusingly.

"That's my decision." The Captain's voice was brusk.

"Your record, either for a slave or for a white woman, is becoming outrageous. You can blame yourself," he sneered openly. "I'd chain your feet if you didn't have a walk ahead."

"Surely we can impose some trust in Miss Lindley. After all, Captain, she is a white lady..." Dureault was fighting a rearguard action.

"The woman once named Julia Lindley is a negress," the Captain said decisively. "She is also a slave, a runaway slave. Her actions prove both counts."

Julie twisted miserably in her new bondage. "My elbows then? Oh please, it hurts so much with my elbows tied like this."

"You could have thought of that sooner. You are getting what mercy you deserve."

"What are you going to do with us?"

"I notice you use the plural." The soldier's voice was caustic. "The man Randall may be subject to execution. Certainly he will be flogged and branded as a runaway." The hard male eyes surveyed her speculatively. "As for yourself, I would suppose the flogging and branding mandatory on this second occasion. You would seem to have a compulsion to delinquency. After the spectacle we beheld on arrival I am much inclined to convene a military Court here at this moment and execute your sentence before my assembled troop."

Julie flinched. She was face to face with the impossible. The sentence would nearly kill any girl. She turned stricken eyes on the Sheriff.

"I suppose Miss Eshelby, as Julie's owner, would enter the picture?" he ventured.

"I'm afraid so." the Captain admitted. "Since she is so close we will deliver the girl to her. If we were a County distant I'd lace this wench's back for her without a qualm. My main concern now is that some misplaced kindness will prevent Miss Eshelby inflicting the appropriate punishment --"

"Isn't that her affair?" Julie demanded angrily.

"You see! This girl is wanton. She's convinced her white skin protects her." The Captain sounded righteous. He fixed his captive with an accusing stare. "It is unjust that you should escape retribution, young woman. It sets a bad example. The blacks have a right to expect you to receive what anyone of them would be sentenced to in similar circumstances. If I was to learn that your owner erred on the side of lenience I'd be inclined to take the matter of your punishment to Court. There are Laws."

Julie was angry and without hope. She tried to shrug but achieved only a fluttering of her wracked shoulders. "All this talk of flogging! Is that all you can think of with a girl! You enjoy it."

"I enjoy justice."

He had become pompous. Julie refused to answer, but looked above his head into a dubious future. The Sheriff shuffled awkwardly.

"You spoke of Mr. Lionel Eshelby, girl. What is your story?"

In simple words, Julie told them.

They listened with few interjections. When she fell silent the two men looked at each other questioningly. The Captain rendered his verdict for both.

"Poppycock!"

"It's true, every word!"

"Arrant nonsense. Randall engineered the whole thing with your help."

"The harness then! The harness Miss Eshelby bought for me - d'you think Randall would have brought me here in that! Look at it - there in the corner."

Her vehemence impressed. Dureault went and retrieved the discarded restraint and examined it. "It's what she says," he admitted. It matches what Miss Eshelby told us."

"But proves nothing. Randall could have carried her. He's big enough. Or they brought it for some reason of their own. If we are to place any credence in the Lionel Eshelby myth, then I would say we also have to examine the hypothesis of murder. His murder by them."

A cold hand on her spine! Vulnerable from every quarter. Julie longed for her Mistress. Crystal would know what to do with this hostile military creature. But even as she thought of her beloved she was suddenly enveloped in an awful realization of the closing of a trap, the trap of circumstance that had her in its grip. These two men could not be blamed for their judgement of her. They had seen what they had seen. They had found her without credible defense. It could be the same with Crystal. Crystal was human and fallible; her hate for Randall and her longing for revenge for the bitter shame he had inflicted upon her body might blind her to all else. Perhaps, after what these men would have to tell, her Mistress would become an avenging fury.

The Sheriff nodded. He was examining the thing in his hands. "I've seen these advertised," he said slowly. "They're practical and humane. I wonder if it wouldn't look a bit better all 'round if we used it instead of those ropes?"

"Dammit man, just because she's a pretty face -"

"No. But there's such a thing as chivalry. I'd face Miss Eshelby easier with the girl laced into this rather than roped like a squaw."

"Oh very well." The Captain was contemptuous. "Fix it on her yourself. I'm not going to."

More shame! Julie forthrightly ended their debate as to whether the belt should go over her sheet or upon her naked skin. "Half the men in the County have looked at me naked," she said impatiently. "You call me a negress. Untie my arms and I'll remove this scrap that covers me."

