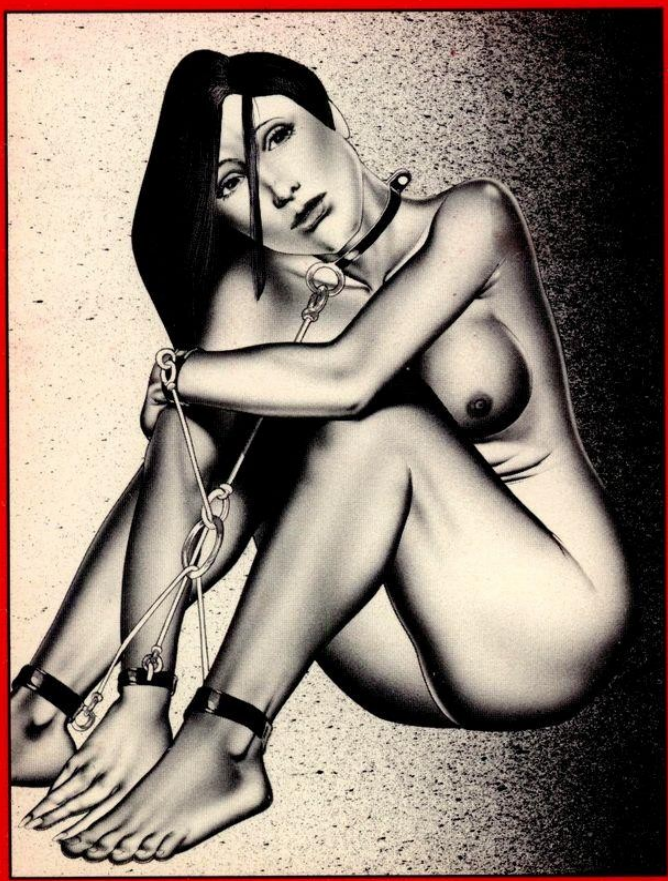
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CAROLINE



F. E. CAMPBELL

HIT 156

Caroline

by F. E. Campbell

Virgin Sacrifice

THEY WERE DOWN to their last few candles. The light was dim in their meeting place. Their exclamations matched its gloom. First was Fraser the Scot.

“We canna’ hold the fort. We ha’ no’ enough powder and shot for a decent sortie. ’Tis hand to hand we’ll be, and outnumbered twenty to one.”

“The riff-raff of the Alogonquins. Renegades, led by a renegade. But they’re well armed. They could take us easily if they knew our plight this desperate.”

“Aye. Fort Stapleton was a mistake. We’re too far west. We’ll get no help. The army’s got its hands full with the Iroquois and the French.”

“This man, Jean Dubois, is he aught but a half breed bandit?”

“Oh, aye, he’s all o’ that. But he has the force. He can take

us." The speaker paused. "The bastard's quoted us a price."

"Damn his soul! He'll get no woman from us." The voice was British. "Infernal impertinence!"

"But will he not take us all?"

The voice of the young woman invoked a hush. Caroline Dover walked out into the candlelight and turned to face her grim-visaged companions. Her voice was calm in resolution. "Dubois has asked for one. Is not that better than all?"

"Buy our safety with a girl!" The voice was outraged. "Never!"

"Forget nobility, Miss Dover." It was the Minister now who counseled youthful femininity. "Jean Dubois and his men will honor no pact. Your sacrifice would be in vain."

"If Dubois did not intend to keep his bargain, why would he bother with me or any other girl when he can have us all?"

It was a hard question to answer. It had occurred to more than one. A harsh male voice demanded, "Give your life for ours, lass! We'd be less than men."

Caroline faced him. "'Tis not a life we barter, Sir. I'd suppose our renegade wants me alive. He'd get small profit from a corpse."

“But, girl, this cannot be!”

“I came here to marry a man you all knew. They killed him. I seek revenge. I will not die.”

The very calmness of her statement carried weight. There was a shuffling of feet, face turned to face. Caroline Dover took advantage of the lull. “It is settled then.” She smiled at shocked features. “Fear not for me. I will survive.” Quietly, her eyes roved in a last farewell before her final statement. “It will be in the morning.”

The first cold of morning had surrendered to the sun by the time the big gate of Fort Stapleton opened and then quietly closed to leave outside its portal the slender figure of a girl. Caroline Dover winced at the sound of bolts and bars falling into place at her back, but she did not turn. Her gaze was set upon the gentle rise of prairie to the Algonquin encampment a mile distant. Her expression was resolute. Her steps out into the grassland held purpose. Before she had covered a quarter of the distance to her fate, a pair of braves detached themselves from the teepees and walked to meet her.

They were neither mediocre tribesmen nor poor whites. They surveyed her stolidly and said, briefly, “We search.”

It was the first of the indignities. The second followed. They gathered her arms behind her back, crossed her wrists, and bound them far tighter than need be. She made no de-

mur but only walked passively between them up the slope, her face betraying nothing of the turmoil in her heart.

Caroline Dover was now a captive. It was a strange new feeling, just as the rawhide cutting her tied wrists was strange and new and terrifying. She had never been bound before. She found in it a degree of helplessness which accentuated her condition. She twisted her hands in brief experimentation, but it only hurt her wrists. Caroline Dover lifted her gaze to a horizon beyond which lay a vengeance only she could see. The time and place for it was not now. But it would come.

Jean Dubois was a product of the time and place, a lusty predator. Shrewdly, he assessed his prize. “Damn me if they haven’t sent their best. You’re a beauty, girl.” His English was surprising.

“I was not sent. I chose to come.”

Dubois cocked a Gallic eyebrow. “Ye could regret it. D’you know what waits ye here?”

“I can guess.”

“Ye’re no virgin, eh?”

“Yes, I am. Does it matter?”

The eyebrow rose to fresh heights. “Ye wouldn’t be thinking of a knife between my ribs, would ye now?”

“I’ve thought of it constantly. But I have no knife and my hands are tied. I don’t suppose you’ll allow me much freedom?”

Dubois slapped his leg in delight at her honesty. His retort was ribald. “Ye’ll not be the first tied bitch I’ve fucked. I warant you’ll live to enjoy it.”

“I intend to.”

“Survival, eh? That’s why you’re here?”

“Yes.”

He nodded soberly. “There’d be a lot of female scalps still on female heads if they all had your sense.”

Caroline shrugged off his tribute. “Must my hands be kept this like this?” she asked. “They hurt.”

“Ye need to be tied for what comes next.”

Her chin lifted. “My rape?”

Her naivete delighted Dubois. He had won a prize indeed. He was beginning to regret what he must do with her. It would have been pleasant to take her to his bed immediately. Instead, he laughed.

“Looking forward to it, eh?”

“No, I’m not. I simply know it’s going to happen. I knew that before I left the fort.”

Jean Dubois laughed. “I mentioned regret, mademoiselle. Come, let me show you.”

Caroline allowed herself to be led to where there was a view of the slope and Fort Stapleton. Halfway between something was taking shape. Men were at work. Her pulse thudded anew.

“They’re planting a post.” She turned to her captor uncertainly. “Why?”

“For you, mademoiselle.”

“But why? What have I done?”

“Alas, nothing—except to be born English and beautiful, and to deliver yourself into my hands.”

“But why kill me? That’s a stake, isn’t it? You’ll torture me.”

“Yes, a little.” Dubois smiled at her bafflement. “My infamy is greater than you suppose. I intend to take that fort.”

Caroline’s world crumbled. “But you made a pact! You gave your word!” She faced him in dismay. “Have you bothered with me only that I be tortured?”

“Ah, mademoiselle, I am more devious than that. I want you as a weapon. It is you who will open for me the gate of Fort Stapleton.”

“But how?”

The shrug of Jean Dubois was eloquently Gallic. “When the noble colonists behold your torture, they will sally forth to do battle. They will be easily destroyed.”

Caroline tugged wretchedly at tied wrists. She had never been more helpless or felt more betrayed. Dubois’s assessment of the garrison was probably correct. They would react as he planned and be slaughtered. Bound at the stake, she would watch—impotent. Her voice was a cry of agony.

“But that word you used. It’s infamous!”

“I am a rogue, mademoiselle. I have never pretended to be aught but a rogue.”

His candor was disarming. Brokenly, Caroline implored. “But I have delivered myself to you. I am giving you all of me. Do you give us nothing in return?”

“Nothing. I accept you as a gift from the gods.” Dubois sighed again. “But I do apologize for the time you are about to spend tied to the stake out there. It will not be pleasant. I will turn the squaws and children loose on you for the benefit of the fort. After an hour, the men will begin to pile the firewood with which you will be burned after the more serious torture later in the day.”

Caroline looked at her captor aghast. “But that is a terrible way to kill a girl.”

“I doubt you will die,” he chuckled. “Those brave men

down there will not endure more than an hour of watching you suffering. Perhaps even in the first ten minutes, eh? Be assured, I do not want you dead."

"Please, no!" The tied girl fought her bonds uselessly.

"I do not want the fire—to be burned!"

Dubois took her arm. "Come. We put our little play in motion. Perhaps if you scream most lustily…?"

The stake was now starkly solid in the soil. Those who had planted it stood around, watchful and alert. There were strips of rawhide on the ground. The hands of Jean Dubois were loosening her bound wrists. Caroline Dover knew herself the focus of hot male eyes. Those in the fort would be watching too. The moment she was free she fled.

They caught her easily, turning her stripping into a laughing game in which she was tossed from hand to hand, losing something of her covering at each encounter. Finally, naked and blushing, she was held by outstretched arms between two braves.

Jean Dubois, who had remained aloof from the play, nodded approvingly. "You are extraordinarily beautiful, ma chérie. You should never be clothed."

Caroline faced him, panting, naked breasts heaving. Lost in a maze of shame and fear, she writhed incessantly at her wrists so easily held and so determinedly pulled in oppos-

ite directions to expose her utterly. She fought for words, but her shock and outrage were beyond expression. Her eyes accused him bitterly as she was dragged back until her bare buttocks were hard against the post and her shoulders welded to it as her wrists were raised and crossed and once more bound behind its vertical solidity. Then came her elbows, dragging them back until her breasts tautened and came high. Then they stood back to admire her nudity.

“Those on the battlements will be looking, too, mademoiselle. I suggest you kick and scream before we tie your feet.”

The bound girl’s indignant retort died unborn as brown fingers came from behind and clamped her nipples. Caroline both screamed and kicked in pain and outrage. She was tightly secured, her feet and her tongue her only protest against this violation of her feminine secrets. She used both in involuntary anguish. When the fingers fell away, they left her with burning breasts and in mental disarray.

“Bravo! Bravo!” Jean Dubois clapped, his hands.

“You betrayed me! You betrayed us all!”

“The fortunes of war, mademoiselle.”

Caroline kept an injured silence as her binding progressed. She was already helpless, but bands were tugged above and below her breasts, circling her tummy, her knees, and

her ankles. Before her legs were immobilized, her feet were drawn well apart to expose her sex and add prominence to pubic hair and Venus mound. The virgin girl was immersed in mortification. Never had she dreamed of such a blatant baring of her charms. The gentle summer air burned her in a sea of shame. The men departed, leaving Caroline's torn garments on the grass.

She had been tied to face the fort. The settlers and the small garrison would have a clear view of her nudity and the manner of her binding. There would be a telescope! Thought of it caused a fresh blush to suffuse her skin. There would also be a frantic debate and hearts heavy with decision. Now they would condemn her willingness to yield herself. Her sacrifice had done no more than expose the full treachery of Dubois and place an additional tax upon their souls. She was too far distant to counsel them to forget her and turn away. But would she have the courage to do so even if she could? She did not know. All she knew was she did not wish to burn. Frantically, she fought, but the rawhide only mocked her puny strength. She could not move. She had been most tightly bound, and her bindings cinched her with cruel competence. She could never free herself—never!

The children and the women came, well armed with willow switches and broad grins. But first they pawed at her, marveling at her white skin. Pinching her, they laughed as she winced. The children were encouraged to explore her

sex. In pure horror, the bound girl gazed back at their smirks and found no sympathy. She moaned in desolation, disbelieving the ways in which her body was being used. Never before had she suffered pain or been bound—and now this!

The willow withes were more cruel and more direct. They did not lash her with sweeping cuts. Instead, the made cunning intrusions within and upon her female secrets that were secret no more. It took their bound victim time to fully realize she could evade nothing and shield nothing, that she must simply stand in naked exposure and allow herself to be whipped at the caprice of savage women and children.

There is a beginning and an end. Both merged for Caroline Dover with the arrival of the braves carrying bundles of dry twigs. They did not immediately bury her feet in them, but set them in a pile—to be ready at one side. The captive they would burn gazed at them with anguish as the switches continued to flick her flesh, but the garrison saw them too. The gate of the fort swung wide, and the armed men burst out in a small tide of vengeance.

Caroline tried to close her eyes. It was a thing too terrible to watch, but a malign fascination held her gaze as Dubois's savage horde engulfed the pitiful few who sought her rescue. Other painted and feathered warriors plunged within Fort Stapleton before the anxious women could close the

gate. It was all over very quickly. Scalps were taken and corpses robbed. Five young and comely women were marched in triumph through the gate, arms tied behind their backs, linked neck to neck by rawhide thongs. They glared at Caroline in anguished anger as they passed her on their way to slavery.

“They suspect you of being their enemy, mademoiselle.”

Jean Dubois was once more regarding her with intent absorption. It took the bound girl a moment to realize her whipping had stopped. The squaws were busy with plunder. Her torture, such as it had been, was over. It had achieved its purpose. All she had left were rercriminations, but what good was reproach?

Her eyes turned to the trudging captives. “But why? I sought only to save my people.”

“They see you as but little hurt—a willing decoy.”

She knew each girl. It was plausible that they should assess her thus. It did not matter. Nothing mattered any more. Pain and fear had reduced her own mission of vengeance to a tiny ember glowing deep inside. As she was, she could harm nothing, least of all Dubois.

“You were not too cruelly used, mademoiselle.”

“I suppose not—by your stands. I hurt, that’s all I know.”

With studied casualness, Dubois picked up a discarded

switch. It was long and limber and unused. Without warning, he swung it in a wide arc and slashed it across her belly and hip. She screamed.

“It is well you understand the many qualities of pain,” he observed evenly, tossing away the instrument of her instruction. “With that bit of willow I could probably make you do or say anything I desire.”

Caroline was gasping, seeking to contain a second scream, surging wildly against the thongs. The pain had been unimaginable, opening up fresh vistas of horror. She moaned.

“You have no need to torture me,” she told her captor. “I’ve given myself to you. I’m helpless. What you just did hurt me more than anything I’ve ever known.”

“Good. I have your attention. I may as well rape you now. It is unchivalrous to keep you in suspense.”

Caroline Dover ignored his sarcasm. She was numb with misery. Everything had gone wrong. True, her fate now was perhaps no different from what it would have been had the Algonquins stormed Fort Stapleton by force and taken her along with the other five girls who no longer saw her as a friend. She supposed all of them would be raped before nightfall, herself first of all. She wondered if such a planned possession of her body could properly be described as rape. Probably it could not.

“I’ll tie your hands again, ma chérie, if I ever get these in-

fernal knots loose."

She closed her mind to Dubois, busy behind the post freeing her flesh. Untie her hands—what did it matter? She had no expectation of freedom. When she stepped away from the stake, rubbing her weals, she exlaimed, "My clothes! The women have taken them!"

"You have no need of clothes. Turn around."

"Oh, yes, my hands!" Caroline turned and crossed her wealed wrists for his convenience. Dubois tied them without cruelty, but she would never get free. "I expect I'll get accustomed to being tied. I can't go on fighting every time I'm unbound."

Dubois gripped her arm, but his grip was not unkind. He led her up the slope. Halfway to the encampment, they paused and looked back. The captive girl ignored the pathetic bodies sprawled here and there in undignified death. Sadly, she beheld the billowing smoke and tongues of flame.

"Why must you burn Fort Stapleton?" she demanded.

"It should never have been built."

His voice was gruff, his fingers demanding on her arm. They resumed their walk. Caroline Dover did not look back again. A chapter in her life had closed. Nothing would be the same. Not ever.

She thought to ask for covering, but everyone had seen her nakedness, and a girl on the eve of rape has little need of clothes.

Inside his teepee, Dubois said, “’Tis a poor sort of couch, but I’ll tie ye spread out on it. The idea pleases me.”

“As you wish. I am not experienced in such things.”

“Salve your conscience too, I expect. You’d feel guilt if free when pierced.”

“Oh.” She tried to sound indifferent, but was trembling as her wrists were freed and she disposed herself wantonly on her back with limbs outspread. Looking up from his couch, she asked, “Is this the approved posture?”

“You’re a cool one.” He looked down at her until she flushed and sought to move. “Keep still. you’re just right, I’m going to tie you so you can move a little. ’Tis a poor fuck if a girl can’t move a bit.”

“Thank you.”

It was not sarcasm. She knew not why she spoke her thanks, it was absurd. Chagrined, she lay motionless while her ravisher looped her limbs with cords, then her wrists and ankles, loose enough so that she could flex them.

“Comfortable?”

“Yes.” The concession was grudging. “I’m surprised you

want me comfortable. Is it not better for a man when the girl's in pain?"

He shrugged. "We will do that too. Have you ever been brought to climax?"

Dubois's blunt question shocked her. It violated the decencies she had been raised to respect. Shifting restlessly against tethers, she said, "I don't know what you mean."

His laugh shattered her feeble defenses. "You know perfectly well what I mean. Well, have you?"

"No."

"Never brought it on yourself?"

"No." She sniffed disdainfully. "You're being filthy."

Dubois sat beside her on the couch. "I don't have to thrash you for that," he said easily. "I have you safe. I've no need to be a bully." He reached down and clasped her easily accessible sex, kneading it gently. Against her tensing and her gasp, he asked, "Is this filthy?"

"Yes."

"Tell me why."

"I can't. It simply is." She stirred in revolt. "Please stop."

"I've never fucked a girl I didn't bring to climax. I won't start with you."

Caroline kept silent, not knowing what to say or do. She was in shock at the familiarity of the searching hand and wise fingers. Nothing like this had ever happened to her. This was part of a new world and a new life in which she was like a child. Not even a girl had touched her thus, or evoked in her such a rising tide of tumescence. She tried to divorce herself from what was being done to her. Stiffly, she said, “I know naught of these ugly things, Sir. If what you are doing is not a part of raping me, I pray that you desist.”

“It is a part of raping you—my way.”

“But I don’t understand. I’m so helpless—”

“And I am a Frenchman.” His laugh at her innocence was wholly Gallic. “I don’t fuck without finesse. My father was a nobleman of old France. He taught me the capacity of girls.”

“My father taught me to cherish my honor.”

“If your honor is your cunt, it would appear your father is about to lose an argument.”

Caroline closed her eyes to his smiling face. Dubois could do as he pleased with her. She could not move enough to stifle his intentions. But what he did to her now was new and strange and beyond her knowledge. All she could be conscious of was a shaming guilt that she felt herself responding pleasurably to his manipulation of her sex. Soon

she closed her eyes and began to moan. Dubois skillfully brought her to a writhing, heaving climax. He looked down at what he had wrought, finding beauty in the palpitating curves and the flat plane of her belly.

Allowing her to rest for a minute, he abruptly demanded, “Well?”

Caroline opened her eyes and stiffed within her ropes. She was prey to conflicting emotions, a ship without a rudder. Hesitantly, she ventured, “I have shamed myself, I know I have.”

“You have become a woman.”

“Your hand, where you placed it on me, do men do that to girls? Is it respectable?”

“Anything is respectable in bed, chérie.”

“But it was so wrong, and I got pleasure.”

Jean Dubois laughed delightedly, knowing himself a lucky man. Casting aside his clothes, he took her utterly.

He left the captive girl tied as she was through the night. He slept beside her on the couch, his head cradled on one of her bare bound arms. From time to time he awoke and possessed her anew, teaching her such of the arts of love as her bondage would allow. For the girl herself it was a nightmare of strange bliss. She slept fitfully between his assaults upon her body, the slumber of repletion. Sometimes

she flexed a wrist or an ankle but found no slack. She would never escape this man—never! She woefully tried to review the events of this most momentous day of her life, but there was too much of it to comprehend. It was shocking. It was inconsistent. It was far from what she had planned or expected. True, she had known she would be bound and ravished. She had seen this as the price she paid for the salvation of Fort Stapleton. But that it should be like this, so totally different from her nightmare fears, she could not comprehend. She closed tired eyes and drifted to sleep.