In silence it was done. Naked, Julie turned her back to them and helped the sheriff with his self-imposed task. She was immensely grateful to him. Marjorie Moffat's harness was going to be heaven compared to the elbow ropes that had wealed her flesh. Under the critical eye of the Military the laces and the straps were drawn as tight as was possible. Julie was helpless but no longer in pain.

"Tear that damn sheet and knot a bit of it 'round her hips," the Captain demanded. "I don't want the whole troop with a hard on. So far as her tits go she might as well be as bare as any other nigger gal'."

Julie was amused at Dureault's heightened color as he made the white skirt fast upon her loins. Her own cheeks flamed at the Captain's next injunction.

"Loop a rope round her neck. The bitch can walk back behind a horse. She needn't think she'll ride like a lady."

The sheriff did not demur, but contented himself by saying: "I'm sorry, Miss." As he noosed her neck and made it secure. Julie caught his eyes and said fervently, "Thank you, I'm grateful." They walked out into the sunlight.

The Troop was intrigued with their female captive.

Julie remained scarlet as their eyes sought her breasts and their lips made comment. They were equally amused by her harness. It was an innovation. It rendered her helpless and amenable but distorted nothing. It was instantly nicknamed. She was then led to where the very last man in line accepted her rope and fastened it to his saddle. She would return to Launceston a leashed bitch. No doubt her shame would impress the Captain with the rightness of things.

"Keep a bit o' slack, lady," the trooper advised good naturedly. "Just chafe your neck if you pull back."

"What happens if I stumble?" The captive asked in genuine concern.

"I'll watch it."

That was all the comfort she would get. Helpless to grasp the rope or to defend herself, Julie stepped briskly after the horse. She would have little time or chance to look around. All her concern was directed to placing her feet where they would not betray her balance. The wide leather was tight about her waist, her wrists were rigid against her sides. The errant slave wondered grimly if her Mistress would find humour in her plight.

Randall was forward in the center of the cavalcade.

Like her, he was tethered by the neck. Julie suspected they might never be given a chance to see or to speak to each other again. Their sin was unforgivable. She wished she could comfort him as his strength had comforted her. Thought of the fate awaiting him drove concern for her own flesh from her mind. She would strive to influence Crystal, she must, she must! But Crystal was unpredictable. It was impossible for Julie to forget the night Randall had ordered his Mistress bound to the bench beside the cage, and successive ravishments of the aristocratic flesh, and Crystal's vow ... Julie shuddered.

With eyes fixed on the ground where her naked feet must tread, Julie's mind inevitably dwelt on what

awaited her at Launceston. The Captain's bitterness would probably ensure the maximum penalties. To be flogged and to be branded! The whip would be a crueler one than had yet marked her skin. It would cut. It would exact her blood. She would faint and be revived with water to be whipped again. She knew the ritual.

The branding came after the flogging, days later when she had recovered enough to apprehend its full awfulness, to feel and to scream totally as the red metal was pressed to burn through the depth of her skin. It was all too terrible to contemplate or to believe. Yet it held a morbid fascination in its very improbability, its pure terror.

With her feet bleeding from the enforced march, they delivered the escaped slaves back to Launceston. Randall was taken away from her sight or knowledge, but Julie was led to the big house, the house that had once been her second home, but which now... The now faintly embarrassed trooper stayed and held her tether while she was made to stand in the hall while Dureault and the Captain made their report and had their say with her Mistress behind a solidly closed door. It seemed a very long time before they emerged. The sheriff bid her an awkward good-bye, the Captain refused to look at her. The trooper took his rope from her neck and followed his superior.

Abandoned, still strapped in her harness, Julie fought down hysterical laughter. What was required of her! To find Felicia, to walk out of the house and take her chances, to search for Randall! But the Captain had left the Study door ajar, without the agony of decision she thrust it open with her shoulder

and entered the room to face the woman whose property she was.

Felicia was sad. It was not her work or her new importance, nor was her dolor the result of the ring of keys she carried so consciously from the belt around her concave middle. Her melancholy came from others. She was like a ball batted back and forth across a net, an intermediary between two impacts, the pain of which was of the spirit not the flesh. She was finding it increasingly hard to giggle. She inserted her largest key in the lock and pushed open the door of the grim chamber.

"Gosh, am I glad to see you," Julie said fervently.

"I brung yer breakfast. T'ain't much, missie. I'se sorry the night's so long. I ain't 'lowed ter come after dark. I expects them chains git mighty tiresome."

"Bread and water again. She's still angry..."

"Sure is, missie. She don' let up on me. Says ter keep youse loaded with irons fer always. Wish it weren't me as has ter do it."

"I'm glad it's you. Felicia. Darling... would you? I mean, dare you free me for a minute or two? I'll stand still to be chained again. I'm so sick of these shackles. Crystal's being pain mean."

"I takes a chance, missie. I'll chain you different after."

How small a joy! But how much it had come to mean to the naked girl held prisoner in the stone room -- to be free of confinements for even a single minute. Julie stood helpfully as Felicia used her keys and carefully lowered each metal band with its trailing links to the floor. Neck, wrists, waist, ankles. Crystal Eshelby's displeasure was a heavy load to bear.

"She hasn't said anything about whipping me yet?"

"You still got that there floggin' ter worry about, missie. Ain't like you git no whuppin' furst."

Julie stretched her' arms in pure ecstasy, then cupped her companion's face in her freed hands and kissed the youthful lips. "Thank you, darling." She grinned ruefully. "I'm going to run round and round. Don't think I've gone crazy."

Felicia shared her captive's joy. She knew well enough the clutch of irons and how good it felt to be free of them. She watched Julie's naked leaps and bounds, her stretching and her twistings, satisfied that such happiness justified the risk she took in granting it.

"It's that there Captain feller, missie." Felicia confided.

"He keep a'comin'. He want yo' hide fer sure." She revived her familiar giggle. "I listens out the door. He say they ain't found Mr. Lionel where you say. Iffen they don' find him, then youse in trouble fer sure. Ah say, missie, that true yo' lets Randall fuck youse?"

Julie countered the question with one of her own.

"Never mind. Did you make the deal with Moses?"

Felicia's giggle was warm from the heart. "Sho' did, missie. Moses he do it. Moses right anxious."

Julie was a nude sylph busily doing ups and down.

"Can we trust him?"

"Sho' can. Moses wanna do it. Even without youse he wanna."

"Good." The prisoner's voice became wistful. "Any idea why Crystal never comes down here to visit me - or has me taken upstairs?"

"'Cos she's scared, that's why." Felicia was proud of her information. "She love you too much. You gits chained up down here 'cos o' Randall. She powerful jealous 'cos he fuck yo', so youse gotta be punish'd. But iffen Miz Eshelby come down here and see youse all chained and sad and wantin' ter love her, she make a dive fo' yo' muff and give youse her'n. She plenty lonely."

Julie sighed thankfully. "What does she say to the Captain?"

"She tell him yo' gits punish' bad, but not right now. She try an' keep him happy so maybe he fergit 'bout white slave what fuck a nigger. He keep talk' 'bout takin' you and Randall to Court so's yo' gits sent to proper prison where yo' gits real bad floggin' and Randall he gets hung. That Cap'n he real mizable."

Julie shivered. The chances of her surviving Lionel's escapade scatheless seemed slim indeed. She understood her guilt in the eyes of her Mistress. Against the incident of Randall she had no defense. But if only they could find Lionel's body! If only ... It would absolve her from the crime of being a runaway.

"I suppose you'd better chain me again, dear," Julie smiled as brightly as she could at an anxious Felicia. "There's no use taking chances and getting you into trouble. How do you want me this time?"

"How it be iffen I chain yo' hands and feet real close and jes' link yo' ter the wall from the collar roun' yo' neck?"

"Is that enough? Supposing Crystal comes?"

"She not like' to come, missie. 'Sides, with the collar roun' yo' neck and the chain on it, you'll be fixed bad enough."

Julie grinned ruefully. To be a willing party to her own discomfort! It was absurd. Her life was forever upside down. She held out her hands and watched the broad metal circle them and click shut. They were joined by only one link. "Don't worry about them being close, Felicia. There's nothing I can do locked in this place, and since I have to be chained to the wall, I can't even walk round the room."

"I change 'em agin' fer the night, missie, if yo' wants." Felicia locked fetters on the slender ankles that would prohibit anything but hops and crawls. "Now yo' neck, missie. I knows yo' hates it, but I gotta."

"Having that iron collar round my neck's beastly," Julie admitted. "And the chain drags. But you've been sweet enough. Lock it on me."

When Julie's punishment was complete, the two girls kissed before Felicia scampered away and

slammed the door. The chained captive lowered herself to the floor. Sitting with raised knees, she lowered her forehead onto her joined hands. It would be another boring day.

Outside in the sunlight, Felicia went about her affairs.

It was easy for her to contrive a visit to the coach house where Moses was busy with polishing. Moses looked at her hungrily.

"Tonight."

Moses nodded in understanding. "Randall, he as good as gone right now."