Caroline Dover adjusted to captivity. She was tossed a soft triangle of doeskin and a rawhide lace by which she contrived to cover her pubic hair. She cynically supposed it was Dubois's way of proclaiming ownership of that portion of a girl men use. There were also small tight mocasins to enable her to keep up with the eastward trek, at the end of which Dubois intended to find profitable employment for his force. The sacking of Fort Stapleton had yielded a wagon and horses. The wagon was loaded with loot and gear. No one rode in it, but each day Caroline trudged behind its tailgate, leashed there by a ten-foot rawhide strip encircling her neck. Except for brief periods of convenience, her hands were always tied behind her back. She was kept separate from the other female prisoners. All she got from them was a hostile glare. It was borne upon her that she was privileged. She had become the personal posses-

sion of Jean Dubois. Debased in a strange slavery, she was nonetheless accorded a small measure of deference. Wryly, she knew herself the king's mistress.

It had become surprisingly easy to come to terms with sex. She cultivated its complexities as the path most likely to lead her to her ultimate revenge. But it was by the Frenchman's skill and tenderness that she knew herself most truly conquered. Dubois had stripped her mind, as well as her body, and laid it bare. Caroline suspected he guessed her intent and was amused by it. But had she been granted an opportunity to kill him she knew this was neither the time nor the place. She was safer under his protection. She had no wish to be linked by her neck to the other five and used as they were used by any brave under the compulsion of carnal caprice.

The force was large, their pace slow. Caroline was grateful for the lack of speed. Leashed behind the wagon, she must walk with care. If she tripped or fell, the noose would quickly tighten around her neck and she might not regain her feet. She had no hands. She never got used to having no hands. The business of having them tied behind her back became commonplace. It was understandable inasmuch as she was a prisoner and might escape. But when she had a need of them, it was the height of frustration to be denied. In their teepee she spoke of it to Dubois.

"Why can't I give you my parole? I could march beside

you."

Everything she said or did delighted him. He found her an endless source of pleasure. "Because, chérie, it is most fitting for a girl to have her hands where yours are now."

"I know. It makes my breasts stick out and keeps me helpless and dependent. If I gave you my word, I'd keep it."

Dubois placed a silencing finger on her lips. "Enough. I like you as you are."

They had come by an easy intimacy, merging identities in the act of love. It became a source of raillery between them that her hands should remain bound at her back while he continued his instruction in the many ways they could pleasure each other. Caroline became adept in arranging her arms or contorting herself to accommodate bound wrists. For safety while he slept, Dubois kept her neck loosely tethered to the bed. Sometimes he bathed her himself while she stood meekly helpless. Sometimes he delegated the task to a squaw. When her hair became untidy and she pleaded hard enough, he would allow her a brief freedom and watch, entranced, as she applied brush and comb to her beautiful mane. When it came time to be retied, she never argued, but crossed her wrists and stood quietly while it was done. It was on the sixth night that he told her of his plans.

"It will not be easy to part with you, little one."

Caroline was sitting, naked, on their couch, her leash trailing from her neck, her hands held easily at her back. She tensed, her eyes suddenly fearful. “Part with me! But I thought—”

“Surely you thought not of wedding bells, ma petite?”

Caroline flushed. What had she thought of, she was unsure. She had seen herself only as a captive camp follower, tethered and tied for her master’s pleasure. What else was there?

Cautiously, she replied, “I thought only of being your captive.”

Dubois cocked a French eyebrow. “I think ye do me honor, mademoiselle. But you’re an expensive luxury, and I am but a poor soldier of fortune. I doubt ye know your worth.”

“You mean money?”

“Ah, indeed, that is what I mean. Gold.”

“Someone will buy me?” Caroline was incredulous. “You cannot mean that!”

“Alas, that is exactly what I mean. There are those who would pay huge sums for you. I expect to reap a tidy profit from those disgruntled damsels on the coffle. That’s the reason they are not apportioned out among the Algonquin. My warriors, too, want money.”

“But how? Where? I cannot believe—”

Dubois shrugged. “There are many places and many ways. The planters in the Indies pay what is asked. There is a sea captain I know there. I expect to make an arrangement with him.”

“What is his need of us?”

“The same as mine, mademoiselle. The same as all men. But he has the money and there are few white girls where he lives.”

“Such a man would never marry me.”

Dubois gestured in deprecation. “It is unlikely. You would be his mistress or his slave, according to his temperament and yours.”

“The girl has nothing to say about anything?”

“If she argues, she’s likely to find herself working in the sugar cane fields, her feet chained, her back marked by the overseer’s whip. A day or two of that softens the heart of any maiden toward her owner.”

Caroline shuddered. “Is that truly to be my fate?”

“Let us hope you will have a kindly owner and that you yourself will be a sensible girl.”

Chin-up, she faced him. “I’d sooner you kept me.”

“Ah! The devil ye know against the one you don’t, eh?”

Soberly, Dubois gazed at his distressed captive. “But there’s girls who find a good life.” He chuckled. “And their hands may not be forever tied behind their backs.”

“I do not want to be sold,” she said flatly, unsure of her reasons but certain they were good, “I would sooner be a captive than a slave.” Vehemently, she repeated, “Please keep me for your own.”

Again he used the familiar motion of his finger on her rebellious lips. “We speak no more of this for now, chérie. We have far to go and much may happen. For the moment you are of a certainty mine.” He pretended to consider. “And now I think perhaps I will take you on your knees.”

Obediently, Caroline Dover arranged herself, legs far apart, bent forward to lay her cheek upon the ground. The shaming posture no longer offended her. She had learned its merit.

One evening Dubois said, musingly, “It’s just occured to me: I’ve had no need yet to punish you.”

Caroline was becoming accustomed to his moods. She examined this one and found no logic. “Why would you punish me? What for? I mean, I’m a prisoner, so what wrong can I do?”

“You could insult me verbally. You could attempt an es-

cape."

"With my hands tied behind my back?" Caroline laughed in genuine amusement. "I'd be insane to try either."

"Ah, but if you were not tied!"

"But I am always tied. You never allow me freedom so I've ceased to think of it." Sensing disbelief, she added, "If you will give me freedom for only one day, I could give you a better answer." She shrugged disdainfully. "Would not a girl have to be out of her mind to run into the wilderness naked and alone, even if her hands were free?"

Dubois eyed her quizzically. "You make a convincing argument. I am almost tempted... but no! You shall not have your hands. You please me as you are." He chuckled. "You are no longer frightened of me?"

"Not nearly as much as I was." Caroline tossed her hair, a familiar and eloquent gesture since she lost her hands to the rawhide. "But you spoke of punishment. If I offended you or ran away, what would you do to me?"

"Whip you. Hand you over to the squaws for a day. Tie you to a wagon wheel for the night. Can you think of something?"

"No. They sound quite adequate. Thank you for telling me."

Caroline was not punished, but Dubois's mention of punishment added a dimension to her captivity. Her condition

had always seemed to her so hopeless as to place her beyond the possibility of transgression. While on this wilderness trail, she could envision only obedience. She had given Dubois total submission. But if the day might come when she might have a viable choice, and if her choice failed, would she then be punished? The thought intrigued. She stored it away with her other resolution. If she tried to kill Dubois but failed,.what would happen then? She shuddered at the probable punishment she would have to endure. But she must not fail! She would not fail!

Caroline never knew what the girl had done. But, hot on the heels of her discussion with Dubois, one of the five girls was hung by her wrists from the bough of a tree and whipped. It was a chastening thing to behold the slender, naked youthfulness kicking, writhing, and tearing at tied hands as the willows cut and bit her unmarked flesh. More terrible still were the girl's screams, her pleas for mercy, her frantic promise of good behavior if only they would stop with their whips.

They did eventually stop when her beauty was well striated with scarlet lines from neck to toes. But they left her hanging there as an example to the other four and perhaps to Caroline herself. The four were tethered to an adjoining tree and had no choice but to watch their companion's punishment and its aftermath in which she simply hung in sobbing misery, still subject to an occasional mischievous stripe from a passing squaw. Tears streamed down inno-

cent cheeks, but their owner was helpless to dry them. Her toes reached vainly for the ground six inches below and droplets of sweat trickled from strained armpits. The punished girl tossed her hair from across her face in the most feminine of all motions. Her sobs were bitter.

It was the captives' first glimpse of Algonquin punishment for an Algonquin sin. Up to that point in their captivity they had endured only constant sexual abuse, their vaginas always subject to the penetration of a man or men. But here was something different, a vision of rules to be obeyed and a hateful punishment for disobedience. The four girls stood together in their own confinement of rawhide thongs, hands behind their backs, necks noosed. They knew what they had witnessed could happen to them. Even Caroline had food for thought.

2

Naked in the Night

THE ACT OF LOVE should be a strange and disquieting thing for a girl who performs it with a man she intends to kill. Caroline's resolution remained firm that she must kill Jean Dubois for annihilating Fort Stapleton and all therein, as well as for the death of her fiance. But his execution was still comfortably distant, and she was bereft of hands with which to use a weapon. In the meantime, she was his compliant mistress. She supposed she was not the first girl to barter her body as the price of revenge, but the happiness she felt left guilt. She knew she should not be happy.

They spoke often of her tied hands. It was now a joke between them, an excuse for repartee. It enhanced Caroline's beauty, acting for him as an aphrodisiac. She herself had become accustomed to doing without hands. She sensed, too, the erotic stimulation and had come to share it.

Jean Dubois was a complexity of contradictions, born of conflict in a savage land. He could play the aristocrat or the savage with equal felicity. He was capable of self-analysis and soon realized he was falling in love with Caroline Dover. He found with her an empathy lacking in previous conquests. But the tender emotion annoyed him. He had always taken girls where he found them, regardless of their origins, and tossed them away with equal ease. He did not want a wife. He was in the full flush of masculinity and

ripe for the plucking by any female shrewd or innocent enough to set the proper trap. As yet, none had succeeded. Caroline was not even aware of being potent bait. It was out of this congestion of emotions that Dubois's caprice decided to punish the girl he feared he loved.

Caroline examined the fact of punishment with less dismay than he had supposed, seeing it as only one more hurdle to cross and one more fact of the male.

Puzzled, she asked, "Why would you punish me? I haven't done anything. We spoke of this before."

"Because I am a bastard, chérie. It gives me pleasure."

"Pleasure? To see me whipped!"

"Ah, the so delicious picture! But you will not be whipped. Another time most certainly. But for now something much more simple."

"Why bother then!"

"You regret the absence of stripes, ma petite?"

She flushed, knowing her exclamation a mistake. "I—I did not mean that," she said awkwardly. "I don't know what I meant. I suppose I just don't want to be punished at all."

"And why should you! Ahhh, but there's the spice."

Caroline knew she was being laughed at again. She was half inclined to laugh with him. Nothing ever seemed quite

real until it happened. It was morning, the hour of rising. Her neck had been freed from its leash. Dubois was dressing while she stood nakedly bound waiting to be bathed—if such was her master's pleasure.

"How nice for you to have me helpless," she stated carelessly. "I cannot stop you this way."

"No arguments? I had expected a few maiden tears."

"I expect you've used mine up. I'm not going to argue about something I don't even know. If you have an urge to punish me, you may as well get it out of your system." Caroline sniffed haughtily. "I have nothing else to say."

"You are a wise girl. You defeat me. Poof! And my excitement is gone." Dubois affected chagrin. "Perhaps the whip after all, eh?"

"You're teasing me! Are you going to wash me or do I go to my punishment soiled?" She twisted her arms against the rawhide in a familiar gesture. "Or perhaps you'd like to untie my hands."

Dubois surprised her by doing so. Caroline stretched in a blissful luxuriance before accepting the bowl, the water, and the rag. She performed her primitive toilette while he watched. She had become accustomed to his absorption with every bit of her body and her limbs, finding pride that she could thus engross her captor. Her femininity told her it was a weapon she could use.

Idly, she said, “Thank you. I suppose this means I’m to be retied some other way?”

“Indubitably.”

Caroline Dover followed her owner out into the morning.

She did not instantly grasp that the wagon wheel was the instrument of torture. When it was made clear to her, she exclaimed, “But it goes around and around! You mean, I—”

“Today is for repairs and rest. The warriors hunt. The wagon will not move.”

“I suppose I won’t move either?”

“Mais certainment! How did you guess?”

Caroline was vexed by how little she was prone to anger with this man. She was sure she should be in hysterics. If this wheel spelt punishment, the least—she could expect would be a day of discomfort. She kept her voice under control.

“Do you want me to position myself some way?”

“You kneel—your feet back with a spoke between—and I’ll do the rest.”

She felt silly, like a small girl being instructed in a strange new duty. Curious, she looked back to watch her ankles being tied. With a spoke between, they could not be withdrawn. Her binding had begun.

“I think ye seek my shame. Like this—before all the camp?”

“They’ve all see ye naked, and there’s noone here watching now.”

“But when you’re gone, they’ll come quickly enough! Will they switch me with the willows?”

“There will be no willows.” Dubois lifted her left hand as high as her arm would stretch. Studiously, he began to tie its scarlet wrist to the rim. “You’ll find this wheel unkind enough without any willows.”

“Or is it the way you tie me?”

He had her right hand now, its wrist hard against the metal tire and hardwood felloe. His care and precision in its binding was the same as with her left. They were identically placed on the outer perimeter of the wagon wheel, stretched high and wide to compel the captive girl hard back against the hub. As on a previous occasion, Caroline found herself looking down at tautened and protruding breasts.

“Well?”

Dubois’s question held a chuckle. The tied girl could now comprehend what her day would be like. The hub was pressing into the small of her back in a way to presage distress to come. Nor could she move to find easement. Her arms were tied too tight and too far out for that. As though

to make quite sure, Dubois now tied each of them above the elbow hard back against a spoke. The pressure against her back and the arrogance of breasts was now doubled. Their owner's retort was bitter.

"I might bear this if you had not tied my elbows. I can see why you used the word unkind."' Beseechingly, the bound girl gazed up into smiling eyes. "Please—not my elbows!"

Nodding in satisfaction at his work, Jean Dubois stepped back for a leisurely contemplation, intense enough to make his victim blush. Knowing herself condemned, Caroline said nothing, but bowed her head to hide her hurt. He soon went away and left the girl on the wheel alone. Knowing that he was gone, she struggled. But it only hurt her more, so she scarcely moved at all. It hurt a little even to breathe. It would be best to remain submissively still. Resigned to her fate, she once more bent her head.

The camp was well aware of her and her punishment. The Algonquin cared not at all about guilt or innocence, only with the end result, and here was a delectable morsel of white femininity to be mocked and shamed. Beneath the mocking regard of individuals and of groups, Caroline refused to bow in shame. She stared back, at each grinning face with cool hauteur. But she was shockingly conscious of bared sex and thrusting breasts. She longed for covering, but that was just a dream. She would probably never wear clothes again. Trudging behind the tailgate each day and

leashed to her master's bed at night, Caroline had become inured to nudity. But this was blatant, a cruel exposure in which she could hide nothing, nor could she turn away. It was only by great effort of will that she fought back tears.

But nudity soon palled. Forbidden to thrash her, the squaws lost interest and the warriors drifted back to their tasks. It was a working day. They took the children with them, fearful of what they might do to the bound girl if left alone with her.

Dubois was leisurely in his return. Approaching soundlessly, he was able to survey his captive for almost a minute before she sensed his presence and raised her head. Caroline's greeting was simple.

"I hurt."

Dubois nodded. "You will come to hate that wheel."

"Must you keep me tied to it? I cannot move."

He shrugged his most eloquent of shrugs. "That is the way of the wheel, chérie, and you are on it."

"You put me here. You can take me off."

"That would prove nothing, save that I was a weakling. Ma pauvre petite, you are a victim of male ego."

"I'm going to be hurting so bad I won't care. At least untie my elbows, Jean—please." Caroline paused, aghast. It was

the first time she had used his name. Blushing, she stammered, “I—I’m sorry. Forgive me.”

“Forgive you for what, chérie?”

“I used your name. I—I—”

“I’m surprised you have not used it before.”

“But I’m your captive—your slave.”

“So?”

“I should treat you with respect.”

“Then revere my bonds upon your flesh, little one. That is all I ask of you today.” Dubois stooped and kissed her startled lips. A moment later he was gone.

Caroline was panting, her pulse racing. Her owner’s kiss had meant far more than in the lustful urges of copulation. Moreover, he had condoned her thoughtless use of his name. She had expected to at least be whipped for such temerity. Instead, he had sanctioned it and seemed pleased. Her breasts could move but little. They were straining in breathlessness against the ropes tied tightly around her arms. But she did not feel the pain. She was irradiated by a shameful joy.

All things pass. The day was but half done when consciousness of pain returned and hours loomed ahead. The bound girl sighed and to counter misery turned her attention to

the view. It was considerable: a stretch of thinly treed grassland leading to a darker line of forest. She had been gazing upon it for several minutes before a horse and rider, dwarfed by distance, emerged from the trees and headed for the camp. Coming within range of clear vision, the rider changed from a generalized approach to something more specific. The heart of the naked girl tied to the wheel thudded afresh. He was headed straight for her.

He was rangey, like most riders, dressed in bucksins, carrying his gun, powder, and knife. Only his features were remarkable. He was too handsome to trust, his smile too permanent to be sincere. He drank in the white feminine nudity with an evident appreciation, his eyes missing nothing of her condition. His sweeping removal of his hat was flamboyant. His voice held the faintest hint of brogue.

“Brian O’Rourke, ma’am, at your service.”

Caroline distrusted him. She could not tell why. He was prepossessing enough. But female instinct counseled caution. She could not rebuke his stare, but she had to be polite.

“You would do me a service, Sir, by untying me.”

His laugh was as ready as his smile. “Oh, aye, that I would, and have Jean Dubois jumping on me with both feet. What’s thy trouble, lass? Been a bad girl?”

She bit back an acid retort. This man must be known. None

had challenged him. Acidly, Caroline repeated her request. “I’d be grateful to be freed.”

“I bet ye would.”

O’Rourke seemed to feel his statement covered everything. He leaned back against his horse and frankly stared to make the bound girl feel ten times more naked.

“Then would you be kind enough to cover me with something? You should not see me thus.”

“What the devil did ye do to get in this pickle?”

“Does it matter?”

They stared—she hostile, he amused. Caroline fought down the impulse to writhe against the rawhide. The motions would please him, and she was entirely helpless.

Tartly, she added, “No gentleman would leave me like this.”

“Guess not. None around, eh?”

He wanted to tease, to enjoy her mortification. Despite resolve, she found her arms straining in a longing to escape his stare.

“Can’t get loose, eh? Bet you’ve been there for awhile.”

He nodded sagely. “Dubois keeping you around to fuck before he sells you?” The captive could not control her blush. O’Rourke enjoyed that too. “No use doing the haughty si-

lence act, my girl. I can pinch your tits until you find your tongue. Want me to show you?"

"No! Never mind. Since you won't help me, I suggest you confer with Monsieur Dubois. You can ask—"

"Monsieur', eh? Never heard Jean called that before. You got a damn fine body, girl."

"I suggest you discuss my body with Monsieur Dubois. It's his property."

"It is now! He's a lucky man. Think he'd spare a fuck?"

Quite simply, she retorted, "I wish you'd stop staring at me like that."

"Not every day I get to see something like you, ma'am."

"Well, have a good look. Then take your questions to Jean Dubois. It would appear you and I have nothing in common."

Caroline turned her attention to the horizon, ignoring her visitor. But, bound as she was, it was hard to be dignified. Moreover, the pain was creeping back, a hateful nagging misery she could not escape. She wondered how many more hours Dubois would keep her on the wheel. Even one would be too many. Further reflections were terminated by the arrival of Dubois himself.

The two men greeted each other with easy familiarity. The

bound girl, forced to be their audience, gathered that they did business from time to time and found each other agreeable. It was not long before O'Rourke nodded in her direction.

"Fort Stapleton, eh?"

"Yes. Too beautiful to scalp."

"Or to share with a traveling man?"

"I share her with no man."

"I could use a woman for the night."

"Stapleton gave us five others. Take your pick of them. The Algonquin have them tethered around the camp."

Dubois's voice held steel. "Leave this one alone."

"You'd best keep her hidden then." O'Rourke's voice was cheerfully cynical. "Seeing her tied the way you've got her gives any man a hard-on."

They drifted away, still talking. When they were out of earshot, Caroline felt doubly bereft. The thrusting hub gave her no rest. She looked up the bare columns of her arms to the rawhide around her wrists. She was sure it was tighter than ever. She felt cruelly ill used.

Dubois returned sooner than she had expected. She said instantly, "I don't like that man. You shouldn't trust him."

“O’Rourke? He’s just a wanderer. One day he’ll feel age in his joints and settle down with a squaw.”

“He’d like to settle down with me. It was hateful the way he stared.”

“You hurt much?”

“Horribly.” Caroline looked up at her master winsomely. “Haven’t I been punished enough?”

“That’s why I came,” Dubois laughed shortly. “With O’Rourke around you’d best be in the teepee or around with me. He’s a horny bastard.”

“He couldn’t do much to me the way I’m tied.”

“He’d think of something. You and I can think of it too and he’d make you do it.”

Caroline’s cheek pinkened at a mental vision. Dolefully, she asked, “Is that the only reason you’re taking me off this wheel?”

“Good enough, isn’t it? Or would you sooner stay here?”

“Oh, Jean, I want to be untied so bad!” Caroline scarcely noticed her second use of his name. “If I’d been bad, this would cure me of being bad forever.”

“You’ve only been tied there for five hours.”

“I’d believe five centuries. I bet you have no idea how ter-

ribly you've punished me."

"Yes, I have. I told you when I tied you there you'd hate that wheel."

"And I have to look at it every day and all the days as I walk behind the wagon. Jean, how long does this journey last?"

"Awhile. You should hope it lasts forever."

Caroline did not ask why. She knew. At the end of it she would be sold, but she would cross those bridges when she came to them. For the moment, she was wallowing in the bliss of watching herself being untied, first her feet and then her hands. Her wrists were wickedly wealed.

Dubois rubbed them for her and commented cheerfully, "Did a good job on you, eh?"

"I could never get loose, if that's what you mean."

Dubois lifted her up and steadied her arm. She was absurdly stiff and cramped. When he gave her the doeskin triangle, she was obliged to hand it back.

"I can't," she told him. "My fingers are too numb. Would you do it for me?"

Grinning, he tied the lace. She tugged the doeskin over her pubic patch as best she could. It was a pathetically small covering, but it seemed likely to be all she would ever have. For several moments they stood face to face. Then, without

being told, Caroline turned and crossed her wrists behind her back. As they were studiously tied to a perfection of helplessness, she glowed with a familiar sense of coming home. If the wheel had taught her nothing else, she had at least learned there are worse tribulations for a girl than a pair of bound hands. When Dubois turned her around again and kissed her lips, it felt better still. Walking beside him to their teepee, she glowed.

The eastward march resumed. Each day Caroline was noosed to the tailgate. But her walk was careless and without strain. She had adjusted to the wagon's pace and to having her arms confined behind her back. She could muse quietly as the miles slowly passed or survey the countryside. Sometimes a warrior or a squaw would vouchsafe her a word in passing and she would reply. Her captivity was taking on the aspects of forever.

O'Rourke allowed two days to pass before bothering her again. He had chosen one of the five and led her noosed behind his horse in the same manner as Caroline followed the wagon. Dubois made it clear the girl was only on loan to him to keep his randy inclinations within bounds. When O'Rourke left the force, she would be returned to the coffle. Caroline saw them at a distance and felt sympathy for the maiden who was likely to be assiduously used each night and who obviously hated the separation from her friends. Like Caroline, each girl had adjusted to constant copulation. It had become a fact of life for all of them. Three of

the five had been young wives, and the other two had likely been as virgin as Caroline herself, but none were virgin now.

On the third day of O'Rourke's arrival Caroline's musings were shadowed by an awareness of a presence. O'Rourke had silently approached from the rear and now fell into step beside her.

"Want your hands untied, love?"

"If I asked you to, you'd refuse. Look, Mr. O'Rourke, you've been loaned a girl. Use her and leave me alone."

"Hmmm—uppity, eh? Suppose I tell Dubois you asked me to help you escape? You'd get a whipping for it."

"If he believed you."

"Oh, I'll make a convincing story, never fear. I can I ikely get you whipped any time I choose."

"Perhaps but I doubt it."

"Feel secure with him, eh? Well, I've taken a fancy to you. Get behind me on my horse at the right time and we'd be safe away. What d'you say now?"

"The same as before. You have a girl. She's a pretty girl. Use her and leave me alone."

"Not frightened of me and my threats, eh?"

“Yes, I’m frightened of you. I think you’re dangerous. You won’t get me behind you on your horse. Why don’t you set young Dorothy up there and ride away with her?”

“Aha! Telling me to steal your master’s property. I’ll remember that. But seriously, lass, don’t you want to escape?”

“Being with you? My hands tied? Naked and with a noosed neck? Do you call that escape?”

“I’d free you. I get no kick out of seeing you bound as Dubois does. For my money you tie a girl only when ye must.”

“I’ll listen to anything sensible.”

“We’ll head south for the Gulf of Mexico. If you’ve pleased me, I’ll keep you. If you’ve acted like a bitch, I’ll put you aboard a boat for the Indies as Dubois intends to do. He’s shipped a few girls in his time, I know!”

“No, thank you.”

“You’re a cool trick,” O’Rourke said with disgust. “But the day may come, eh? You may not always have Dubois by the tail.”

That night, in their teepee, Caroline told her master what had been said. She was piqued by his laughing response.

“I’m surprised O’Rourke waited so long. He’ll try anything

once. He lives mostly by his wits. Look, chérie, the man's no friend of mine. We work together when it pays us, that's all. I'll warn him away from you again. If he makes more propositions, listen and let me know."

"He could concoct some story you might believe. Then would you have me whipped?"

"You'll not be whipped for anything O'Rourke says, little one." Dubois held her in in his arms and kissed her gently. "I have a use for him, or else I'd tell him to go."

The next proposition was not long delayed. On the following day O'Rourke slipped beside her once again. His brogue was faintly accusing.

"You tell him all I say? It goes along with your walking to market like a trussed fowl. He's got you buffaloed for sure."

"He has me captive, and I prefer his captivity to yours."

"Suppose I deliver ye to a British garrison? We're getting fair enough east, and I know where they are. Would you pleasure me on the way?"

For the first time she was tempted, but her distrust was too great. Her reply lacked warmth.

"Thanks, but I'd rather not," she told him.

"They'd send ye back to England, lass."

"I doubt it. In this condition they'd regard me as a scarlet

woman. I'd get the pillory and the whip for sure."

"Give me a week with your cunt and I'll drop you off at the first farm. They'll give you clothes and help."

Once more there was temptation. It was a plausible offer. It was easily possible. But there was also the vision of being kept bound and then sold to a brothel or to a plantation owner. Caroline had little knowledge of such things. Frankly, she turned to the man at her side.

"You may think ill of me, but I'm naked and helpless in a strange land. I am owned by a man who, in his way, has been kind. If I go with you, I face the unknown, and you strike me as a man of little substance. Can't you understand? Please stop pestering me."

O'Rourke left her. It was hard to tell how angry he might be, but Caroline did not care. He was disquieting, bothering her with options which would have been tempting enough if she had trusted him. She was now forced to examine her status and her future with Dubois. Most difficult of all were her own feelings. Her evening with her owner took her one more step into quandary.

"I've been staying away from settlements," Dubois told her as he noosed her for their play and for sleep. "We're not far distant from a port."

The day had finally come. Caroline looked at her owner, wide-eyed and wrought with anxious curiosity.

“What will you do with me?” she asked simply.

“Sell you.”

Hands tied behind her back, the tether running loosely from her neck to the couch, Caroline was sitting as she so often did before they started making love. Now she tensed in immobility, breathless at this tossing of the dice with fate.

Very quietly, she said, “I’ve fallen in love with you.”

“I know. It’s the same with me.”

“Then why—?”

“You know why, chérie.” He raised her to her feet and kissed her gently, then savagely, as his fingers gripped her arms. “I’m an adventurer, a soldier of fortune. I can never marry.”

“I don’t care. Keep me as you keep me now. If you set me free, I would follow you.”

“To kill me?”

Caroline’s indrawn breath was involuntary. “I had meant to once. How did you guess?”

“It was not hard, chérie. I own all of you, including your thoughts. Besides, what’s more logical?”

“I cannot kill you now. I have not been able to for some

time. I told you the truth. I am in love with you."

Dubois sighed. He pressed her back to sit upon the couch. He draped himself across its end and cocked his eyebrow.

"We have both known this for some time," he admitted slowly. "I knew it with surety that day I tied you to the wheel. I wanted to see if you would hate me. But you did not."

"I knew it then too." Hesitantly, Caroline asked, "If you love me, why would you sell me?"

"Because I must. I own you on this couch. But you belong to us all, as do the other five. The six of you represent the greatest profit my band has ever known, and you will fetch more money than the other five together." Dubois shrugged and gestured. "I know you do not understand your worth, even as a wife, but you are a most extraordinarily lovely girl. The word 'beautiful' does you no justice. You have a figure such as men dream of."

"Jean, I do not understand any of this. How much is this great sum you can get for me?"

"Perhaps a million and a similar sum for the other five together."

It was shattering—a sum almost beyond her comprehension. Caroline stared in dismay. She was bereft of words.

"If I had a million, chérie, I would toss it in the kitty and

take you for my own, but I have only paltry sums."

"Allow me to escape, then join me elsewhere."

"I have thought of that, but it would deceive no one. And where would you escape to?"

"Why not use O'Rourke? Let him kidnap me or take me in any way he wants. I've told you of his offers."

"Allow him to use you, chérie?"

"I don't mind. I would do it for you."

"No, I do not trust him. He knows your worth the same as I do. He'd sell you. Ma petite, can you understand this devil of a spot?"

Caroline understood. They were both caged by invisible bars. But she still had a feminine logic.

"I think if you loved me enough, you would find a way. Your men are bandits. Do you owe them so much honor?"

"I owe them the honor that is among thieves. You have beheld their trust in me. They follow me without question. They have accepted my possession of you. I am sure there are those who would have been happy to borrow you from the coffle for a night of love."

Caroline stirred restlessly. "There has to be a way," she said with certainty. "Could you link me on the end of the coffle and let me escape from there?"

Dubois shook his head sadly. “I have thought of little else for several days,” he admitted soberly. “But I always return to the same place. No matter what we contrive, I cannot offer you a decent life. You have seen the best of it on this journey. Mostly it is pain and tears and death. I will not give you that.”

“But you will sell me into slavery!”

“Yes, I told you that at the start. I am a rogue.”

“But I love you!”

“I cannot hope your love will endure what I must do. It is a price I must pay.”

“But what of the price I’ll pay as a slave? Chained, whipped —slaves are treated worse than cattle.”

“Not a slave such as you will be. You could become a wealthy woman.”

“I don’t believe that. Keep me with you, my hands tied behind my back, my neck noosed, and keep me naked. I give you pleasure. Surely your men owe you something! They owe you me!”

Caroline’s vehemence was convincing. Dubois was touched by it. If she wanted this life so much, he would be a fool to part with her. He had never known a girl who could be so happy in bondage. She was all his dreams come true. He had known this from the day his men had bound her to the

stake outside the fort. He had closed his mind to it long enough.

“Very well then,” he agreed decisively. “Tomorrow I’ll have it out with them.” He chuckled. “If they kill me and add you to the coffle, you won’t be much worse off.”

He took her in his arms. Caroline was in feminine ecstasy. She had got her way. She had no doubt whatsoever that Dubois would win his men’s approval. And she could not believe she was worth all that money anyway.

As her master positioned her for their love-making, she mischievously asked, “Would you like to untie my hands just this once—now that I won’t run away?”

“No, you are perfection just as you are.”

“I could play with you.”

“It is I who plays with you, chérie. I want you bound.”

The naked girl beneath his weight sighed happily. Everything was so absolutely perfect!

Minds relieved of doubt and decision, they slept deep. The cautioning finger on Caroline’s lips brought her drowsily awake. At first she thought it was her lover, ready to possess her once more, but even in the gloom she recognized the girl who O’Rourke had chosen as his slave. She sat up cautiously, still half asleep. Bu the time she was fully aware, a knife had sliced the rawhide on her wrists and the

noose on her neck. The girl tiptoed back to the teepee's flap. Suddenly awake to new possibilities and urgently curious, the freed girl leaped to intercept, but the nude female shadow in the night had slipped easily away without a word. Caroline, baffled, stood close by the couch, looking down in wonder at the wicked weapon she held. Ironically, she thought back to what she would have given for it in those first days with Jean Dubois. Now she had no use for it. Thought of using it to rob the body on the bed of life was too horrific to consider. She hefted the slender steel in a puzzled hand and lovingly looked down at the man asleep upon the bed. But Dubois was not asleep. He was gazing up at her with eyes vividly aware.

It happened quickly. One male hand struck her wrist so that the knife fell to the floor, and the other slapped her cheek and sent her sprawling onto the ground. A moment later a male knee was on the small of her back,. and her hands were being tied once more. When they were firmly joined at behind her, she was allowed to sit up.

"You little bitch!" Dubois accused.

The contempt was worse than any blow, and Caroline's wail against it was instant. "No, Jean, it's not what you think! It's not the way it looked! Oh, darling!"

Dubois picked up the blade, his voice icy. "A toothpick, no doubt? Where the devil have you hidden it all this time?"

The girl, so seemingly caught in the act of attempted murder, poured out her story in dismay. The more she examined what Dubois had seen, the more she beheld herself as guilty. How could she hope to convince him against the evidence of his own eyes? Her explanations trailed away in tears. If only she was not tied, she could embrace him and everything would be all right again, but her wrists were corded tight.

“You little snake!”

Her lover continued to revile her as he bound her feet. Then he joined them to her bound hands. Caroline knew herself hogtied and totally helpless. She tried to think of things to say, but they would not come. She saw herself as Dubois saw her: condemned! Caught unforgivably in the attempt to murder him, and after they had spoken so of love—what must he think of her? She lay bowed backward on the floor, unable to do or say a thing in her own defense. Taking the murder weapon, Dubois left her there alone. Caroline never knew if or where he slept.

There came then a hopeless night, a cheerless dawn, and a day which promised only pain. Caroline, hanging naked from a tree as once another girl had hung, cared little. The pain of her outspread wrists was a nagging misery from the rawhide loops by which her feet were suspended a foot above the grass. All her weight was on them, her shoulders screaming against her tractioned. arms. Soon she was to be

whipped for all to see. She was a queen brought low. She was a murderess about to receive the first of her punishments. But what did any of it matter? She was numb with the desolation of what might have been. She had held ecstasy in her hands, and now it was gone forever.

The encampment passed and repassed her suspended nudity. Children mocked and squaws grinned knowingly. From a distance her five fellow captives glowered at her suspended nudity with gloating satisfaction. The warriors examined her taut breasts and lifted her doeskin triangle, possibly to make sure her sex was still there and her pubic hair intact. Caroline hoped they would whip her soon and get it over with.

Prudence cautioned the suspended girl. She had never been whipped before as she would now be whipped. She vividly recalled the one awful stroke Dubois had given her as a warning long ago. It had made the squaws' inflictions seem mere child's play. Now every stroke upon her nudity would be that severe or worse. Perhaps she would die under the torture. She did not care about that either. If only the girl on the coffle had told the truth! But she had lied, and her companion had lied too. All five swore she had been linked in the coffle the whole time. Caroline supposed they still believed her guilty of horrific crimes and saw her new condition as no more than justice being served.

"Did I not tell ye, love, I'd see ye whipped?" O'Rourke's

brogue insinuated itself into consciousness. He was standing close, examining her stretched loveliness with satisfaction. “Maybe you’d have been wise to take my offer.”

It fell into place. Brokenly, she accused, “It was you! You planned this!”

“Oh, aye, but you’ll never prove it.”

“If that girl was threatened with the whipping I’m going to get, she would speak.”

“And who’s to give it? ’Tis not her word alone.”

She was caged—boxed in by lies. She had no friend in the entire encampment. Caroline moaned in desolation.

“Make her tell the truth,” she begged of O’Rourke. “She won’t be punished. I promise she and the others won’t be punished.”

“Aha—with the queen back in favor, eh?” O’Rourke laughed cynically. “Have ye naught to promise me?”

“Nothing.”

“Then rot where ye are.”

Caroline watched him stride away. It was a frightening thing to have her future dependent on such as he. The slavery to which she would now be sold was preferable. But for now she would be whipped, and there were other days before they would reach the port. She closed her eyes.

Fingers fumbling at the lace of her triangle brought her back to life. Opening her eyes, Caroline knew instantly her time had come. They were all present. Dubois was one of the crowd, detached and out of range of her voice unless she screamed. She could not plead. Caroline moved her bare legs up and down in restless anticipation. The audience approved. Soon she would be dancing like a puppet on a string. They would approve of that too. It was a heathen holiday, her maiden flesh the sacrifice. She could see O'Rourke whispering into Dubois's inattentive ear.

It appeared she was to be whipped by a girl chosen from the coffle—a big, good-natured creature with whom she had shared coffee and feminine secrets long ago. The girl was now grim-lipped and determined, playing with the whip as though it was an old friend. Doubtless she saw herself as an instrument of justice and now planned to settle an old score. But perhaps her arm would not be as brutal as that one stroke of Jean Dubois's. She was only a girl. Caroline's expert eye sought for and found the scarlet wrists so recently untied. The girl had been bound almost as long as she herself. Presumably, after she had wielded the whip, she would be bound again. It suddenly occurred to the suspended girl that they would now be fellow passengers—or fellow captives aboard the same ship.

There was no roll of drums, no reading of a proclamation. A nod from Dubois sent the maiden with the whip to take her stance. Another nod and her arm swung back. She was

as naked as Caroline herself, so the play of her curves and muscles as she swung upon her heel was an exhibition in itself. The audience was tense. The girl to be whipped closed her eyes and held her breath.

It was every bit as bad as Caroline remembered—maybe worse. Perhaps it was because she now hung suspended and totally exposed in cruel invitation to the lash, her skin taut and stretched so that the bite of thongs must be doubly severe. Caroline gasped. She writhed uncontrollably, her legs flailing in a wild revolt of maiden flesh against an agony it could express in no other way. It took four such strokes, their impact wildly spaced on flinching flesh, to bring the screams. Caroline had not wanted to scream, but the cries of anguish she pealed into the wilderness air were an involuntary protest of nerves and skin and all the curved loveliness which proclaimed her femininity.

Willow withes across her bottom, the cut of thong upon her back. The girl named Audrey used both with a skill born of righteousness. Most likely she herself had once been whipped. She knew the places where a snapping tip could best bite at a girl's body. With all her writhings, the victim could defend no part of herself. Her hands had been cunningly tied far apart so she could not turn. As the withes and the whip had their way with her, and as she screamed, her eyes sought those of Jean Dubois. But finding them gave her no comfort. They were dark depths of hurt, of contempt, of anger. Caroline knew he was still seeing her

beside their couch and in her hand the blade with which to pierce his heart.

Audry did not whip the would-be murderess to death. Her willing hand was stayed before unconsciousness might release her from further pain. She had been severely whipped. Her skin from neck to knee proclaimed in scarlet and purple the viciousness of the infliction. But it was far from lethal. After a disgruntled Audrey had been forced to cross her wrists behind her back to be retied and the easily bored audience disappeared, Caroline was left to hang suspended and savor the agony, indignity, and, above all, the shame of her punishment. She was a girl who had sought to murder her lover in cold blood. She sobbed in silent loneliness and hurt.

Night came. The encampment slept. A warrior checked the rawhide on the punished wrists. Caroline was securely bound. Sometime later three horses emerged from the gloom. They were led by O'Rourke, Audrey, and the girl who had given Caroline the knife. The punished girl watched their approach with astonishment and misgiving. They had dragged her back from semi-consciousness. While O'Rourke clasped her striated nudity in appreciative arms, a mounted Audrey cut the rawhides above the punished wrists and the hurt girl was lowered to the grass. Before she thought to scream, she was tightly gagged. Rapidly, they bound their prize. They hoisted her on a horse and cinched her securely across its back. They returned into

the shadows.

Caroline had not fought; she had not screamed. Now it was too late. Her hands and arms were useless, stiff and numb and without function. She was too dispirited to care much about anything. The whipping had drained her strength and her emotions. But the unexpected acted as a stimulant. Reasoning revived. There had been only five horses in the camp, including O'Rourke's, and here were three of them. Somewhere there must be two more should someone wish to pursue this errant trio and their female booty.