Felicia handed him a ring of keys. "I gets these back real quick after, eh?"

"Sho' do, honey. And Missie Julie, she willin'?"

Felicia tossed her head disdainfully. "Yo' real bastard, Moses. Lettin' yo' fuck me or'ta be 'nuff. 'Sides yo' claim yo' wants Randall free same as we all do."

Moses chuckled. "Mebbe' only time I ever gets ter fuck real high class white gal. Yo' all get her chained bad?"

"Don't worry. One o' them small keys unlocks her legs. The rest l' her ain't no concern. She fasten' ter the wall, but her chain plenty long so it won't bother yo' none."

"How's 'bout a fuck right now. Felicia gal?" Moses snickered resentfully. "Yo' too high an' mighty ter let Moses screw yo' lessen yo' wants somepin'?"

Felicia tossed her head proudly. Few of the negro girls wanted Moses. But Moses would free Randall for a price she and Julie were able to pay. Without complaint, she raised her dress and spread herself in invitation on the floor.

That night, the chained girl in the stone room was wakened from a fitful sleep by the sound of the door. It made less sound than the response of her chain, but she had been expectant.

"Moses?"

"Thass' me. Miz Julie. Sho' is proud ter be here."

"You'll free Randall and make sure he has a horse?"

"Don' you fret, Miz Julie. Moses keep his word. Yo' all still willin'?"

"Of course I am. Moses."

"Yo' sho' mus' love that nigger, missie."

"Moses, when you give him the horse ... last thing, tell Randall I love him and will always remember. Tell him to never, never come back. He'll only be caught. Tell him I'm a slave and I know I'm a slave and that's the end of it."

"I tells him, Miz Julie. He damfool iffen he come back. Dey's gonna hang him."

"Good. Did Felicia get some money?"

"Sho' did. Randall gin' ter need it."

"I'm so damned helpless like this. I can't do a thing. Tell him, Moses, I can't get free to say good-bye."

"Miz Eshelby real mad. She sho' got you chained. Yo' sure?"

Julie knew herself blushing in the gloom. "You'll need the right key. Did Felicia remember? My ankles..."

"She real good gal, missie. It's one of these here. Yo' sho' is bein' mighty nice to Moses."

Since the interlude of the shanty, Julie had become indifferent to what had once been impossible. In the light of what it would achieve, her sacrifice seemed trivial. Unprepossessing as Moses might be, tonight he was a knight in shining armour. She found herself required to do. "Let me do it, Moses. I know the key and where to turn it. I can use my hands enough for that."

"Yo' sho' is wunnerful, Miz Julie." Moses breath was beginning to quicken.

A shackle fell away from a captive ankle. "Here, take the keys, Moses. Put them somewhere safe." Julie's voice had become both urgent and tremulous. "I only need one free."

"How 'bout yo' neck, Miz Julie, that there collar?"

Moses sounded anxious.

"It's alright, Moses. It's quite a long chain," Julie stifled an impulse to giggle. "I can lay down fine."

"Yo' sho' is beautiful, Miz Julie."

Julie was glad of the dark. She arranged herself competently for the delivery of her bribe. "There, Moses, is that nice? Is that the way you want me?"

It was the way he wanted her.

Moses forgot to lock her shackle when he left. Julie did it herself. There must be no clues. She slept.

In the morning came the summons.

Crystal Eshelby glared across her desk at her slave. "I suppose you know Randall's escaped?"

Felicia had tied Julie's hands behind her back for the interview. Her ankles were chained. She stood, delinquent, before her Mistress.

"How would I know - when?"

Julie hoped her simulated surprise was convincing.

Crystal was in a bad mood. The slave girl could almost feel the lash.

"Last night. Someone must have helped him!"

"Well, it couldn't have been me! The way you've kept me chained..."

"Don't get snarky, Pet."

"Well, I can't pretend I'm not glad, Crystal -- oh damn! Mistress." Julie looked forlornly at her owner. "He did awful things to you, but he doesn't deserve to die."

"That buffoon of a Captain is due here this morning. I'll have him put out a general alarm and search. He won't get away."

"Please, darling, don't! Don't bring him back to be hung."

"Forgetting your manners again?"

"Oh, what's it matter!" Julie was desperate. "I'm going to be flogged and branded and goodness knows what else. I'm spending all my time chained up in a rotten dungeon. Does that silly

military type want to hang me, too?"

"That is not a dungeon you're in. Pet, and up to now you've been let off lightly for a runaway. Oh, Julie darling, why did you have to get into bed with that damned nigger?"