Caroline sought the right word: kidnapped, stolen? At least she was no longer hanging from the bough. She was, moreover, being taken from punishments and Dubois's cold anger to another fate, the travails of which she could only guess. O'Rourke would sell her eventually, of that she had no doubt. What would happen between now and then was a closed book only time could open. But O'Rourke might be less concerned with keeping her bound. Perhaps escape was now a possibility in her life in ways it had not been before—perhaps.

Once clear of the Algonquin camp the trio mounted. Jenny, the second girl, was the lightest, so her horse had been chosen to carry the double load. Her bare knees were hot against the captive's bare skin as she urged her horse silently to greater speed.

"We've got you now, you treacherous bitch," Jenny

whispered. “Audrey and me get liberty, but you, my sweet, are going to be sold into slavery.”

The pounding hooves overtook them in the first mile. The starlight was sufficient to distinguish horse and rider. Even from her limited, upside down view, Caroline was positive it was Dubois. What she did not see was O’Rourke dismounting and taking careful aim. His rifle shot split the silence of the night. What the captive did see was the rider tumble from his steed, laying motionless upon the grass. If there had been any doubt before, there was none now. It was Jean Dubois.

Jean Dubois was dead.

3

Chained Cargo

“THE SON OF A BITCH, the dirty son of a bitch!” Audrey poured into the words all the venom she possessed.

Caroline was weary of hearing the exclamation, but secretly got a good deal of satisfaction from its bitterness. Jenny, too, was extremely vocal on the subject of Brian O’Rourke’s perfidy.

“He promised us the earth. We was goin’ to wear diamonds and silks and everything. Now look at us!” Disgustedly, she held up chained hands as high as the links allowed, looking petulantly at Caroline. “Sold into slavery same as you.”

“We thought we were so damn smart.”

“Well, how was we to know?”

“Serves us right—these lousy chains!”

Caroline surveyed her two fellow prisoners with wry amusement, but their tribulations were hers too. The only difference was they had been duped by the blarney brandishments she herself had never trusted. Now the three of them were below deck on a ship bound for the Indies, the auction block, and the plantations. They were ironed at wrists and ankle, a chain joining them to prevent them from raising their hand fetters as a weapon. Their necks were metal-collared and chained behind them to a bulk-

head or a post. Their only comfort was their own company.

“That bloody blacksmith! Pounding his rotten rivets into these things they’ve put on us! We can’t ever get loose now.”

“Ten times as bad as having our hands tied the way we was.”

“We’ll never escape—not ever!”

“Well, we’re not supposed to,” Caroline pointed out reasonably. “I expect they’ll strike the irons off us when we get where we’re going. The ’Smith can do that as easily as he put them on. We can’t possibly get them off, so there’s no sense chafing our skin the way you’re doing.”

“A girl has to try.”

“At least it’s something to do.”

Audrey and Jenny were diverting to a point. Caroline would have preferred less plaintive company, but she could share their outrage at the treachery of the male. However, there was still between them the fact of Jenny’s conivance at her spurious crime, and the whipping of her back and bottom which Audrey had delivered with such relish. It was a division. Caroline felt no animosity for acts performed under duress, but the girls themselves felt a guilt they did not voice.

“The rotten bastard—the way he screwed all three of us!”

Audrey could not relinquish her anger. “He had his fun. It wouldn’t have hurt him to let us go.”

“What—and lose all that money? Not bloody likely!” Jenny was still seeing the astonishing pile of gold coins. “I never had no idea us girls were worth all that.”

“And at the end—getting us those dresses and telling us our hands should be tied, just for appearance’s sake.”

“We sure were dumb.”

Caroline silently agreed. Jenny and Audrey had been besotted by Irish charm. But maybe it was habit leading them into being tied again without demur, they had been tied so much.

They simply had not thought.

“It’s no use rehashing it over and over,” Caroline said evenly. “It’s done. It’s over. All three of us are slaves. We’ve been slaves for a long time without realizing it.”

Audrey stood up. She did this often and within the small tolerance of the chain from her collar. It was as though the girl could not reconcile herself to irons, as though they made no sense, holding her within such confinement, so impossible to wriggle out. All three sets had been wrought for the slenderness of girls. There was no slackness anywhere, not even around their necks. The metal bands riveted on wrist and ankle were firmly snug. But Audrey,

standing, tugged angrily at the chain which prevented her from raising her hands above her navel.

“Look,” Audrey said disgustedly. “I have to bend down to scratch my nose. I can’t slap a face. I can’t eat unless I sit down.” She looked at Caroline as though to an oracle. “Is this the way it’s going to be all the rest of my life?”

“I’m afraid not,” Caroline told the other girl. “I expect whoever buys use will expect us to work, and we can’t work chained like this.” Caroline searched her mind for knowledge of such things. “I think they chain our ankles so we can’t run away. They’d have to leave our hands free, though.”

“I could have murdered that son of a bitch, taking those dresses away from us. D’you think they’ll keep us naked the way we are now after we’re sold?”

Caroline shrugged. “I don’t care any more. I’ve gotten used to it.”

“Dubois got you used to a lot of things, didn’t he?” Jenny asked complacently. “I think you sort of like being tied, and maybe even chained.”

“I liked it with him,” Caroline confessed without shame. “I fell in love with him while my hands were tied behind my back. After that I never wanted them untied.” She lifted shackled hands. “I suppose that’s why I find these bearable.” She shrugged. “After O’Rourke killed Dubois I

stopped caring about anything. I still don't care."

"But don't you want to escape?"

"Yes! I'd run like a hare if I could. But I'll never get the chance. Look at the way we are. From now on we'll always be chained some way. A girl can't fight irons."

"We'll get fucked all over the place, and we'll never get a husband!" Jenny wailed, returning to her favorite theme. "I always wanted to get married."

"I was told some wealthy planters sometimes marry a girl they buy. Where we're being taken there aren't that many white girls available. That's why they pay all that gold for us."

Jenny perked up, but her plaint continued. "I don't see why they'd do that. Not when he's got a girl so she can't run away, and he can screw her and whip her all he wants. It's within the law, isn't it—all those terrible things they do to a girl once she's a slave?"

"I think so. I'm pretty sure they can do what they want with us. But I'm told they are not all cruel. We have to pray we fall into good hands."

"But no man's going to pay all that money and not fuck us!"

Caroline made a wry grimace. "That wouldn't be anything new for us—would it?"

Their arguments brought them closer together and helped pass the time. The shackled girls were left very much alone. They were costly merchandise and thus were well fed and kept clean. They were not made available to the crew. Even the captain availed himself of no privilege. Once a day they were taken on deck for an hour of sunlight. The crew took turns at carrying them above, rather than stand by for their painful shackled shuffle in irons. But even this close contact was not followed up on. Their breasts and pubes were handled, but that was all. A single seaman was left to keep an eye on them and warn them away from the rail. It was understood that girls sold into slavery often preferred a rapid death in the ocean. No chances were taken. But they were the subjects of a good deal of amiable raillery.

“Must be damn nice to sit around and look at tits all day.”

“First thing they do on a plantation is brand your bottom.”

“The overseer gets to fuck all the girls.”

“We’d screw all three of you, but orders is orders.”

“Ye’re too damn costly for the likes of us.”

“Now if I could buy one o’ you for a couple of guineas.”

Mostly the girls gave as good as they got. Jenny was particularly adept at repartee. But it led to nothing. The naked girls were tempting but inviolate. Their real travail

was with their chains.

But this travail was modified at journey's end. They were taken once more to the blacksmith, there to lose the chain linking their ankles, but to also gain another from each foot to the linkage between their hands. This enabled them to stride freely but with an embarrassing clatter of iron. It kept their hands where they had been before, at the level of their navel or lower down as they chose.

There was also the matter of a covering for their nakedness. Leaving the ship, they were exposed to public view. But the captain surprisingly provided laundered white shifts to cover them from just above their breasts to slightly below their pubic hair. There was a draw-string above their breasts and another at their waist. Tightened, these defeated shapelessness and enhanced female curves. They were unaffected by chains. The girls wondered why they could not have worn them on the voyage. But then they would have arrived soiled. Now they felt as much pride in their appearance as a slave girl may feel. Clinking across the deck, they got a sailor's welcome.

"Ye'd be sure winners for the hundred yard dash now."

"Hate to think what ye'll fetch on the block in that there fancy gown."

"That pretty nightshirt won't stay on ye long once he's paid thy price."

“Spare me one last took at thy cunt, girls.”

“We’ll miss thy tits, and that’s a fact.”

The chained trio felt they had scored.

Nothing is ever what we think or expect. There was no giant black with a whip. Instead, the captain ushered them into a carriage and they rode to the slave market in style. He explained apologetically that it was cheaper than striking off their irons. He delivered them to a middle-aged Englishman presiding in an office reminiscent of a bank or counting house, and there he said goodbye. At the door, he paused and said, “They’re good girls, Mr. Lowther. Never a spot of trouble. No suicide or escape nonsense, and no screaming.” He nodded affably and was gone.

The trio had been lined up before the desk, and there they stayed, gazing expectantly at the tired , bored man resuming his seat. Mr. Lowther gave an impression of having seen everything before, but his voice was pleasant and so lite.

“I am sure you know you have been sent to me to be sold.”

“Yes, Sir, we know.”

Caroline was sure she should be polite too. She had infused respect into her acknowledgment. But Jenny still had her grievance.

“We’ve been kidnapped, that’s what’s happened. A lot of

filthy Indians and a Frenchman—oh, yes, and an Irishman. We ought to be sent back home instead of being here like this."

Mr. Lowther nodded gently in understanding and raised a warning hand. "If you will permit me a few words."

They sensed authority. It was there. The man behind the desk quietly continued.

"I am sure your chains and the prospect of slavery must distress you greatly, but I assure you, you are not the first to stand where you stand now."

His tired delivery paused as though to give him time to recall whole troops of chained maidens entering thralldom. He nodded at Jenny.

"You raise an interesting point, young lady: the precise moment and place wherein a girl discovers she has become a slave. None are born; it's something you must become."

"It shouldn't happen. It's not right." Emboldened by kindness, Audrey made her proclamation in sure conviction. "If you do the right thing, you'll send us back to England, Sir."

"Hmmmm." Mr. Lowther waved England into limbo. "The fact is," he continued as though the girl had not spoken, "that force and circumstance usually govern. The girl is seized, and she changes hands. Even a young woman of wealth and position may be enslaved if there are none to

defeat her captors. You three have gone through the preliminary processes. The place of your seizure is far distant. Your origins lay in another land. There is nothing here to deny your slavery."

It was deflating. They looked at each other askance. Mr. Lowther seemed to have said everything. None of the three could think of a hand to be raised in their defense within thousands of miles. Yet this tired man did seem kind.

"We wonder what sort of life we can expect, Sir," Caroline ventured. "We've heard so many stories."

Mr. Lowther assumed a lawyer's pose of locked fingers and wrinkled brow. "Ah, there you do indeed pose a problem for me," he acknowledged cordially. "Frankly, your fate could range from the sugar fields to being the grand lady of the mansion, perhaps even the wife." He paused reflectively. "Mostly the range is in between those two extremes. Your first month or year may be difficult, but you will adjust. One cannot even be sure about the irons. After the first while your own attitudes may govern what ye have to bear."

"But, Sir, we have been told there are cruelties."

"Ah, yes, that does exist. Where it occurs it is usually pure sadism. Your master or mistress will simply enjoy inflicting pain. It is your duty to bear it."

Again there came an exchange of incredulity between the

girls.

Audrey chimed in. “But won’t the authorities interfere? Surely they won’t allow this to happen.”

“My dear child, anyone rich enough to buy you is the authority. You are not in England any more. ’Though even there—” He left the inference unsaid. Again silence. After if had dragged on for too long the tired voice began again. “I can only offer you my sympathy in this role fate has designed for you, I have to counsel implicit obedience, even while in my care. I can have you whipped by simply clapping my hands. Be good girls and do what you’re told. You will be kept here for about a week before the sale is made. Merchandise such as you deserves advertising. We will pass the word around of your impending sale.”

“Need we be kept chained, Sir?”

“Yes, I think so.” Lowther made a tired gesture. “Chains are very much a symbol, y’know. They act as a constant reminder of what you have become. They keep you out of mischief.” He smiled across the desk. “Our experience with the granting of limited freedom has not been happy. No. You will remain chained as you are.”

If Mr. Lowther was the velvet glove, Mr. Willis, his major-domo, was the iron fist. His greeting was terse. “You play the fool, you get your ass whipped. Understand?”

They understood. Meekly, they followed him from the

Lowther presence into a long wide passage flanked with bars. Behind the bars were girls, all of them colored to varying degrees from light coffee to dark black. They peered from their prisons as the clanking cavalcade went by. At the end was a larger, brighter cage. Willis opened the door. Without enthusiasm, the trio trailed inside. When the lock thudded shut behind them, it was the knell of doom.

They surveyed the metal bars dismally. It was a new experience in captivity—bars and stone. Even the large window was high and heavily barred. Against each wall was a wooden bench. It was then that they saw they were not alone.

It was a girl, huddled in the corner. She had been weeping, and it was not hard to see why. Her bare back was laced with fresh stripes. She looked up at them doubtfully.

“I jes’ been whipped,” she told them. “I’ll git over it.”

“But you’re white, like us!”

“No, I ain’t. I got black blood in me somewheres, ’though it don’t show. Gosh, y’all pretty!”

“So are you.”

“It don’t do a gal like me no good. It jest gits me fucked a lot, and the more I gits fucked the more trouble I gits into and the more I gits whipped. I been whipped so much!”

The trio did its best for her. But when they stood, their

hands were lost to them. The girl herself was confined only by shackled feet.

“Tha’s all right, I got my hands,” she told them comfortably. “I kin do things fo’ y’all. They sure got you fixed proper, ain’t they?”

“But what did you do to deserve that awful punishment?”

“These licks on mah back? They ain’t so bad. But I couldn’t help cryin’. It’s bad when they shoves you in a cage alone.”

“But what did you do?”

“Oh, that! Mr. Willis, he figgered I lipped off at him. A gal’s gotta be real careful what she say. I sure hopes I git sold real quick.”

Willis was at the door again. With him was a girl of a dark coffee color, with deep dark eyes and an assured grin. Willis turned the key and pointed at Caroline. “You—come here.”

Caroline could not avoid fear. She was in a place governed by discipline. Discipline would place a heavy hand on her all the rest of her life. She looked at her companions. She shrugged. She clinked her way outside.

“This is Amy. You’ll do what she says. Don’t give her trouble.”

The chained girl followed back down the passage and the

dark curious regard from either side. At the end, Willis went through one door, then through another.

“We get those chains off you, missie,” Amy said briskly. “They sure don’t trust you on them ships.”

“Why? Have I been sold already?”

“You that anxious, girl? Gosh sakes, no. I polishes you up a whole lot first.” Amy’s grip on a bare arm tightened. “Look now, you don’t give me no trouble, and I don’t give you none either. That all right with you?”

“Of course. Can’t you tell—I’m too frightened to give you any trouble. This is all so new for me. What do you mean, polished?”

“You’ll see. You’ll like a lot of it, and the rest ain’t all that bad. Wish I was a good-looker like you.”

“But you are.”

“No, I ain’t. I ain’t got that figure of yours. Them breasts and things you got, they’s worth a lot of money.”

“But not to me!”

“What do you want with money anyhow, honey? Ain’t never going to be a time you needs money. That’s one good thing ’bout being a slave.”

“Are you a slave?”

“Oh, sure. All us blacks is slaves.”

“Why aren’t you chained?”

“’Cause I learned more sense. I done all the running away and getting myself whipped I want.” Amy stopped and lifted the hem of the scanty shift she wore. She protruded a smooth, pert bottom, on the flank of which was a flaring brand—the letter S. “Got myself that last year,” she said proudly. “Can’t fool no one no more. That’s where I gave up. I’m a real good girl now.”

Branded, Caroline thought. It could happen to her too. She was a slave. It was one more thing to worry about. But they were now at the blacksmith’s. Caroline watched the rivets punched from her shackles and was once more free. She stretched happily beneath amused regard. The blacksmith summed it all up.

“A looker like you ain’t going to be wearing much iron, girl. Wiggle that ass right and you’ll be wearing silks.”

Amy’s hand once more was on her arm. They went through more doors, more passages, and finally stopped in a room. In its center stood a stark object to evoke a gasp of dismay.

“That’s—that’s a whipping post!”

“That’s right, honey. Get over there in position, a hand up to each end of the crossbar.”

Caroline saw the shackles waiting for her wrists. Turning

to Amy, she wailed, “But I haven’t done anything! Why are you whipping me?”

“Don’t never ask why ’bout nothin’, honey. Just get yourself over there and let me fix you up.”

“Is it you who’s going to whip me?”

“Sho’ is. Wiggle your ass over to that post.”

Dolefully, Caroline obeyed. This was a terrible letdown in the throes of ecstasy from freed limbs. This brutal thing to which she must surrender herself defeated all hope. She stood against the vertical post and raised her arms out to the bar across its top. Amy quickly snapped the small circlets shut. Miss Caroline Dover was now ready to be whipped.

But not quite. First the laundered white shift was removed by dark fingers. The same fingers roamed up and down the postured nudity. Amy’s voice was reverent. “You sure is a beautiful girl, honey. Pity I’ve got to whip you. You got marks on you already from someone else.”

How far away it now seemed—the encampment and her daily trek, her hands tied behind her back. And now this.

“A man whipped me,” she said listlessly. “I displeased him, so you see what I got.”

“They’re well faded, honey. Have to look twice to see em.”

“Well, I’ll soon have more, I’m sure.”

Caroline was not ready for the gale of laughter, the embracing arms, or the kiss. She was even less ready to find her hands freed, Amy grinning widely.

“But I don’t understand,” Caroline said. “I thought—”

“You thought you were going to get whipped,” Amy said complacently. “Honey, you behaved real well. Mr. Lowther, he’ll be real pleased.”

“That was just a test to see how I’d act?”

“That’s right.”

Astonishment and thankfulness carried the freed, naked girl through more doors and more passages to the luxury of a grand lady’s boudoir. Caroline looked around at the exquisite appointments askance.

“Should we be in here?” she asked doubtfully. “Won’t the lady—”

“You’re the lady, honey. Ain’t you lucky? Like I said, it’s them looks o’ yours. But there’s always a kicker someplace. Stick your foot out.”

Dazed, but excited at her surroundings, Caroline offered a bare foot. She watched the shackle clasp her ankle and snap shut. She beheld the trailing chain.

“Gives you the whole room, but you can’t get out the door.

C'mon, bathroom's over here."

It couldn't be true, but it was. Even the bath had been filled, and it was steaming hot. The chain she must pull with her from a shackled ankle seemed only the hand of a kind authority. Even that was taken from her as she stepped into the tub.

There was disbelief at what was happening to her, but also bliss and ecstasy at such luxury. Fort Stapleton had provided her last warm cleansing. Even that had been primitive. But now this—scents and perfumes and soaps applied by amused and skillful hands.

"I still don't understand," Caroline whispered.

"Yous worth a lot of money. I gotta make you worth a lot more. Just you enjoy it."

"What about Audrey and Jenny?"

"Oh, I'll look after them all right. But they won't get nothing like you getting. You's special."

Replacement of the shackle on her ankle seemed a mere nothing compared to the irons of the voyage. Caroline swirled its chain around the room in a joyous testing of her semifreedom. Then she took her place in front of the big mirror, yielding herself to Amy's skilled attention. She sensed herself as a lovely plaything, but did not care.

"I done things quite awhile for a lady who owned me,"

Amy explained. “She taught me a whole lot ’bout making girls beautiful.”

“Why did you leave her?”

“Honey, you and me, we don’t leave nothin’. That lady, she got herself married again, so she sold me so’s her new husband couldn’t be gettin’ in bed with me. Husbands is bad that way. Maybe you’ll find out.”

Then came the dressing. But that was really the wrong word for it. What was done to the palpitating slave was a crafty artfulness, the full importance of which she comprehended slowly. Breathlessly, she drew on the mesh stocking, adjusting its seam and the blatant garter like a scarlet brand upon her thigh.

“Where’s the other one, Amy?”

“There ain’t no other one. You gets to wear one, that’s all. Looks real good on you like that.”

It most certainly did. By the standards of Fort Stapleton and before, it was outrageously indecent. Caroline felt a quickening of her pulse.

The next thing was distinctly unmentionable. It was worn where the English knickers had once, long ago, covered the slavegirl’s pubic hair. The silken loveliness Amy was busy fitting upon her most secret place was outrageously tight and lewdly scanty.

“But, Amy, it’s torn!”

“Sort of. Looks like some man grabbed at it. I fix it so it looks good hanging off one hip.”

It was the same with the bra. Saucily small, with a broken strap, a pink nipple peeped shyly from a tear in the cup.

“But, Amy, it would have been so lovely—”

“It’s lovely the way it is now, honey. Don’t you fret. You’s ’bout ready now.”

“I can’t wait to see the dress to go with these.”

“There ain’t no dress. They way you is—that’s it.”

“But—!”

Caroline’s exclamation died before the vision of herself in the big mirror. The effect was exquisite. She was a costly whore emerged from a fight for a non-existent virtue. Once more dazed and disbelieving, she was led to one more room. This one was a shallow cell with bars, an alcove in the opposite wall, and in the alcove a post. Amy opened the door and a moment later had her charge safely locked inside, Caroline’s back against the wood, her arms raised and her wrists fettered above her head.

Amy stepped back get the effect, giggling at Caroline’s plight. “You caught on yet, honey?”

“I’m on display. People will look, right?”

“You guessed it. My, but you are an eyeful, girl!”

The chained girl was certain she was. Her emotions were a delightful mixture of shame and pleasurable excitement. She was certain the scanty scraps were far worse than nakedness. Nakedness was an old friend, but this was altogether different. She stood, trembling, as curtains framed her on each side and a pair of cunning lamps were lit to bathe certain portions of her body in a sensual glow. She was in the hands of a mistress of erotic arts. She let her body and limbs be positioned like molding clay. She was patted approvingly. Then, quite suddenly, she found herself alone.

Mr. Lowther was her first visitor. He first peered at her through the bars, then came and stood close.

“Really, my dear, you are exquisite.”

“Thank you, Sir, but I’m afraid I may get tired.”

“It’s an effect we seek. It becomes the pose. But don’t worry, Amy has you in hand. When you are being viewed from beyond the bars, you should keep quite still or writhe gently to demonstrate weariness and despair. Oh, and never look a client in the eye. Pretend you are not aware he is there.”

“Yes, Sir.”

“We are making a feature of you. We anticipate an excel-

lent sale. The eventual sum may be enhanced greatly by what you are doing now. We may as well occupy your time like this as have you back in the cage with the others, waiting."

"Thank you, Sir. I really will try."

Mr. Lowther sighed happily. He had found a pearl of great price. He wished he was young again. He took one more look, almost worshipful, before departing.

It was the first time Caroline had been alone since her whipping in the encampment. In the manner of her chaining she had little else to do but think. She did not bother to test the iron on her wrists. She was certain she could not get loose. And even if she could, where would she go? Her mind drifted back to her last sight of Jean Dubois, a motionless figure on the grass in the wilderness night. She supposed him dead, but his death was not a certainty in her mind. If he survived O'Rourke's bullet, would he track her down and repossess her? It was but a silly fantasy. Dubois had intended the same fate for her as she had found with her abductor. Possibly, had he lived, she would have stood where she stood now anyway. But she could not forget him. She never would. He had been her first! She wondered how she had reconciled his treachery at Fort Stapleton and his ruthless murder of her loved ones with the love she had come to feel in that long time he had kept her bound. But was it treachery or merely an act of war?

Was Dubois a murderer or simply a product of his time and place? She did not know. Besides, now it did not matter.

Caroline was resolved to avoid punishment. As a slave it would be waiting for her everywhere. She would not fight over being ravished. She had been ravished enough to make it commonplace. She would not fight or be sulky over being shamed. She had become inured to that too. Wryly, she saw herself as well conditioned for a life of slavery. But she could face it only in fear. It was so cruelly unfair. Her mind was drifting back to her home in England and inevitable tears when she heard the step.

“Damn me, Lowther wasn’t lying.”

“Crafty old bastard. But even without the artifice, she’s a beauty.”

“Look good tied to your whipping post, eh?”

“I’d try not to whip anything as lovely as she.”

“Put her in a gown and she’d grace your table. She’s no whore. Look at her features.”

It was both exciting and demeaning to be discussed like this. Caroline longed to steal a glance but did not dare.

“Wonder what the old devil did to her to make her pose like this. She’s doing it perfectly.”

“I’m told when he gets a difficult one he puts ’em naked in

a small dark room with a bottle of water and leaves 'em there until they get some sense. A whip's more positive, but I don't suppose he wants them marked up for the block. Gives a bad impression."

Caroline ventured the small writhe she had been permitted. The response was instant.

"Damn me if I can stand this much longer. The girl's a witch. Did you catch those little undulations?"

"Perfect, just perfect. This one's going to fetch more than I can afford. Damn pity, eh?"

"Aye, she'll fetch a couple of hundred thousand pounds. Dammit, man, she's worth it."

"The little bitch is watching us out the corner of an eye. Can we get in there for a closer view?"

"Nay. Lowther keeps the door locked. He's no fool."

They drifted away, leaving the startled merchandise thrilled to her core. It was nice to be wanted, but she wished they had not mentioned the whip. Everybody here seemed to think of girls in that context. If you possessed a girl, you whipped her whether she had done anything bad or not. If she had actually been bad, you whipped her just the same. The girl could never win. What good resolve could she herself make to absolve her from the lash? Probably none. She shifted again in her first awareness of fa-

tigue.

Caroline was not bothered by being chained as she was.

She took a secret pride in the pose. She enjoyed holding her arms as they were. Her breasts responded wantonly. She felt like a woman again, feminine and desired. But her thoughts drifted back to her time as the captive mistress of Jean Dubois; It was hard to pinpoint in it the exact time when she had ceased to hate having her hands continually tied behind her back, or the moment when she started to enjoy having them there so bound. She had ascribed this eroticism to her love for the man who tied her, but now she sensed the awakening of a sleeping tiger. She had not hated the chains aboard the ship as she should have. She did not hate these fetters now. In fact, she found a strange comfort in helplessness. It was sometimes frustrating but generally absolved her from decision and the nagging wish for escape. She would have liked to discuss her strange satisfaction with Audrey and Jenny, but she felt sure they would not share it or understand. Their disgust with bondage was very real. But surely there were other girls who felt as she did. Maybe she could ask Amy.

“You are quite charming, my dear. Please don’t move.”

The feminine voice dragged Caroline out of reverie. She became aware of the female presence. The woman was of lower middle age, immensely intelligent, and quite lovely.

Without actually looking, that was all she could tell.

“Would you like me to buy you, dear? No, no, you mustn’t look or speak. I know the drill. But think about it. I’m Laura Ratcliffe. I’ve got a randy husband, so I’d have to keep you locked in a cage and hold the key. But you’d be so perfect for my afternoons. You could be whipped lightly at all my tea parties and harder at the formal affairs.”

The whip again! Apart from that, Laura Ratcliffe sounded interesting.

“I could give you as a birthday present to April. April’s my daughter and a precocious fourteen, she’s wanted a slave of her own since she was eleven. That might work. My Herbert’s too much of a gentleman to rape his daughter’s slave, too much like incest. Yes, it’s a splendid idea.”

With Mrs. Ratcliffe gone, Amy reappeared, grinning wisely. “What d’you think of ’em?”

“They all want to whip me.”

“Yeah, I know. Half of it’s talk, but the other half hurts.”

Amy shrugged. “It’s just a fact of life here. Lowther has me whipped sometimes. I think it’s from habit or maybe a sense of duty. Want to be changed?”

“Changed?”

“Sure. You’ve been like that for over an hour, and it’s a long

time ’til evening.”

It was swiftly done. Suddenly, Caroline was no longer a fettered wanton. She was naked and curious. This time her attire was the torn remnants of a white shift to convert her into a ravished innocent with one breast exposed and a hint of pubic hair.

“Back against the post, honey. This time it’s rope.”

Caroline was thrilled by the sound of the word: rope. Her pulse raced as her hands were tied in back and her breasts crisscrossed. It was very familiar. She was going to be an enticing damsel in distress.

“They really go for this one,” Amy confided. “You know, the ravaged innocent thing. I’m sorry, but I have to make it tight so your figure shows through.”

“I don’t mind. Tie me as tightly as you like.”

Amy paused. “You enjoy being tied and chained, don’t you? I can recognize the signs.”

Caroline’s heart seemed close to bursting. Amy understood. Amy knew.

“Yes, I love it,” she told Amy. “Aren’t I silly?”

“Gosh, no. There was another girl here not long ago—she used to pant every time I tied her. She’d even get a climax out of it. Would you believe I love it too?”

“Oh, Amy…!”

“It’s true. I guess that’s why I stayed a bad girl so long. I used to do the bad things that got me tied up. But now I’ve been promoted I don’t get tied up at all, except when I’m whipped. That hurts too much to mess with.” She laughed. “Pity we can’t get addicted to that too. I love a little of the whip—it makes me all goosey—but they never give a girl just a little. No, they always give us a lot.” She sighed. “I won’t put the rope in your cunt, dear. They don’t have to have that. You look like a perfect dream just like that. See if you can go to sleep. I used to when I was tied like this.”

So she was not alone. She had never been alone. Caroline went to sleep. She dreamed of Jean Dubois and of her hands tied tightly behind her back.

The week went by swiftly. Each day in the alcove was a fresh experience. Once Amy tied her hands behind her back and put her in the cage with Audrey and Jenny, but the visit was not cordial. Once more they were suspicious. Most certainly they envied her status and immaculate condition. The visit was not a success. Caroline was glad when she was taken back to the gorgeous bedroom and the shackle locked on her ankle. Her value might be distorted, but she cherished them.

On the day of the auction Caroline was given the white shift. It was explained how convenient it was to whisk away and reveal her nakedness at the crucial moment. Be-

low it she wore nothing. Her hands were then tied behind her back. Only she and Amy knew the thrill she got from it. Lowther saw it only as an excellent way to protrude her breasts and keep her under control.

Miss Caroline Dover was now ready to be sold.

4

Sold

IT WAS A MIXED BAG. A bevy of colored maidens was disposed of first to whet the appetite. They sold well. When the last of them had been bound and taken away, it was the white girls' turn. But first an intermission. While refreshments were dispensed—mostly Scotch whisky to loosen inhibitions—a dark-eyed delinquent was publicly whipped upon the platform where the more virtuous were displayed for sale at another time. Whatever dark sin the unfortunate girl had committed was not mentioned. She was simply strung up naked and whipped for the delectation of all present—except, of course, herself. She screamed and writhed most entertainingly and left the male members of the audience with gratifying erections before being taken back to her cage for further moral guidance.

Caroline was to be sold last. She was the piece de resistance, the grand denouement. She stood with a hostile Jenny and Audrey to one side and watched the proceedings. Her heart was thudding painfully. At this last moment she longed to make amends with her two companions in slavery, but they had been forbidden to speak. They exchanged glances which helped nothing. Soon the moment would come after which they would never see each other again. Each was on the brink of terrible loneliness.

Jenny was first. Caroline had never truly believed the sums

of money previously mentioned. She believed them now. The bidding on Jenny started at twenty thousand sterling, rapidly advancing to fifty, at which point the hand of the auctioneer rose to the fastening of her shift. Naked, she faced the crowd, one of whom would purchase her and take her into slavery. The bidding leaped to sixty and then seventy thousand British pounds. She was knocked down to a ruddy-cheeked planter for eighty-one.

There was applause. It was a big price: four hundred thousand American dollars. Jenny's purchaser bought her shift too and the rope around her wrists. Jenny, the little girl from England, was led away in triumph.

At the last moment Audrey, suddenly aware of her impending slavery, whispered, "I'm sorry I whipped you." Then she was gone.

This time the opening bid was fifty thousand. As though the figure prompted the act, the auctioneer tossed aside Audrey's covering to reveal her faultless nudity and splendid curves. The next bid was seventy-five, followed quickly by one hundred. She was sold for one hundred and fifteen thousand pounds sterling.

Caroline watched. Audrey's purchaser, a stern-faced woman, insisted on her acquisition's elbows being tied as well as her wrists. She was evidently accustomed to escape attempts. Audrey cast a desperate glance in Caroline's direction before being noosed and led from the room by a mus-

cular black woman. Her purchaser brought up the rear. In a moment they were gone. Caroline knew a chapter in her life had closed.

To stand upon the platform, knowing she was to be stripped naked, was a shattering experience. Caroline had told herself again and again that it did not matter, that these were only men and she had been seen naked by a host of men and many women too. But this was different. It was the ritual that made it so. The hushed electric air, the staring sea of faces, and Amy's parting all added to her distressed excitement.

"They look like a lot, but there's only one of 'em goin' to buy you, honey. Stare 'em in the face as though you know something they don't."

She was there now, standing beside the auctioneer who was extolling her virtues. It was a foregone conclusion that the bidding would start at one hundred thousand. It then moved rapidly to one hundred and fifty. There it paused long enough for the auctioneer to perform the almost sacred rite. Nimbly, he removed her shift, and she stood there bare before the staring eyes. She could concede the wisdom of binding a girl's hands behind her back. The urge to cover what she could of herself was irresistible. But she could cover nothing. Because of her complete exposure, she felt an inconsistent need to reveal more of herself than was demanded. Gently, her feet edged further apart. She

straightened up erect to protrude her breasts as though they were cannons to destroy her enemies. In the most feminine gesture of all, she tossed her hair.

A few minutes later Miss Caroline Dover was sold to Mr. Stanley Burdett for two hundred and ten thousand pounds sterling.

Stanley Burdett was a handsome forty-two. He was a hard driving man who had made himself the richest of the island's planters by dint of ruthless force. He was a wholly dominant male with little imagination beyond the acquisition of land. The same qualities which gave him success in business destroyed his relationships with women, for whom he had an insatiable appetite. His wife was a brow-beaten beauty, completely cowed. He kept a string of black mistresses like a stable of mares. To this menage he brought Caroline Dover.

It had been a strange, exciting, disquieting journey for Burdett's new slave. Covered again by the white shift, its drawstrings accentuating her figure, Caroline had accompanied her master in the landau. But her hands remained bound behind her back. Burdett himself was preoccupied but spared a few remarks.

"You're a beauty, girl."

"Thank you, Sir."

"I won't beat around the bush. When I get you home, I in-

tend to fuck you."

"Of course, Sir. I understand."

He looked at her, puzzled. "You're not a prostitute, I hope."

"No, Sir, but I've been captive and at the disposal of men for a long time now." Caroline wanted to laugh at her master's evident dismay. "I'm sorry if I appear less shocked than I should."

"Huh! You're no virgin then?"

"No, Sir. I hope I was not misrepresented as one."

Burdett waved the question aside, pursuing another tangent. "Been thrashed lately?"

"No, Sir. I have given no reason to be punished. I want to assure you I will be an obedient slave."

"Don't like to be whipped, eh?"

"No. I do not, Sir."

"Well, have you ever been whipped?"

"Yes, Sir, very cruelly."

"You're a cool one." He gave Caroline his full attention as though first noticing her presence. "You'll get some thrashings from me, y'know. I'm a believer in thrashing girls. Keeps 'em in their place."

Caroline's heart sank. As the owner of her body, this man was not getting high ratings in her esteem. Shrinking from subservience, she ventured, "I will obey you. I will do what you require of me to avoid any need to thrash me."

"Will you now!" Burdett glared. Evidently she had said the wrong thing. "I'll have ye know, young lady, I'll take no guidance from slaves. If I feel like thrashing you, I'll do it."

"Very well, Sir."

Burdett's look was sharp. "You're from good stock, eh?"

"I'm educated."

"You missed calling me Sir. Why?"

"I feared servility might be mistaken for sarcasm."

It drew a laugh. "Damn me if I haven't bought a schoolmarm. What I wanted was a shrinking virginity I could thrash into submission."

"I'll be as submissive as you like."

"That's not really the idea. You do understand, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, I'm sorry." Caroline actually did see Burdett's quandry. "You can most certainly thrash me, but what you want is a reason for doing so." She pondered a moment. "I can give you reasons, but they would be contrived."

“Damn, I’ve a good mind to take you back to Lowther.”

Caroline wished he would, but she dared not say so. Instead, she continued to apologize for her womanhood. “But I expect if you whip any girl, you’ll get much the same reactions from her whether she’s guilty or innocent. It hurts so terribly while it’s being done to us that we aren’t a bit rational.”

Burdett brightened. “I suppose we could try it.” He smiled in his first real warmth. “I’d love to catch you in something real, though, and then thrash the tar out of you with a purpose.”

They left it at that, a polite and formal introduction to slavery which was quite unreal. But the landeau was unreal.

She should have been tethered and walking in its dust. The price paid for her was unreal. For that sum Burdett could have purchased a dozen girls. Caroline Dover longed most ardently for the American colony and Jean Dubois. England had become only a dream.

Her introduction to Mrs. Angela Burdett was equally hard to believe. Burdett’s wife was a pretty woman in her thirties, obviously nervous in the presence of her husband. They met before dinner. Caroline was still in her shift and still bound.

“Ah, yes, Caroline, this is my wife. Her name’s Angela.”

Angela's smile was welcome. "Has Stanley just purchased you, dear? There are so few white girls."

"Of course I just purchased her! Where else would she come from?"

"Well, I didn't know. We don't really need another slave—"

"This one's for amusement. At least I thought she was. Not so sure now."

"Her hands are still tied, Stanley. If she's our guest for dinner—"

"They stay tied. You can feed her."

"Yes, dear. Will she be kept with the other slaves or stay with us in the house?"

"The house. Keep her hands tied for the time being."

"Of course." Angela's face flushed at the inference. "Then shouldn't her ankles be chained and her hands untied?"

"All in good time. You can keep an eye on her when I'm not around. That reminds me—take that cloth thing off her. She doesn't need clothes."

"I hope you don't mind, dear," she said kindly as she untied the laces and revealed the slave girl's nakedness. "My, you are lovely! What a magnificent body!"

"I'd like us to give her a lesson in discipline, Angela. She's

got some damn odd ideas."

Caroline was instantly aware of tension. Standing naked between husband and wife, she felt the current flow. Her heart went out to the woman who now blushed in embarrassment.

"Stanley, please. Must we—?"

"Of course we must. Go and get it."

Angela Burdett hesitated, obviously on the verge of further words. But she turned and shrugged, smiling apologetically as she passed the naked, bewildered slave, and left the room.

"Damn women!" Burdett offered his exclamation to no one in particular. He looked at Caroline. "Angela's a bit of an idiot. You'll have to put up with her."

"She seems kind. I don't think she'll enjoy seeing me whipped."

"You've resigned yourself to it, eh?"

Burdett's chuckle was interrupted by Angela's return. She carried the vicious length of a shiny yellow cane. She handed it to her husband.

"Stanley, I really wish you wouldn't," she said to him.

"I'm sure you do."

“It will give Caroline such a bad impression of us—at least of me.”

“Dammit, woman, the girl’s a slave. Look at her standing there naked, with tied hands. Who the hell cares what she thinks? But I want her to have this lesson.”

“Very well, Stanley. I just thought—”

More unreality. Caroline watched, breathless, as the impossible happened. Angela Burdett gathered up her voluminous skirt and lifted it as high as it would go. She wore no underclothes and thus revealed a bottom as pretty as the rest of her. It already bore marks. She positioned herself in what was evidently a familiar spot and bent far over, her hands clutching her gown around her waist. She gazed fixedly at the carpet.

“How many would you suggest, Angela my dear?”

“You know best, Stanley. I leave it entirely up to you.”

“You see, my dear girl,” Burdett lectured, looking straight at Caroline’s breasts, “Angela is not so much obedient as she is cowed. She has been broken by my whip.” He turned to his wife. “Is that not so, my dear?”

“Yes, Stanley, you are quite right.” The bent woman spared a glance for the naked girl, her eyes imploring. “I’m awfully sorry about this, Miss Caroline.”

What could she say? What was appropriate in a situation

so bizarre? Caroline's dilemma was solved by her master.

"I think, Angela, I prefer the crouched position—bottom raised, if you will be so kind."

"But, Stanley, it hurts so terribly like that! And I do so want to behave for Caroline."

"You will have every opportunity to behave, Angela. Now take position!"

Caroline instinctively took a half step forward to offer sympathy to the woman about to be caned. But what was the use? She was bound. She could not even offer the touch of a hand. Sickened, she watched as Mrs. Angela Burdett went to her knees, then leaned forward so that her forehead was on the rug, resting on the full length of her forearms. Drawing knees and elbows together, and bowing her back down, she reared her bare bottom, her thighs and waist in a shocking and obscene exposure.