"He was the only gentleman I met." Julie retorted acidly. "Lionel certainly didn't treat me like one - he was beastly. Randall was kind and strong..." Tears suddenly brimmed from her eyes. The rest of her words came sobbingly, "I was so damned lonely, so lost, so hurt and scared..."

The Mistress allowed the storm to pass, then rose and dried her captive's eyes and cheeks. In a sudden surrender to her lifelong love, the slave girl fell to her knees and pressed her cheek against the older girl's leg.

"I did wrong, Mistress. I know I did. Punish me."

"I'll punish you, Pet. But not now."

"I didn't run away with Randall ... Lionel kidnapped me from the cage. I was helpless in my harness. It was Lionel who put these awful marks on my bottom with a beastly riding crop he used. They're still there, aren't they? I can't see. Half the time I can't even feel, I'm so fixed."

"Randall could have put them on you."

"Why would he?"

Crystal sneered. "You're a delectable morsel to whip, Julie. And besides, perhaps he had to persuade you to lie down?"

"Why won't anyone believe me! Oh, Crystal, I'm so scared."

"What we need is that useless brother of mine for a bit of evidence."

There came a timid rap on the door. Felicia's anxious face appeared. "It's the Captain, Ma'am. He done find Mr. Lionel."

"Stand where you are, Julie!" Crystal rose to greet the visitor.

"Damnedest time we've had, Miss Eshelby. But the man found him. He did. My condolences. We washed the body. He's downstairs. We'll need you to identify."

They swept from the room. Julie stood obediently. Her hopes quickened with the beating of her heart. She would have found a chair but was sure the Captain would disapprove. Awaiting the return of her Mistress, she amused herself twisting against the cords on her wrists. Freedom was hopeless, but it countered tedium.

"There was no sign of foul play," said the Captain. He was working hard not to look at the bound and naked girl standing to one side of the desk.

"Would you like me to cover her. Captain? I keep her naked to engender a proper frame of mind."

"No. Never mind. We found the swamp treacherous, this supports the girl's story. The sheriff feels murder may be ruled out." His gaze now unashamedly devoured his prey. "I still feel, however, that this young woman should be rigorously dealt with."

"Because you found her in bed with a negro. Captain?"

"Is not that enough!" His tone was grim..."And, technically, she was a runaway -- a second offense. Both the flogging and the brand are called for."

"Captain, cannot you leave her to me? After all, I do own her."

"I distrust your kindness of heart, Miss Eshelby. I wish to see justice satisfied."

"It would give you pleasure to watch Julie flogged, wouldn't it!"

"In the line of duty, ma'am."

"Captain, I admit I am fond of this slave. I do not want her harmed. I have already misjudged her."

"In that case, Madam, I must invoke the Court." The Captain's voice was stiff with umbrage. He bowed curtly to Crystal, ignored Julie the slave, and strode from the room.

The Mistress became a whirlwind of enveloping arms and ripe, moist lips. Julie was bursting with happiness but was helpless to do more than avidly return the kisses that were showered on her in an abandon of love.

"Oh, darling, I've done it again! Always jealous, always punishing you for something you haven't done!"

"I don't mind, Crystal, just so long as you love me." The Mistress tore at her slave's bonds. When the captive wrists were freed, their owner's arms were busy for a long time. When they stopped for breath and to take a look at each other as though parted for years, Crystal made a grimace.

"That fool of a man! Pouf! Don't worry, darling."

"But he means it, Crystal. I'm scared of him."

Crystal Eshelby went to the big window and looked down. "Oh damn! He's still here, nattering to his corporal."

"Crystal, darling..."

There was that in the slave girl's voice that gave the Mistress pause. She turned and looked searchingly at the lovely face now lined in concentration. "What is it, dear? You're frightened."

"I suppose I am," Julie's words came slowly. "But it's not that. Promise you won't be angry?"

"I'll never be angry with you again."

"Yes, you will, darling. But never mind. I'm thinking of the Captain and Randall."

"What have they got to do with each other, Pet?"

"Let Randall go. Crystal. Don't tell the Captain - tell him nothing. Don't post a reward or tell the sheriff. Please?"

"Julie!"

"I know! I'm awful. Here, we've just got to loving each other again and I go and spoil it. But darling, if you do really love me and want a happy slave, please forget Randall."

"And the Captain?"

Julie shifted her chained feet in distress. "He... he wants to see me flogged and branded. He's going to cause you trouble. He's going to make you show up poorly before the County. I want to stop him."

"Yes, love? As if I didn't know what comes now."