"Ah, that's much better." Burdett rapped the taut flesh of his wife's bottom with the cane. "I think, in view of good behavior, a mere half dozen will do."

"Stanley, I can't possibly stand six like this."

"Yes, you can, dear. Now hold tight."

It was the worst of cruelties, without love, without purpose, inflicted only to appease male ego. The cane left a welt upon the pitiful twins that would have been vicious on

someone twice Angela's size. The punished wife moaned but did not move.

Caroline watched the welts blossom and rise into puffed, ridged flesh-bars of scarlet on a field of white. It was exquisitely awful but also exquisitely beautiful. Caroline pictured herself kneeling in the same manner, the scarlet insignias of agony upon her own flesh. She shuddered deliciously at the thought No doubt it would happen, but with her would Stanely Burdett limit his joy to only six?

The slavegirl supposed it to her master's credit that he limited himself now. Most certainly credit had to be given to Angela for maintaining her position. The wife's features were lined with suffering. She flinched and bit her lip at each impact. She moaned and sometimes emitted small cries. Except for her hips weaving, she held the obscene pose to the very end. She did not move even then, awaiting her master's command. The lips of her vagina had not escaped his strokes. They were swollen and crimson in their rear exposure. The helpless slave was too fascinated not to look.

"Stand up and tidy yourself, Angela."

Once more Caroline had the urge to help—to comfort—but tied hands denied her. Caroline stood quietly and watched her master's wife return to normal. Angela even had to dry her own tears.

“I trust you feel some benefit, dear?”

The absurd question met with a serious response. The dutiful wife delivered it with anxious speed. “Oh, yes, Stanley! I always feel better afterwards. You’re always so good to me.”

“And you, Caroline?”

The question startled the slave. Was this her cue to kneel? She took a chance that it might not be. Her tone was as dutiful as his wife’s. “It was a brilliant illustration, Sir. I now understand what you were saying about submission. I see your point.

“Excellent! Angela, my pet, I want you to take our new slave on a tour. Show her the house and that portion of the demesne given to the slave pens and the pillory. She must be made aware of these things.”

“Yes, Stanley, of course.”

The caning of his wife’s bottom appeared to have put the master in good humor. He turned to his property just acquired. “Angela and I are entertaining this evening, my dear, and I want you to mingle with our guests. Possibly I’ll have you serve drinks. But I want your attitude to be as a social equal. You will be naked. I find the situation piquant. I trust you agree?”

“Of course, Sir.”

“There will be no need to be too subservient. Angela will prepare you.”

“Thank you.”

“Angela, look after the matter. Caroline will have to be chained, but I’m sure you can deal with it.”

Dinner was a pensive meal. The wife fed the slave. The slave knelt beside the wife of her master to facilitate the business of putting food into her own mouth. Neither woman ate heartily. Dessert disposed of, Burdett excused himself.

“Stanley is so impetuous,” Angela said. “I expect you think me a silly woman.”

“I think him a cruel man.”

“I’ve gotten used to him, dear. I used to make a fuss when he punished me, but I don’t any more. I’m afraid my bottom’s become toughened by that cane.” She smiled brightly. “But he never whips my back. He’s really a perfect gentleman.”

“Your bottom didn’t look toughened to me. Doesn’t it hurt to sit?”

“Yes, dear, but we girls mustn’t be too persnickety about a little pain.”

“Why didn’t he whip me too? I fully expected it—”

“I expect it’s because of this evening, dear. Stanley won’t want our guests to see you marked up so soon. There’s some people who are against the whipping of white female slaves.”

“You mean there are a lot of other girls like me?”

“Well, not a lot, but I know of a few. Their stories are all tragic. I’m sure yours is too. Come along now. I think we’d best do this tour, and then I have to fix you up.”

The tour showed evidence of great wealth, but Caroline’s most vivid memory would always be of the slave pens and the pillory. There was also a whipping post. Fastened to it was a black slavegirl waiting to be whipped.

“Poor dear. I expect she’s misbehaved.” Angela approached the fearsome structure and politely asked, “And what have you done to get yourself like this, Florry?”

“I dunno, mum. ’Spect I didn’t cut enough cane.”

“Oh, dear, I’m so sorry. How many stripes must you receive?”

“They’re talkin’ ’bout thirty, Miz Burdett, ma’am.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll be a brave girl, Florry. We all have been brave.”

“Yes’m.”

Caroline was sure Florry would have liked more concrete

help but knew enough not to ask for it. They moved on to the next exhibit.

“The poor girls have to stand in this thing for hours,” Angela lamented, gesturing at the pillory. “I expect you’ll have to sometimes. There aren’t many who escape. I’m not sure anyone does. One night Stanely even made me. Of course, he had been drinking. It’s most disagreeable. I remember I cried a lot. But a girl can’t do a thing. You don’t have your hands or anything. I got awfully tired.”

After awhile came Angela’s inevitable query. “I’m surprised, dear. You don’t seem a bit concerned about having your hands tied the way they are. Doesn’t it bother you?”

Caroline told enough of her story to make her seeming aberration understandable. She did not admit to finding pleasure in being bound. She judged such a confession beyond Angela’s scope. They went back to the house.

“Oh, dear, I wonder if Stanley would mind you being free long enough to fix yourself up.” Stanley’s wife dithered in confusion. “I’m sure he wants you looking your best. He’ll be so proud. I suppose I could try—”

“He said something about you putting me in chains,” Caroline offered helpfully.

“Why, of course. How could I forget? These chains I have for you are simply darling and they let you do almost anything. Stanley got them especially for me. Oh, dear, I sup-

pose I shouldn't have told you."

Caroline was amused. Angela was a treasure house of absurdities. That a planter's wife should be chained—it was incredible. She wondered what this woman had been before marriage to this bully.

Leaping to an obvious deduction, she asked boldly, "Did Mr. Burdett whip you terribly to make you so compliant?"

"How did you guess?" The wife viewed the slave with added respect. "I'm afraid I wasn't a bit like this when Stanley married me. I used to argue and threaten to go home to Mama, and once I actually went, but she sent me back here. Stanley was so patient. He whipped me and whipped me until I began to understand how to behave. I cried an awful lot for the first two or three months."

"But do all the men here treat their wives like that?"

"I haven't liked to ask, dear. I was so ashamed. But now I'll get those lovely chains for you."

Once more the sense of unreality. But this was happening. Caroline felt like a puppet, a plaything, it made her completely helpless. Even Angela could handle her. And soon she would be chained!

"I'll have to untie your hands to put these on, dear. I do hope you'll be cooperative."

"Yes, I'll be a good girl. If I ran away, I don't know where I'd

run to."

"You're so sensible. I wouldn't want you to run away and get caught. You'd be branded right away. Branding hurts a girl terribly. I remember I was only nineteen when I ran home to Mania, and—"

"You mean—?"

"Yes." Angela blushed. "I suppose I might as well show you. It's so nice to have a girl I can talk to." She slipped her arms out of her dress and lowered it enough to disclose a scarlet S in the center of her chest barely below her breasts. "It's nicely healed now, but it took the longest time."

"He did all these things to you and you still stay with him?"

"I'm sure you think me silly, dear, but there's nowhere for women like me. Without a husband nobody wants us."

Angela Burdett's problems were the same as Caroline's problems. Caroline knew she could not solve them. She couldn't do anything any more. She had become a nonperson.

Helpfully, she encouraged the older woman. "If it would set your mind at case, you could chain my feet first. You'd sort of have me safe that way."

"Why, of course! You really are sweet, and I never even thought of it." Angela rummaged with the small pile of shining metal and held up anklets and chain. "You see!

Aren't they lovely?"

They were indeed. Burdett must have spent a lot of money to so embellish his wife. They were neither light nor heavy, a craftsman's dream. The outside of both wristlets and anklets had been enameled in flowered designs, with gems here and there. The links shined brightly. When Angela had captured the slave ankles in the ornate hands, their fit was snug. Caroline took hobbled steps. They both laughed.

"I bet these have been tied for the longest time. You poor dear." Angela fussed with knots, then massaged wealed wrists. "The chains will be so much better." She changed from back to front and fitted the flowered circles around Caroline's wrists and clasped them shut. "I do hope they're not too tight."

They were tight, but Caroline was in no mood to complain. She held them up to admire. Their eight-inch chain gave her far more freedom than had been used to. Had it not been for Burdett's menacing shadow they could have been happy.

Insolent nudity in the midst of sartorial elegance does indeed carry a unique piquancy, but only if the naked one carries herself with pride. A shrinking, cowering bundle of unclothed female could actually repel. Caroline well knew these subtleties of nakedness. She knew also that to carry off so difficult a task must surely rebound to her credit. She would give Burdett and his coterie a magnificent show. She

entered the brilliancy of the huge room with only the gentle touch of Angela's fingers on one arm. Standing erect, eyes defiant, Caroline Dover faced them all. In her mind was a plan.

Burdett basked in glory. Word of his purchase had gotten around. The assembly was large, made up of eager men and reluctant wives. The host fobbed off his wife with ham-handed praise.

"Damn me, Angela my pet, those chains look quite grand on the girl. A damn sight better than they did on you. Look at the way she carries herself in 'em. She's a pro."

After her first flood of shame under the admiring eyes, Caroline began to enjoy herself. She was introduced by Angela as though she was a guest herself and not a slave. Because of chains and nudity she was a being apart from all the rest, but she was mistress of both handicaps and for this was grateful to Jean Dubois. Polite comment ran from worshipful male babbling to female venom:

"I say, Miss Dover, you really are a splendid girl."

"You wear your chains quite well, child. Criminal experience, I suppose?"

"D'you think Burdett would sell you? I'd make him an offer."

"Haven't had one of Burdett's whippings yet, have you,

dear? You've got so much to look forward to."

"Your first time in slavery, I'm told. Your insolence will soon be whipped out of you. Burdett will turn you into another Angela."

"Regrettable you're a slave, Miss Dover. I'd have considered it a privilege to call on you."

"A few days in the cane fields will do wonders for you, girl. Sooner the better, I'd say."

The way of drinks made Caroline more obviously a servant and modified the jibes. She moved anxiously, her chains being no more than barely adequate for her task. She shuddered at what Burdett would do to her if she fell. She was clinking from group to group with a near empty tray when a youthful, girlish voice caught up with her from the rear.

"Mummy says I can have one." A youthful hand helped itself to a glass which went mischievously to ripe red lips, Under adolescent regard from big laughing eyes, Caroline blushed. "You're blushing! I think that's sweet. You must have read my mind."

She was in her early teens, probably precocious, undoubtedly spoiled, but she was not dressed as a child dresses. She was most elegantly lovely. The chained slave wondered what the girlish thought might have been to warrant such a blush. She was immediately informed.

“I want to eat that lovely cunt you’re walking around with,” the girl told Caroline. “I think you’re gorgeous.”

The child was delicious. From her eager lips even vulgarity was exquisite. But Caroline’s reaction was prim.

“Are you sure you should talk like that? And are you sure you should be drinking what’s in these glasses?”

“Of course I’m sure, darling. You’re only a slave, y’know. If you blab on me, I’d deny it, and it’s you who’d be whipped. I think that’s lovely.”

Caroline sniffed and tried to move along, but was stopped by fingers on her arm.

“Talk to me,” the girl said. “If you don’t, I’ll push you and you’ll spill all the drinks on the tray. Then you’ll be punished.”

“Very well. What do you want to talk about?”

“Well, nothing really. It’s just that I’m bored. Tell me about the last time you were whipped.”

“There’s nothing to tell. It hurt horribly, that’s all.”

“I’d love to whip you. I’m sure Mr. Burdett would let me if I asked.” Young eyes sparkled at so delectable a prospect. “Y’know, it’s so hard to believe—if you were dressed, you’d look just like all the others.”

“No, I wouldn’t. I’m chained.”

“Well, yes, but I think they’re so lovely on you.” The nymphet giggled. “I wonder if Mummy would let me do what you’re doing at our next reception. Wow, would I shock their drawers off! And I do have the loveliest body.”

“I think you’re teasing.”

“No, honest! But what I really want is a slave all my own, a girl I could keep chained and be terribly cruel to—in a nice sort of way, of course. And she’d have to obey my every command.” The young girl sighed. “Mummy’s offered me a black girl, but I want someone like you. It’s such a shame you’re so terribly expensive. Whipping blacks isn’t nearly as much fun.”

“Why whip us at all? You don’t have to.”

“What a silly question! Of course we have to whip you.”

“Why?”

“Well, because—” Laughing eyes turned angry. “You’re being uppity, and you ought to be whipped for it.”

“I—I’m sorry. I forget sometimes.”

The eyes laughed again. “You mean you haven’t yet got used to being a slave? I think that’s lovely. Tell me, would you like to belong to me, if I can persuade Mummy?”

It was a simple decision: to be whipped by a teenage girl or by a heavy-handed man. Caroline made it easily.

“Yes, I’d love to be owned by you, but I cost so much.”

The child was gone in a swirl of silk. She returned with a handsome, amused woman. Recognition was instant between Caroline and the woman.

“Ah, yes,” Laura Ratcliffe laughed. “You’re the slave we looked at in the alcove. I might have known. What do you think of April?”

“She’s—she’s—”

There was more laughter. “Yes, she is, isn’t she? She amazes me sometimes. I’ve spared the rod and spoiled the child. I like the results, though.”

“She wants to buy me. I don’t even know if I’m for sale. I sort of suspect I’m not.” Caroline hesitated, clutching at hope. “But I’m not really what he wants. I know I’m a disappointment.”

“Men!” Laura Ratcliffe clothed the word in deep scorn. “None of ’em know what they want. Craftily cover a bit of female flesh and they’re all in a dither. Burdett once had the gall to ask me to allow him to whip me. He seemed to think he was doing me a favor. Poor, dear Angela.”

“Oh, Mummy, I’d love to see Mr. Burdett whip you!”

“Quiet, you outrageous moppet.” Mrs. Ratcliffe turned to the naked girl. “You see what I mean about April? You’d probably be good for her; give her an outlet. She’s an em-

barrassment the way she is. Can't promise a thing, but I'll have a word with Burdett."

Caroline was thrilled at the prospect. It was only a hope, but an hour earlier she had no hope at all. She carried her tray with a fresh verve. When the last guest was gone, she was summoned by her master.

"Damn proud of you tonight, girl. Had an offer for you," Burdett stated, pausing awkwardly. "Inclined to accept it. You're not really my type, y'know."

"I suppose not, Sir."

Caroline's simple words hid a thudding heart and rising spirits. Stanley Burdett was impossible. His next words confirmed it.

"Been wanting to trash you, but I've waited for the party to end. Hate to let you go without a good thrashing."

"Yes, Sir, I can understand that."

He glanced at her sharply, uncertain of sarcasm. He made a grunt of contempt and continued. "Trouble is, if I'm going to get rid of you, I mustn't put marks on your pretty skin. Damned unreasonable—just silly female attitudes." He glared at her. "We have to think of something else to do to you, eh?"

Caroline longed to scream at his silly male complacency. Instead, she humbly asked, "Could I beg for your mercy, Sir?

Perhaps it may not be necessary for you to punish me at all?"

Irritated, he stared at this interruption to his train of thought. "That's a damn silly thing to say. Of course it's necessary. Can't have you leave here without some sort of punishment. And as for mercy, well, you're not to be thrashed. I think you should be grateful."

"I am, Sir. And thank you."

"Still leaves us to think of something. Ever spent a night chained in a dungeon—a real one?"

"No, Sir."

Burdett waved the idea away. "Bit of a bore for both of us. You'd be buried out of sight. Hmmm, I could suspend you for a bit, especially since you haven't really done anything. Damn that woman! A thrashing would have been ideal."

Caroline kept a respectful silence, striving to appear politely interested in being tortured. Burdett slapped his thigh enthusiastically.

"The very thing!" he bellowed. "Should have thought of it before—the pillory!"

"That's wonderful, Sir. So clever of you to think of it. But, er, will I be able to sleep?"

"Sleep? Oh, you mean because it's night? I really have no

idea. I suspect you can manage something. I'll have a man lock you in there."

"I'll be sorry to lose these." She held up her chained hands.

"Eh? Oh, of course! Well, we can't have everything, can we? Here, I've got the keys."

Caroline allowed herself to be led by Stanley Burdett's man to the pillory.

"You been in the stocks before, miss?"

"No, I'm afraid not."

"Not much fun. You won't like it."

"I don't expect to. It appears I'm being punished."

"Pretty girl like you—it's a damn shame. Want me to fuck you before I lock you?"

"No, but thank you. I'm sure Mr. Burdett would not approve."

"He'd never know."

"I'd rather not chance it, if you don't mind."

"Sure, I mind. I'd lace your back if I hadn't been warned not to. Damn girls and their cunts!"

Viewed through the darkness, the pillory was more fearsome than before, a great hulk of solid timbers with tiny

orifices designed for girls.

Sensing her dismay, her companion tried again. “Spend the night with me in a decent bed. I can lock you in here come early morning so no one will know.”

Caroline was sorely tempted by his offer. She was no longer squeamish about being used by men. Burdett had lost interest. This man could take his place. What did it matter? But she was frightened. She wanted nothing to stop her sale. Again she refused.

Disgusted, her jailer raised the upper yoke, his command to her bitter. “Get yourself in there, girl! Hair in front with your head.”

Caroline positioned herself, hair down one cheek, hands last. She gasped fearfully as the timber was lowered. Its fit was unexpectedly snug. She looked sideways at the snapping of the padlock by which she would be kept prisoned until morning. Casually and without a word, her sex was cupped, kneaded and played with until she climaxed. It was an unlovely act, leaving her unsatisfied and alone. But she was not unhappy. She was escaping her first slavery and moving on to her second.

She did not count Jean Dubois.

5

The Happy Slave

IT WAS A DELIGHTFUL BEDROOM. The two columns stood at exactly the right distance apart to enable a girl's wrists to be bound there to leave her standing between the two with arms outstretched. Caroline had been standing thus for what seemed a very long time. She supposed she was waiting to be whipped but was unsure. April might consider her helpless stand sufficient unto itself. With April she could never be sure.

For a casual onlooker, April's antics might evoke a smile, but for April's slavegirl who must do what April said they were not always amusing. Upon delivery, April had busily tied Caroline's hands behind her back and roped together reluctant elbows.

"Just to keep you safe. I couldn't bear it if you escaped."

Caroline knew she would not escape. She refrained from complaint. If April wanted her to walk to her new slavery in shame, it did not really matter. Besides, April had been obliged to clothe her in the shift for the journey. It was a small bonus and kept the slave from forgetting what covering was like.

"Of course I'll take it off you immediately when we get home, darling. You're so beautiful." April sighed in ecstasy.

“I just couldn’t stand you wearing things. Do you mind?”

“No, I don’t mind. I’m used to being naked.”

“I don’t want you to call me miss or mistress or any of that nonsense, dear,” April said. “I want you to call me April or something nice. You can call Mummy whatever you like.”

The girl was an engaging mixture of child and woman. Her caprice was infinite and unpredictable. She gloried in her legal possession of a living girl and made it clear that she would insist on instant obedience. Inconsistently and absent-mindedly, she allowed her slave frequent small periods of freedom in which Caroline could have fled or fought, but nonetheless expected that when she picked up rope the slave would offer her wrists or whatever other part of her was to be bound. It had been so that morning.

“I love these pillars, darling. You’ll look so sweet with one wrist tied to each. You just have to stand and look pretty, and it’s a wonderful way to have you ready for whipping.”

Caroline had become aware of predecessors, all of them black or colored. They had been recruited from the domestic staff. They had made her competent in the handling of girls. April accepted their enslavement and her power over them as a fact of life, but the white slavegirl was her heart’s desire.

Caroline could not ignore her own potency. April’s hands were always busy upon her somewhere—hard clutches at

her sex or breasts, or light and naughty fingertips tracing over quivering skin. There emanated from her a concentration of desire, a femininity to keep the slave in constant excitation. For Caroline, her youthful mistress was fast becoming a drug to which she was increasingly addicted, accompanied by an equally delicious fear, because April had never denied her intention to give her slave various punishing pains.

“Ready to be whipped today, dear?”

“Yes, April, I’ve been looking forward to it.”

“And how should I whip you, darling?”

“You look gorgeous standing there, and the ropes are so neat around your wrists. April does a beautiful tie. I wish she was as neat with her clothes.” Laura impatiently gathered stray garments and a towel. “I should make her stand the way you are for a day and look at her own litter.”

“She’s terribly sweet, Mrs. Ratcliffe.”

“Oh, I’ll grant you that, but the little baggage knows it. And I should mention the whip. You’re bound to get it, y’know.”

“Of course. I’m surprised I haven’t yet.”

“Don’t ask for it, dear. Believe me, you’ll get more than you want. But I do want to reassure you—I only allow April two whips, neither of which are lethal. They’ll hurt more than you’ll like, but the marks will fade quickly.”

“Thank you.”

“Of course, there’s still the riding crop, but that’s only on your bottom. I’ve found girls’ bottoms to be amazingly resilient. “

“Yes, I know. I really am grateful for you telling me.”

There had been an element of raillery in Laura’s tone. Now it became more serious. She placed a hand on the bound girl’s shoulders and searched Caroline’s features whimsically.

“There’s something I’m curious about, darling. I’ll never find out myself, but you can tell me.”

“Yes, Mrs. Ratcliffe?”

“Call me Laura, the same as you use April’s Christian name. Darling, about a year ago you were an ordinary English girl in an ordinary English family—right?”

“Yes. Robert was in England on business. We met and fell in love. I followed him back to Fort Stapleton a month later. We were going to be married, but he was killed. Shortly afterwards the fort was burned and I was taken prisoner. “

“Hmmm—such a lot to happen in a short time, and such changes in your life. What I’m trying to fix in my mind is the drastic difference between then and now—a respectable young woman in England, now a slave in these islands.”

“Part of me doesn’t believe it yet. It still believes I’m Miss Caroline Dover who will be going home someday soon. The other half of me has to believe the ropes and the punishments and the chains and standing here naked.”

“You’ll never go home again.”

“I try not to think of that.”

“What’s bothered you most about all these things?”

“Being naked. About the time I think I’ve gotten used to it something happens and I’m blushing again.”

“Any sexual thrills?”

Caroline grinned ruefully. “I’ve thought about that a lot. Yes, the whole thing’s been sexual from the beginning. I was stripped naked soon after capture, and I know now that anything a girl does or is made to do is frightfully sexual.”

“It was men who kept you prisoner then. What about now?”

Caroline looked embarrassed. “I expect it’s the same.”

Laura laughed delightedly. “Well, any way we look at you it’s a damned piquant situation. Believe it or not, I’d value a single incident in which I was taken from wealth and power and made to be a slave in chains. The shock of adjustment must be vivid. I’d like to experience it, but it’s

something I'll never know—except through you. "

"You wouldn't like it. I've cried and cried."

"Poor dear." Laura clasped the girl in strong in her arms. "And now I've bought you for young April who is a cruel little witch half the time."

"It's probably the best thing that could happen to me. I'm really grateful. Mr. Burdett scared me to death."

"Him and his thrashings and his pathetic Angela—I'm glad I got you away from there. I suppose you realize this slavery with Burdett and I isn't what usually happens to female slaves. They go to the cane fields or a brothel or are trained as house servants. But you're a pleasure slave, purchased solely for one's amusement and gratification. You owe that to your looks, of course, and your price."

"I'm lucky. I don't think I'd like the cane fields."

"I do have a plantation and cane fields, darling. I guess you'd best never forget that."

April bounced in on them like spring sunshine. "Oh, Mummy dear, are you talking to Caroline? Isn't she delicious tied like that?"

"I hope you're not being too unkind to her, poppet."

"What—tied like that? She loves it!"

Caroline blushed. It was a dead giveaway. Her owners

laughed. Laura waved a cool hand.

“I’ll leave you to April’s tender mercies, dear,” the older woman told Caroline. “If she’s too cruel, just let me know.”

“Isn’t she the best mother ever! Now I’m going to whip you. You’ve been expecting it, I know you have.”

“Yes, I’ve been expecting it.” Caroline tried to shrug. “And there’s not a thing I can do about it.”

“You don’t want to beg and plead?”

“No, thank you, I’m quite resigned to it.”

“You’re quite adorable.” April hugged her slave fervently, a small hand going to cup a plump sex. “I’ll attend to this later, but right now I want to whip your lovely back. Please tell me you don’t mind.”

“I don’t mind.”

“Mummy’s terribly unkind about whips. She only lets me use the innocent ones. I call them girl whips.”

“Well, I’m a girl.”

“Well, yes, but you’re a big girl. I’m sure you could put up with something more adult. Look, I’ll show you.”

Caroline surveyed the slender thong. “I bet that hurts plenty. What’s that other one?”

“What, this?” April held up a short affair of silken thongs.

“This is for your cunt and breasts. I won’t use it today. I’ll wait until you’re naughty.” She then slipped out of her scanty coverings, her naked young body displayed proudly. “Like me?”

“You’re beautiful.”

“Yes, I am. Nothing like you, of course, but I’m getting there. I think it’s so nice for me to be naked when I whip you. You know, the two girls together. Besides, I can get a better swing with the whip. Aren’t I mean?”

April Ratcliffe whipped Miss Caroline Dover’s bare skin with verve and enthusiasm. She interspersed inflictions with light-hearted comment.

“Oooh, you do mark beautifully! What a pity they fade.”

Caroline was clenching her teeth, hoping she would not be made to scream. Another blow and another drew a moan. Admittedly, the whip was light, but it was being applied with vigor, and it hurt.

“I love the way you writhe. Don’t stop.”

The tied girl was quite sure she could not have stopped if she had tried. She did not try. She was busy fighting back verbal expressions of pain.

“I do think it makes a whipping more interesting for both of us if I find the special places like this!”

Caroline yelped as a leather tip bit under her armpit and then at another lash planted squarely on her hip. It hurt like fury. When another cut her thighs, she pleaded, “Can’t you just whip my back? Oh, please.”

“You want me to whip your back, dear?” April’s query affected pleased surprise. “Why, of course I will.”

The blows were harder now. Caroline supposed she should have kept quiet, but keeping quiet was so difficult when being whipped. She was fighting down screams when the springtime voice intervened.

“You mustn’t scream, darling. I don’t like screams. I think they’re vulgar. If you do scream, I’ll whip your breasts.”

Caroline took out her anguish on her wrists, tugging at April’s neat bands in frantic pain as blow followed blow across the white expanse of her back. She knew that it could be worse—that the whip was a kind whip—but it still hurt terribly as April went on and on.

“You see, I do change from side to side, Caroline. I’m being ever so fair about your skin, and I haven’t once lapped over onto a breast. You’ve got the loveliest breasts. They’re awfully tempting.”

The pillars to which Caroline’s wrists were bound were made of steel—quite narrow, three inches in diameter, and flutings ideal for the binding of a girl. No matter how she fought, Caroline could not even make them shiver. They

held her tight, and her wrists did the screaming for which she dared not use her lips. The cruel but careful lash bit at her again and again across her back.

“You see, dear, I’m being so clever—just your back and nowhere else. That is what you wanted, right?”

“Yes, oh yes—but please, April, haven’t I had enough?”

“A few extra for that, dear—down on your thighs. It’s me who says when you’ve had enough.”

Caroline wanted to say that she was sorry, but it would sound so trite. She accepted the bitterness of the stripes across her thighs, keeping her legs closed for fear the thong might be tempted up into her crotch. Her teeth were clenched so hard they hurt.

“Fifty strokes, darling. Maybe I’ll stop now. But this whip’s so mild a girl has to give a lot of strokes to get the right effect. Gee, I enjoyed whipping you. I could go on forever. Did you enjoy it too?”

“Yes!”

“Liar! You hated every one. But you’ll love them now that it’s over. It’s the loveliest sensation to know that they’ve stopped.” She laughed gaily at Caroline’s surprise. “Oh yes, I get whipped too! Mummy has me whipped whenever I’ve been extra bad. She’s really awfully unkind about whipping me. She doesn’t do it herself, but I wish she did. She

has one of the girls do it, and they lay it on twice as hard because of who I am."

"You haven't been whipped for a long time; you don't have any marks." Caroline was still gasping but feeling better.

"Oh, that's the whip. It hurts something awful, but marks soon go away. You'll see. I'm going to untie you now."

April giggled. "I bet you'd sooner stay tied, wouldn't you?" Caroline was by no means sure herself, but she brightly said, "No, not really. What are you going to do with me?"

"Can't you guess?"

Caroline could guess. Soon she would be saying no, then she'd be whipped again, only much harder and probably on her breasts. Quivering, she felt the rope loosen and fall away from her wrists. She rubbed gratefully but did not move.

"There you are, sweetheart. You're a free girl. You can escape."

"Oh, April, you know I won't. If I did, I would be caught."

"In that case, come to bed. Come and pleasure me."

"I don't do that, April. I've never done it."

"Don't be silly. Come along. It's all perfumed and ready."

"Please, April, don't make me."

“Of course I’ll make you, and I am being terribly kind. You’re only a slavegirl, so all I have to do is tie you up again and whip you until you say yes. But here I am, persuading.”

“But it’s not nice. It’s wrong.”

“I’ve got the most darling little slit. You’ve never seen it. Do come over here and stop quibbling.”

“I’m sure your mother wouldn’t approve.”

April laughed. “It was Mummy who taught me how. The big reason she bought you was so I wouldn’t have to have this lovely fun with blacks. Looking after my pussy is part of your duties.”

Caroline was stunned. Shutting her mind to reason, she placed her wrists once more against the pillars and said wearily, “Very well. Tie me again and do whatever you think you have to do.”

She was enveloped in a rush of young arms and heady scent. She was hugged and kissed, but then she was securely tied as she had been before. She suspected each hand was a few inches higher on the post. She had to stand very erect.

“Gee, you look so pretty like that—good enough to eat.”

The words did not register. Even the tying of her ankles to drag a foot out to each base of a pillar failed to convey its message. Caroline dismally supposed she was now to be

whipped up into her sex where it would hurt unbearably. She was not ready for the hot and hungry lips and seeking tongue, or for the small hands clutching the cheeks of her bottom and drawing her pubic patch against the eager mouth.

Involuntarily, she gasped, “No, no, no! Oh, please don’t. Oooh, please stop!”

Nothing stopped. The kneeling girl did not bother to answer. Her clutch intensified as did the actions of her mouth. Miss Caroline Dover was in the hands of a youthful mistress of the erotic arts. She tried to writhe and wave her hips, but she could not move enough to matter. Soon she began to moan.

“It’s a lot better for me to do it to you, dear,” April said placidly when it was over and the last gasp had trailed into limbo. “Salves your conscience, and with you tied like that it gives me a chance to do a good job on you. Did you enjoy it?”

“Yes.”

April laughed. She knew the admission had been hard to make. She was pleased with her inspiration and her slave’s helplessness. Poor dear Caroline would soon come around, and this was a lot better than whipping her until the poor darling was worn out with pain. Thoughtfully, she tied a noose around the slave’s neck and left rope trailing as a

leash. “I’m leaving your feet tied, sweetheart, just the way they are for now. I’m going to tie your hands behind your back, and I don’t want any fuss.”

Caroline was still dazed and in a welter of shame, but her feelings no longer mattered. April was going to have her way regardless of the slave girl’s objections. She sobbed her way through the freeing of her hands and their retying behind her back. Then came the loosening of her feet. She stood abjectly with the tears running down her cheeks and a hang-dog look on her face. April gathered up the leash from her neck.

“Caroline, for goodness sake, do stop crying. You’re being ridiculous.” April’s tone was peremptory. “Come along now and be a good girl.”

Caroline had no choice. She was dragged to the bed by her noosed neck and the end of the leash fastened to keep her there. Her shoulders weaved in a familiar frustration against tied hands. Suddenly her hair was clasped by two young hands and she was dragged down on top of their owner. April spread herself comfortably and positioned the captive head to the best advantage. Her voice was demanding.

“You’re being an awful bother, dear, but you have to do it—you have to!”

Caroline was now in a strange new world her tears did not

survive. It w as a scented cavern of femininity, its pungency a heady brew of sex, perfume, and April's own sweet scent. She struggled vainly to withdraw, but her hair was firmly held. Moreover, her face was thrust again and again within the warm confinement of April's thighs. Her stricken gaze confirmed what the moppet had said. April did indeed possess a neat and tight slit. April's pussy was indicative of the girl herself: young, sweet, warm, and anxiously urgent in its demand. A particularly hard tug on her hair and a crafty arrangement of loins were Caroline's undoing. Her mouth was suddenly alive with April's secretions and flavor. After that she was lost to April completely.

"You see, you could do it all the time," April said. "Am I going to have this trouble with you every time?"

"No," Caroline said slowly. "I'm sorry, April. I—I had no idea. I mean, you taste so—so gorgeous!"

"So do you, darling. See what we'd have missed if I hadn't been firm with you?"

"How was I to know? I thought it would be horrible. I thought it would be only a smell and taste of—of—"

"Pee, darling?"

"Well, yes, but there wasn't any there. Or maybe it's just because it's you and me. I think it has to be that."

"Wait till you taste Mummy!"

“You don’t mean—?” Caroline stared down, aghast.

“Of course. I told you she taught me. If it weren’t for Mummy, I’d still be whipping black girls’ bottoms and wondering what the strange perfume was all about. I think most girls smell nice to other girls. I haven’t been fucked by a man yet. What’s it like?”

“Well, it ought to be the same as with you and me, but it isn’t. It’s different.”

“I bet this is better. Mummy told me you’d been raped the first time. What was that like?”

“Horrible. A girl can’t judge it, she’s so frightened.” Caroline thought back to the hard thrustings of O’Rourke and shuddered.

“I wish everything that’s happened to you had happened to me too,” April said drowsily. “I get the damnedest dreams. I suppose they’re sort of fantasy things where I get thrown in prisons and whipped, and tied to a stake by Indians and tortured with everyone looking at my tits. And there’s one about having to stand in the pillory and everyone’s laughing. We actually have a pillory out in the woods; it’s for the slaves. I’ve asked Mummy to lock me in it to see what it’s like, but she won’t. She says it’s too public. I could put you in there because you’re a slave. How about you put me in there one afternoon when Mummy’s away?”

“She’d skin us both alive.”

“Not if she didn’t find out. Even if she did, we’d probably only be whipped.”

“Who wants to be whipped!”

“Well, yes, you’ve got a point, but let’s try it anyway. I can always make you do it.” April giggled. “It’s so lovely to own a girl and be able to make her do whatever you want. I’ll make you do all sorts of things.”

Wryly, Caroline surveyed her future. She could see herself being punished from different directions, but, suddenly April seemed very close and very dear.

Lightly, she asked her young mistress, “What are you going to make me do next?”

“Mummy says I can have the carriage this afternoon to go shopping. You can come with me.”

“But I can’t possibly go like this!”

“Not as a slave, darling. Only you and I will know that. If somebody else guesses, well, what’s it matter? I’ll dress you in some of Mummy’s things.”

“We’ll get ourselves whipped.”

“No, really, Mummy’s already said I can take you.”

“But I—I could—”

“Oh, you mean escape?” April giggled. “Wouldn’t that be

fun? You could hide in the cane fields or something, and they'd hunt for you with bloodhounds. When they brought you back to Mummy, she'd have you branded. She'd almost have to; it's the custom."

"It sounds horrible. I'm not even going to think about it. But honestly, April, you can't possibly be seen in public socializing with your own slave—or any slave."

"Darling, except for the way I've got you fixed right now, you look about as much like a slave as the Queen of England. C'mon, let me get at that rope around your neck."

Davenport was not a metropolis, but it was town enough to excite a girl who had seen more than enough wilderness and captivity. The sudden and total freedom—a luxurious, rich freedom—was heady stuff. Add to it April's giggling enchantment and it was all quite intoxicating for the captive girl. In the company of Miss April Ratcliffe, Miss Caroline Dover was a very happy girl. It was diverting to consider what the passersby and April's acquaintances would think if they could see the whipped back beneath the elegant clothing. The two girls shopped, and they had tea on a terrace. It was there—that they met their first embarrassment. Mrs. Portland was a heavy dowager who minced no words. She fixed Caroline with an eagle eye.

"I know you. You have no business here. You're a slave. I

saw you serving drinks at the Burdetts' place the other evening."

Caroline's blush was more eloquent than words. April said, "Please mind your own business, Mrs. Portland. Caroline belongs to me now. My mother has the papers."

"It's scandalous. You both should be whipped."

"Thanks. I'll mention it to Mummy."

"Don't you be pert with me, young lady. You're altogether too big for your breeches."

"I don't wear breeches."

"Nor little else, I suspect." Mrs. Portland glowered. "You need not think respectable people are deceived. You've purchased this girl for reasons open to question. I intend to report this matter to the island authorities. Slavegirls in a place like this—it's outrageous!"

"So are you; you silly old trout," April said, undismayed. "Go home and change corsets. You need a larger size."

Mrs. Portland took a deep breath, inflating an impressive bust. "I shall not be satisfied until I see you both properly whipped," she announced grandly. "I have always said that your mother spoils you. What Laura Ratcliffe has needed for a long time is a husband with a good limber cane for both your bottoms." She snorted and stomped away.

“Silly old bitch.” April stuck out her tongue at the retreating bulk. “I bet it’s she who thrashes her husband’s bottom, not the other way around.”

“But, April dear, can she cause trouble?”

“I don’t know. Maybe she can. But I’m not going to be bawled out in public by an old fart like her.” April sniffed disdainfully. “Forget the old witch. Mummy will look after her if there’s any trouble. Mummy knows how to handle them. Darling, would you like to see a perfectly wonderful free show?”

Caroline was worried. April’s insouciance was wonderful for April—behind her was vast wealth—but behind Caroline was nothing except a whipped back. Mrs. Portland could not be easily dismissed. But April’s unconcern was reassuring.

“Of course,” Caroline finally told April. “I want to see anything that gives you pleasure.”

“You may not like this, but you have to look at it anyway because I say so.”

“Of course.”

It was a place of punishment, an open green within the town. There was a pillory, stocks, a whipping post—all the familiar regalia of pain. Caroline shivered and stole a quick glance at her companion. April’s eyes were shining, en-

grossed at the sight before her.

They had come at the right time. As gentry, they had a privileged place in the stand provided for the edification of the wealthy. The bailiff was there with his whip and his scroll. A wagon was unloading the delinquents for punishment.

“Half of them are girls who have said no to the wrong man,” April giggled. “They won’t say no next time he asks.”

Caroline wished she did not have to watch, but April’s enjoyment was all too evident. She composed herself. She was a lucky slave not to be down there herself. Or was she? This morning she had been whipped herself. She shrugged away the thought. One of the good things about being a slave was that her thinking was done for her. She supposed she would get used to it.

“The rest have been sent here to be punished by their Masters or mistresses,” April whispered. “It’s a service the bailiff provides. Just think, Mummy could send either one of us here. Isn’t that exciting?”

It was exciting, Caroline could not deny it. The crowd, rapidly gathering, was also excited. Ribald comments flew. The crowd on the stand was better mannered, but there was an excitation there too. And all of it was about pain—pain inflicted on others. Caroline shivered but felt a rising pulse.

“They’ll whip the men and get rid of them quickly,” April whispered. “Who wants to see men whipped? It’s the girls

we've come to see. Some of the poor dears probably haven't done a thing, but they'll get whipped just the same."

It was so. The men's crimes and the number of strokes they were to receive was read sonorously by the baliff. The sentence was administered by his helpers. Here, for the first time, Caroline was witness to true floggings—the cat-o'-nine-tails, the bloodied backs, and the screams. To see strong men punished thus was bad enough, but that such a horrendous punishment was inflicted on the backs of girls was beyond belief. Yet there it was before her eyes.

The males disposed of, the bailiff, with obvious relish, read out crime and sentence on the first female, a haughty damsel of good family who obviously felt socially superior to all present. Her crime: being persistently impertinent to her betters, plus a less specific disobedience. She was, at most, seventeen years old. Disdainfully, she strode to the whipping post and stripped to the waist, raising bare arms to the straps, waiting for her wrists to be tied. No doubt she had watched this happen to others many times before. She knew her role. With hands firmly strapped to the post, she turned insolently to the stand and winked. It was her last act of bravado. She was sentenced to only five lashes, but she screamed lustily as each impacted on her lovely back. At the end of it, her back shed blood. She was marked, not by welts but by wounds. She would bear their evidence for a long time, perhaps for life. When she was released, sob-

bing, she donned her clothes and was driven away in a costly carriage, a scion of wealth brought low. From now on she would be an obedient young woman. Caroline wondered how she would explain the marks upon her back to her husband, when she got one.