"But, darling, it's all I can do, the only thing I can think of. Have those awful things done to me, the things the Captain wants. But help me bear it by telling me that Randall's free and that you'll love me always."

They filled the ensuing silence with the turmoil of their thoughts. The mental images invoked were almost tangible in the room. They gazed at each other in a communion that made them one.

"Julie. I can't Not to you."

"You can, darling. I'll survive. Girls do, y'know. And it's the perfect answer, it rounds everything out. It will shut the Captain up."

"Flogged and branded! Oh, Julie!"

"Better here than in some hateful prison. I can bear it here. I think I'd die if they take me away. And darling, it is partly my fault."

"It's too cruel for you. We've both seen what it's like for a girl."

"But they do get well again. And they wear their brand. I'll love wearing yours! You know that. If I need nursing, then you can nurse me. These chains on my ankles now ... You need never take them off."

"You're brave, Julie. But you won't be able to bear it. No girl can."

"Will I be tied or chained to the whipping post?"

"Oh course."

"Well, then. That will be that. I couldn't change my mind or run away. It would just happen to me. I'd keep thinking hard about the afterwards ... and about you."

As in a dream, the Mistress of Launceston opened the window and looked down. "Captain, would you come up please?" She tumed a stricken face to her watching slave. "Julie, for the first time in our lives, you're the stronger of the two of us. Here, let me tie your hands again. He'll think you're indecent if you're free."

"Tie me tight, Mistress." said the slave girl with decision.

"You have something to tell me, Madam?" The Captain's voice was cold.

Julie turned to face him, her face serene "It is my privilege, sir, to tell you that I am to be flogged and branded on any day you name. It will be done to me here at Launceston. You are invited as a guest to witness my punishment. I accept it as just. I will not appeal."

Her simple words struck him like a blow. He turned, puzzled and offended to the slave's mistress.

"You must remember. Captain. Miss Julia Lindley was an educated lady of some consequence in our community." Crystal's voice was suave. "It is quite fitting that she inform you of her punishment. She is making no pretense of equality."

"You are both serious? I find this hard to believe."

"You are invited as a witness. Captain. Bring the sheriff if he would care to see a white girl whipped."

"Flogged. Madam. No simple whipping. She is not white."

"Quite so. The whip will draw blood. But, tell me, sir, if she is not white, what is she?"

"A negress in the eyes of the Law."

"No doubt the lash will bear this in mind."

A frown signaled his displeasure with the sarcasm. Julie countered it by asking demurely. "On what day would you like me flogged and branded. Captain? My Mistress will see to it."

The Captain named his day.

The Whipping Post was a lonely place. Beside it the Pillory lacked a tenant. The staffs of Launceston and Beverleigh, even the children, stayed studiously away from the place were the one-time Chatelaine of Beverleigh awaited her flogging. Ritual demanded it. Whoever it might be that was fastened to the Post would wait a prescribed and mandatory hour to think well on that which would be done to them. And why.

Julie was totally naked. Her arms were high, one wrist tied on each side of the heavy wooden column so that she was well stretched and superbly exposed. A belt of rope circled the Post and the small of her back. It was tightly cinched. It would prohibit contortions too violent for the majesty of the lash. It would also sustain her when she fainted. A bucket of water for revival purposes had been placed in full view. The bindings pressed her breasts tight against the pillar so that they would not be cut. It was the only mercy.

She was strangely calm. She knew the awfulness of what she must endure too great for comprehension ... Her mind rejected it. The fall of the first lash across her bare back would bring her awareness? she would wait till then. As for the branding of her flesh, it was still days distant. She shivered in the hot sunlight.

Crystal had been with her while she was bound. She had watched.

When those who had done the binding went away, they had kissed and whispered.

"I will never have you punished again, darling girl."

"You will. Crystal. You must. I am a slave."

"A beloved slave whom I adore. I long to free you, but I dare not."

"Mistress, never free me. Never! You made me a slave. You knew! Now keep me a slave. I wish it!"

"Always, beloved Julie. I will keep you forever."

"Kiss me, darling and go. You must not watch."

"I will not watch. I could not bear it. Julie, I love you."

"I love you. Crystal. I have always loved you."

Crystal went away. Over a bare strained shoulder the slave girl watched her Mistress go. She cried and found comfort in her tears.

The girl who had been Julia Lindley rested her cheek against the post to which she was so firmly bound. Her eyes roved the empty yard. Soon the crowd would gather to see her flogged. No doubt the Captain would be first.

She was strangely content.

Frank E. Campbell HIT Publications RUNNING OUT!



HIT-106 $2.95 | HIT-109 $2.95 | HIT-110 $2.95 | HIT-112 $2.95 | HIT-113 $2.95

HIT-114 $2.95 | HIT-115 $2.95 | HIT-116 $2.95 | HIT-117 $2.95 | HIT-118 $2.95

HIT-119 $2.95 | HIT-120 $2.95 | HIT-121 $2.95 | HIT-122 $2.95 | HIT-123 $2.95

HIT-124 $2.95 | HIT-125 $2.95 | HIT-126 $2.95 | HIT-127 $2.95 | HIT-128 $2.95

PLEASE USE THE ORDER FORM ON THE LAST PAGE

Fellowes - The Classics STILL IN STOCK!



FELLOWES 1 $2.95 | FELLOWES 2 $2.95 | FELLOWES 3 $2.95 | FELLOWES 4 $2.95

FELLOWES 5 $2.95 | FELLOWES 6 $2.95 | FELLOWES 7 $2.95 | FELLOWES 8 $2.95

FELLOWES 9 $3.50 | FELLOWES 10 $3.50 | FELLOWES 11 $3.50 | FELLOWES 12 $3.50

PLEASE USE THE ORDER FORM ON THE LAST PAGE

H.O.M. Best Sellers



AW 4/6 $5.00 | BCm 1/1 $4.50 | BCm 1/2 $5.00 | BCm 1/3 $5.00

BC No. 16 $5.00 | BTP 2/11 $4.50 | BTP 2/12 $4.50 | BTP 3/1 $5.00

BTP 3/2 $5.00 | BB 1/2 $5.00 | BA 1/1 $4.50 | Cap 1/7 $4.50

Cap 1/8 $5.00 | Cap 1/9 $5.00 | HT 3/7 $4.50 | HT 3/10 $5.00

HT 3/11 $5.00 | Kid 1/5 $5.00 | Kn 3/8 $4.50 | Kn 3/9 $5.00

H.O.M.'s Greatest Films



B&D CLIMAX
He wants nothing more than to see her writhe, experience the delights and pains from his drawing hands.
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

CAPTIVE
He walks in and observes my helplessness. He gags me, feels me, suspends me and pussy-whips me!
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

CAUGHT' TIED, & FETTERED
Stringent bondage and fast paced action bring this film to a high-pitched, peak climax.
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

CLOSET B&D
Work your fantasy into ecstasy: tie her, gag her, strip her, feel her, caress her, touch her, she's all yours!
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

EROTIC DENIAL
Two sexy teasers wiggle their asses in front of the wrong eyes. Their naked bodies are tied & taught well.
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

HIGH STRUNG
Teasing, taunting, squeezing he erect nipples he forces her to want him. She can't demand, only take.
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

HOT AND HELPLESS
A dominatrix decides to submit to a master who is both strong & equipped.
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/55m $27.50

INTERROGATION
The gag denies her screams as the brutal hands suspend and spread, demand secrets!
Reg8/50m $25.00
Sup8/69m $27.50

OUTDOOR BONDAGE DOUBLECROSS
Spread eagled on the bondage cross, his evil hands molest her body!
Reg8/54m $25.00
Sup8/59m $27.50

PLEASE USE THE ORDER FORM ON THE LAST PAGE

THE STORY OF k.

An Authentic SM Film



REAL SM PRACTITIONERS!

"Through the love and trust she feels for her Master, 'Kathy' is transformed into the slave 'k.' An awesome, realistic SM film experience, sure to become a highly treasured classic."
Sylvia Stein, Editor, H.O.M. INC.

MAGAZINE, VIDEOTAPE & AUDIO CASSETTE



THE MAGAZINE - Presented in our traditional entertainment format, we explore behind the scenes, highlighting a stimulating profile of our film star, "k." and her personal feelings. This magazine dramatizes "The Ssory of k.," emphasized by many exciting on location photos, featuring 16 pages of dynamic color photography. It's truly magnificent!
Only $7.00



THE VIDEOTAPE - What more can be said about this fabulous film except, "Have it all!" We've worked hard for a film of this magnitude, and now the 60 minute, five sound, Beta or VHS videotape is available. We've done our part, now it's your turn.
Only $99.00

THE AUDIO CASSTTE - "The Story of k." original soundtrack is now available as a full 60 minute audio cassette tape! It serves as a valuable addition to "The Story of k." magazine and it is sure to become a highly treasured item on it's own. The whipping scenes alone are well worth the price!
Only $10.95



A COMPLETE ENTERTAINMENT PACKAGE!
MAG & AUDIO ONLY $12.95!
VIDEO & MAG ONLY $100!
ALL 3 FOR ONLY $105!

PLEASE USE THE ORDER FORM ON THE LAST PAGE

THIS IS THE MOST IMPORTANT PAGE IN THIS BOOK.

TO GET WHAT YOU WANT

Being number one in this business isn't easy. We have to scan the entire market worldwide on a consistent and thorough basis. And that's exactly what we do. We are up to date and up to the minute with new merchandise. And we get it for you. H.O.M. INC. is number one because our customers are number one. You get what you want.

Now you can be well informed as to what is available. Now you can shop for your magazines, novels, movies, videotapes, correspondence publications and much more with the utmost discretion. Now you can save money through our many bargains, discounts and sales. Now is the time to start receiving our free brochures.

Our disclaimer form below insures you complete confidence that your name will not be released in any way, sold or distributed to any other publisher or mailing list of any kind. When your name comes to H.O.M. it STAYS with H.O.M.

So . . . send for your brochure today, fill out the form below and mail it to us. It's safe, it's discreet, it's efficient and best of all, it's free.

DISCLAIMER

For office use only - Do not write in this space

☐ ORIGINAL (FIRST) DISCLAIMER ☐ CHANGE OF ADDRESS ONLY

I, the undersigned, hereby direct H.O.M. INC. to mail to me all brochures, catalogs, magazines, merchandise and all related promotional material for their product lines and social activities. I realize that these items, brochures, etc. may be considered sexually oriented and DO NOT want "sexually oriented material" or other identification written on the envelope or package mailed to me. I am an adult, 21 years of age or older. In the event that I no longer wish this material coming to me in the future I will notify H.O.M. INC. in writing and allow up to four weeks for the deletion to become final (due to mailings in preparation when notification is received). Please enclose address label from last mailing when possible!.

Signed_____ Date_____

Name (print)_____ Age_____

Address_____

City_____ State_____ Zip_____

H. O. M. INC., P. O. BOX 7302, VAN NUYS, CA. 91409, U.S.A.

ORDER FORM

Name . . . . . .

Address . . . . . .

City . . . . . State . . . . . Zip . . . . . .

Country . . . . . .

I certify that I am 21 years of age and fully understand that the merchandise I am ordering may be considered sexually oriented.

Signature . . . . . .

TYPE OF PAYMENT
☐ Cash ☐ Check ☐ Money Order
☐ Master Charge ☐ Visa ☐ Foreign Currency

Interbank No. _____ Expiration Date _____

TYPE OF SHIPPING - PLEASE CHECK ONE

QUANTITY ORDERED	☐ UPS GROUND	☐ US MAIL ☐ AIR UPS
1 Item	$1.15	$1.35
2 to 5 Items	.70 Each	.90 Each
6 to 9 Items	.60 Each	.80 Each
10 to 14 Items	.50 Each	.70 Each
15 to 19 Items	.40 Each	.60 Each
20 Items and up	.35 Each	.50 Each

QTY	ITEM ORDERED	REG	SUP	PRICE

FOREIGN ORDERS - POSTAGE AND HANDLING
CANADA - Add $2.00 for EACH item for FIRST CLASS MAIL. **OTHER COUNTRIES** - Add $3.00 for EACH item for AIR MAIL.

MAIL TO: H.O.M. INC. P.O. BOX 7302, VAN NUYS, CA, 91409

Subtotal	
6% CA Tax (Residents only)	
Postage & handling	
TOTAL	

Strange and haunting slavery! Pain and humiliation! The heated lusts of men!

JULIE

by F.E.Campbell

Never was a period so fruitful of the situation so beloved of Campbell fans. The screams of Julie the slave are vivid testimony. She gives you the anguish of an age.
—H.O.M. INC.

"Julie" pulses with the horror of the impossible. No girl has faced nakedness and the whipping post with such incredulity, or gazed at the chains locked on her limbs with equal disbelief. Julie lives with shame and discovers humiliations that parallel the pain and penalties of Pillory and cage, of whip and scourge and the lusts of men . . . and of a woman!
— F.E. Campbell

OTHER SMASH HIT BOOKS BY F.E. CAMPBELL

The Prisoner of Ismaul — Captive of the Priory
The Siblings — Wanda & The Whip — Dorinda
Monica — Strange Captivity
Chains of Jehdra — Melynda
Miranda — Jewel — Sukie
The Girl Behind the Wall
Moira in Jeopardy
Slave Girl & The Lash

Available NOW from H.O.M.

PRINTED IN U.S.A.