The next was an obviously married woman whose crime had been dalliance. She was stripped to reveal large heavy breasts. Force had to be used to strap her to the post. She glanced at the stand resentfully but did not wink. Her sentence was ten strokes. Caroline watched her receive them with a sinking heart. If she herself was publicly punished, she was sure she could not bear the awfulness. The snap and crack of the cat on bare flesh was horrific, the screams heartrending. At, the end of the ten, the woman was borne to her carriage and her waiting husband, then driven away with a flourish. No doubt she would be the model wife from now on. “Watch this girl,” April whispered. “I was at school with her. We’ve often eaten each other’s pussies. She tried to run away with the delivery man and got caught before they could get married. Now she’s going to be whipped. Poor Myrtle!”

April waved a carefree hand to the girl being stripped for the post. Myrtle smiled wanly and raised her hands to the straps.

“A wanton. Ten strokes”’

They were delivered upon the innocent back with verve

and a greater vigor than need be. Myrtle screamed steadily and writhed to the approval of the spectators. It was agreed: Myrtle's punishment was the most entertaining yet. She too was driven away in a carriage, no doubt to receive parental admonitions. Caroline began to feel thankful she was a slave, looking furtively at her mistress, but April was totally engrossed at what she was watching. If she could see herself there, strapped to the post, the vision did no more than excite.

The last two maidens each had more than a single sin to her credit. The first was flogged, then clamped in the pillory for the rest of the day. The second was also flogged, then left to stand fastened to the post, her arms pathetically raised to the straps, her bloodied back a lesson for all who passed. Their tears were copious. The spectators dispersed.

"Wasn't that glorious?" April enthused. "Our own plantation has a whipping post and a pillory down in the slave compound, but this is so much more exciting, with everybody watching and the bailiff reading out what you've done and then having to walk to the post. Mmmmmmm… I'd love it, wouldn't you?"

"No, I wouldn't—not getting my back cut up that way."

"Well, that is a bit unkind, I admit. Darling, let's go home now and make love. Watching these whippings has got me all excited."

They went home. They made love and were happy together. But Caroline could not forget the punished girls. She was positive half of them were consigned to the bailiff out of petty spite. And the whip used on them was so terrible. The cat had come into being for hardened male criminals, not for the frailty of naughty girls, some still in their teens. The fact that Laura Ratcliffe could consign April or herself to the public whipping post was hard to believe, but it was so. Not that April's mother would do such a thing, but still the thought was horrific. Caroline shuddered and retained a grain of fear. Neither girl romping on the bed knew the nemesis already awaiting them.

"I demand proper retribution, Laura," Mrs. Portland stated gruffly. "I've conferred with my associates and all club members. They are outraged. What young April has done is unforgivable."

Laura Ratcliffe was annoyed with April and with herself, but she was particulary annoyed with the bulky figure sipping tea oil her couch. But the latter was an island force, a power. She must be placated, but certainly not at the expense of her daughter's back.

"I don't count Miss Dover as an ordinary slave," Laura said firmly. "She is an educated young woman of some breeding. She has simply been unfortunate. I purchased her solely as a companion for April."

"If you had to purchase her, then she is a slave. Burdett

had her first. That's where I saw her. Now there's a man who knows how to treat slaves," Mrs. Portland snorted. "He'd never parade one in a fashionable tea shop among decent people."

"April is young and lacks good judgement. Please forgive—"

"I want both those girls sent to the bailiff."

"But what good would that do?"

"What good? It would do 'em both good—teach 'em a lesson—particularly that slave wench. She doesn't know her place."

"Mrs. Portland, allow me to deal with this in my own way. You must understand I absolutely will not have those girls publicly flogged."

Mrs. Portland delivered another snort. It was unmistakably a cry to battle. "I've sent two of my own girls to the bailiff," she declared. "Did 'em a world of good. They've got some marks on their backs from it, but that helps 'em behave, and I expect they'll fade eventually."

"I prefer to punish April myself."

"You spoil her rotten. What about the slave?"

"She too. In this case, it is only April who has committed an indiscretion. I will deal with her."

"How?"

Laura Ratcliffe bit her lip in vexation. Young April would certainly pay for this embarrassment. She should have had enough sense to keep Caroline in the carriage. But, for the moment, the dowager on the couch was her principle problem. Laura was becoming angry.

“How I deal with my daughter is my own affair,” she said icily. “I think you are making a lot of fuss over very little.”

Mrs. Portland swelled indignantly. “I’ll have you know that I’m the spokesman for most of the island families. They are behind me in this matter. Those two girls must go the bailiff.”

“No!”

Laura’s retort was forceful, but she was secretly askance. She was one of the island families herself, but she could not fight the rest of them. There were pressures they could bring to bear. In the end it might be better, even for April herself, to take this whipping. As for Caroline, she was only a slave, and slaves are hard to defend. The island code was when in doubt, punish. It was an easy code to live with when not applied to oneself.

Laura sighed and asked, “If we do have the poor dears punished, what do you suggest?”

“That’s better. I knew you’d be sensible, Laura. I recommend fifteen strokes for each girl.”

“With that appalling instrument?”

“Well, perhaps not. They do have a special cat-o’-nine-tails for females, y’know. Don’t use it often, but it’s there just the same—no metal inserts in the lashes.” Mrs. Portland sipped at the tea. “But I’ll tell you this, with my own girls I had the bailiff give ’em the full treatment. I wanted Doris and Esther to know they had been whipped, and by heaven they did!”

“Fifteen with any whip they have is too many. I can’t agree to that number.”

“Ten?”

“I am thinking in terms of five each. They might be able to handle that.”

“It’s a mere nothing—hardly worth the trouble.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Portland, we must also consider the profound effect on a young girl of the public exposure, the shame. Do you realize that their breasts are bared for the whole duration of their punishment?”

“I’d stripe the little baggages from neck to toe!”

“I suggest a compromise then. Five strokes each, and the poor dears remain fastened in the pillory or to the post. I suppose a bit of public nudity won’t hurt them.”

“Hmmmm.” Mrs. Portland was running the delectable pic-

ture through her mind. “I suppose something along those lines might be acceptable. They’d have to stand for more than thirty minutes each.”

“Of course. I agree it’s an excellent discipline.” Laura Ratcliffe was thankful to get the strokes down to five. “Just how do we go about this?”

“I’ll have the bailiff pick them up Wednesday morning. Wednesday’s market day. Your little dears will be assured of a good audience.”

“Couldn’t we deliver them? I dislike the idea of them being… what would we call it—arrested? And then being led through the streets.”

“Oh, I suppose so. Really, Laura, you are far too softhearted. You can’t relieve them of all consequence. Anyway, I’ll drop by and advise the bailiff to expect them and what their punishment is to be. So now I’ll bid you good day.”

It was a thoughtful woman who went in search of her daughter. Her annoyance with April had evaporated to be replaced with concern. Laura felt manipulated, overridden by Mrs. Portland’s redundancy. But she knew the island and its folk. She could think of no way out of the dilemma. The two girls had an appointment with the baliff on Wednesday morning. She uttered a heart-felt “Damn!”

Caroline learned of their fate from an ebullient April. The youngster was positively throbbing with elation, her eyes

shining.

“Darling, guess what! We have to go to the bailiff on Wednesday morning and get ourselves punished! It’s because of that old trout, Mrs. Portland—but isn’t it exciting!”

Caroline could understand but not share the exuberance. All she could see was shame and pain. Life was so unfair.

“Oh, darling, my pussy’s on fire just thinking about it! Just think, stripped to the waist—or maybe more—and then tied to that post or locked in the pillory! And with all those people looking on, talking about us! I bet there’ll be all sorts of comments about our breasts!”

“But, April, we’re going to be whipped!”

“Oh, that! It’s only five strokes. Mummy’s so clever.”

“But those girls we watched—the ones who got five strokes didn’t seem very happy about it. They screamed horribly.”

“But Mummy’s persuading them to use a special whip on us. I think it’s called a lady’s whip or something. Gosh, I’m going to be so hot between my legs I’ll burst!”

Caroline was irritated enough to want to slap her young mistress. She could grudgingly admit to herself a measure of sexual excitement at what she had seen and the prospect of it happening to her. She supposed the emotion arose from them being leading ladies on a grim stage. She had no thought that whatever whip was used it would not hurt.

She was sure it would hurt horribly.

The bailiff was a jocose man who took his duties lightheartedly. He saw enough of quaking females to become inured to feminine qualms. But April was something new. She was young and of high estate. He was a privileged man. Caroline he accepted as a fortunate perquisite of his office. Their timid entry into his office was an excuse for humor.

“Come to get your backs striped, eh? Well, you’re not the first, and you won’t be the last. D’you want to be fucked afore I take ye out there?”

Caroline was certain only April’s social position kept them inviolate. Their polite refusals were not taken amiss.

“I always ask ’em. ’Bout half are real grateful. You gals been flogged before?”

He listened to what they had to say, his eyes on their breasts.

“Well, this’ll hurt you worse than anything you’ve had afore,” he assured them amiably. “Sorry I can’t offer easy strokes for a piece o’ tail, but there’s them that watches, y’know. You want to go out to the post now or wait here in the cage until the crowd’s ready?”

They assured him they would wait.

“Best tie your hands, eh? You ain’t goin’ to feel so easy

when the times comes."

On their best behavior, April and Caroline assured him they understood. They were not like other girls.

"There ain't no other girls," the bailiff assured them as he crossed their wrists and bound them behind their backs. "Come time for 'em to go out there and strip, and they'd all like to run, if they could."

The cage held three unbound Negresses. A pair of tied white girls was a bonus in their boredom. They took instant possession. While the bailiff watched from beyond the bars, they took April and Caroline to reluctant climax with tongues and hands.

Caroline and April endured the fervid attentions. They had no choice. Hands tied behind their backs, they could not argue. They were still on their knees with busy mouths when the bailiff opened the door of the cage.

"Not sure your mama would want you doing that, missy," he said awkwardly. "Maybe you best get off out there on the green with the bunch havin' a look at your tits."

They could not demur. Caroline was apathetic, seeing only a lengthy and painful ordeal ahead. Led to where they would spend the rest of the day, they stripped to their waists. April raised her hands to the post, and Caroline bent a subservient neck into the pillory.

“The whip can lace ye well in there, lass.”

“I’m sure it will,” she retorted bitterly. “How long must we stand like this?”

“Long enough.”

Caroline accepted the vague answer as all she could expect. Prisoners were never told the limit of their travail. Looking sideways, she was able to see April with her breasts pressed hard against the wood and her hands fastened high. For the first time, April looked wan.

They stood for a long time. They were made to wait for their punishments. The comments were ribald.

“Should show us their rumps.”

“Nay, the young’un’s a Ratcliffe. A Ratcliffe ass ain’t for the likes o’ us.”

“Should let us handle ’em. They’d be ripe by now. After awhile they ain’t goin’ to feel like it.”

“Should stake ’em out on the grass. Let the boys have themselves a good time.”

“Hey, lass, how ’bout a piece o’ tail!”

Caroline was thankful the instruments in which they were held were within an enclosure. Those ugly and eager male hands would have driven her crazy. Caroline looked from side to side at her prisoned hands. She moved her fingers

ineffectually. She was helpless. Another sideways glance at April showed the youngster shivering deliciously at the comments she evoked. Her nervousness had gone. She had become the young lady of quality about, to be publicly flogged.

They waited.

6

Public Punishment

THE BAILIFF OF DAVENPORT TOWN enjoyed his work. He spent the balance of the morning contemplating his afternoon. The two girls, already secured and awaiting his whip, were like gold in the bank. He was reserving for himself the privilege of lacing the bare young backs so wantonly displayed. From time to time, he went to view the shivering nudities and was well contented. One of them, the girl in the pillory, was visibly frightened. The younger one was a puzzle. But the lash would excise her mischievous smirk.

Caroline herself was both frightened and angry. This exposure was cruel and needless, but was obviously highly esteemed as part of their punishment. She gazed hatefully at the empty stands. When those stands began to fill, her pulse accelerated in anticipation of anguish.

The bailiff had a sense of theatre. With each girl he grasped their hair and dangled the supple thongs of the whip before their eyes. They were then made to kiss it. Caroline viewed the well oiled slenderness of leathers with loathing. She decided she had best scream from the first blow. Without maiden screams the audience would feel cheated and the bailiff goaded to a heavier hand. She listened dully to the reading aloud of their crimes. It appeared she and April had been convicted of lewd behavior and impertin-

ent tongues.

Whippings are routine affairs, varied only by the victim's reactions. Caroline screamed to the fullest extent of her lungs. April took her first two strokes in shocked silence, but then did full vocal justice to her other three. Both girls kicked and lunged frantically. Their audience was satisfied. Mrs. Portland glowed with righteous pleasure.

"It hurt lots more than I expected," April whispered. "I don't think I could have taken ten."

"Girls can stand anything," Caroline said bitterly. "I'm not sure the worst part isn't still ahead. When these other poor girls have been whipped, we go back the way we were. We could stand there for a long time. It's hateful."

"But, darling, I've been shivering deliciously with all these men watching. Just think—every one of them wants to fuck us. But they can't touch us. Doesn't that give you a thrill?"

"Well, perhaps—that part."

"And here we stand, two good little girls with our whipped backs and our hands tied and our breasts all bare. I'm finding it positively scrumptious. My pussy's on fire."

After the remaining delinquents were whipped and sent on their way, the bailiff once more turned his attention to the two white girls. While one of his assistants untied captive wrists, he raised the pillory's upper yoke, instructing,

“Come along, my proud little beauty, and rest your pretty neck.”

The wood was still warm from the previous victim. Caroline nestled her neck within the cruel half circle, brought her hair forward, then placed her wrists in limbo. The upper yoke closed down to hold her as immovable as before. The massive padlock was snapped shut with a flourish.

“It will be many a weary hour afore I unlocks that again, young lady. Ye’d best use the time in good resolutions.”

It was an anticlimax to their previous punishment and thus even more potent. Caroline would get more tired and increasingly bored, and she could do nothing about either. In the end, it would be the same with April. As yet, the young girl’s eyes were still alight with her own heated eroticism, but she would tire and long for a release that would not come. One by one the spectators departed. By suppertime the two girls were alone in their captivity.

They were too far apart to converse. They would have had to raise their voices, and Caroline supposed that would bring a gag or a scold’s bridle or some such horror. In any case, she had nothing to say. She longed only to be set free.

It was twilight, the end of the day. It seemed reasonable to expect release, but still they were left alone. This would be part of their travail, to stand in diminishing hope. They could be left there throughout the night. It was most emin-

ently practical and would undoubtedly teach them a lesson.

Caroline tried to sleep, but when her knees gave way in sleep, her neck was painfully jerked to return her to an awareness of her condition. When night and darkness curtained the green, the best she could manage was a fitful doze. It was during one of these that a voice whispered against her prisoned neck. She recognized Burdett's man who had himself placed her in a pillory once.

"Want a free trip back to England, lass?"

Thinking it a cruel taunt she wearily said, "Go away."

"There's a ship that sails with the early tide. Captain's a friend o' mine. I'm already booked and all in good order, but he'll take ye along and no questions asked."

"Don't be absurd."

"'Tis easy, lass. All we're askin' is ye be nice to the Captain an' me for the voyage. 'Tis a bargain for 'sure."

"I can't. I'm securely locked. Please go away."

"I've a ring o' keys, lass. One of 'em will fit. Oh, and me name's Jed."

Caroline had to take him seriously. A furtive glance in April's direction showed the girl's head turned as she sagged against strapped wrists. She was asleep. Suddenly

the offer of this crude man could not be denied—freedom, England, her parents' loving home.

Sadly, she said, "What's the use? I'd be tracked down and caught. I'm a slave."

"Aboard ship and far away, lass? Nay, there'll be no tracking there."

It was so perfect, so easy. Its price was high but mattered little now. She adored April, and Laura Ratcliffe had been more than kind, but she had just been flogged, and a vision of her English home overwhelmed her with tender longing.

"Very well, I'll come. Release me."

"Ye'll be fucked good and proper, lass. Is that a deal?"

"Yes, yes," she urgently whispered. "Please hurry."

"I ain't fully trusting you, but this here won't do ye no harm." Jed produced cord and knotted a loop around her right wrist, its end dangling as a leash. "Just so's you don't go runnin' back to that Laura Ratcliffe. The moment I lets you outta this pillory you belong to me. Understand?"

"Yes, I understand."

The padlock yielded to the key, and the yoke was raised. Caroline stretched luxuriously, then slipped into the top half of her dress. She made no demur about a leashed wrist. She obeyed its tug and followed into the dark.

It was the main road to the port, an hour's journey on foot. Caroline refused to think of anything except her home and family. She walked beside Jed in docile acceptance of her leashed wrist. When they heard traffic coming, they hid behind a bush.

"'Tis a wonderful thing I'm doing for ye, lass."

Caroline crushed back cynicism about its price. "I know," she said simply. "I'm terribly grateful."

"Safe back in England, ye'll be a slave no more." Jed tugged at her wrist. "But stay clear of the colony and the islands. Someone sees you and you'd be back behind bars."

"I'll never go near them again. I'd be insane. Jed, I'm so very grateful."

"Oh, aye, and ye'll have a chance to prove it. The voyage is a month and more."

"I won't be kept in chains, will I?"

"Would be poor love-makin' we'd be doin' with ye ironed. Nay, lass, ye are good as free right now."

But Jed was wrong.

The men converged from the shadows on the jetty. Jed dropped her leash and ran. The night was split by the racket of a well aimed rifle. The fleeing man hovered in mid-air like a flying bird, then slapped thuddingly into the

sand and lay still.

“I thought ye had more sense, lass.” The bailiff’s voice was pure reproach. “Ye didn’t think I’d leave thee unattended through the night? I had one of me boys inspect ye hourly. Then, when ye was gone, I had no doubt where ye was headin’.”

Caroline said nothing. She could think of nothing to say.

“Kept ye leashed, eh? Didn’t trust ye.”

Caroline’s wrists were pulled behind her back, then crossed and bound. She made no complaint. Nothing mattered any more. She was lifted into a carriage. At the Davenport jail she was locked in a cell. She wept in a flood of bitterness, then sought the hard comfort of the bench. She was so tired.

In the morning her disposal by the court was brief. “Runaway slave, m’lord—caught in the act.” “How d’you plead, girl?” “Guilty.” It did not occur to the grief-stricken girl to plead anything else. She was burdened by a terrible guilt that had nothing to do with the court. In dull misery she heard her sentence: to be branded with the letter S for slave beneath one breast, to spend a day in the pillory, and to be returned to her owner for further discipline. She was led away.

The branding of Miss Caroline Dover was as brief an incident as her time in court. She was taken to a dismal room

where the blacksmith awaited. There she was bound most tightly to a post. Strictures made it impossible to move her body above the waist or below her neck. She was exquisitely open to the iron.

"'Tis sorry indeed I am, lass, to have this done to ye."

The bailiff sounded truly sincere. "But don't think ye'll die —ye won't."

"Thank you, Sir." It was all she could think to say.

"Would ye like a blindfold?"

"No!"

To be in darkness and unable to move, a red hot iron hovering near her, was unthinkable. Once more she was naked and fighting rope. Fascinated, she watched as the iron was drawn from the embers and scraped clean. Breathlessly, she watched as it neared her breast. When she felt its heat, she closed her eyes.

The agony was as she expected—beyond description. Her breast did not move as the count to five was made, but her screams rang through the room until she could scream no more. Totally absorbed by the pain, she paid no attention to what was being done to her. When the familiar hardwood closed around her neck and wrists, she prayed that now she would not succumb to the darkness and break her neck. She was completely alone in her pain. That night she

was driven to a destination she knew all too well.

Mr. Lowther was his usual self. Caroline's nudity did not excite him, nor did her wound appall his wise scrutiny.

"I did not expect to get you back in this condition, my dear. You appear to have been foolish."

"I've been terribly foolish, Sir."

"Well, you're young. I've been told the story, and I don't want to hear it again. Amy will look after your brand. Tomorrow it should have a dressing. Is the pain very great?"

"It was awful, but I can bear it now, Sir."

"Good. Willis can put you in a cell for the night, and Amy can attend to you. I suppose you realize you are here to be sold again?"

"No one told me."

"Well, you are. I have here a letter. Since your hands are tied I had better read it to you. Have I your permission?"

"Of course."

"It's from your owner, Mrs. Ratcliffe. It is quite short. It reads: 'You have spoiled it. We had something. Now it's gone. April is broken-hearted. It seems best to sell you and give you a fresh start.' It is signed with 'love'. May I say how sorry I am? I sense tragedy."

“Can I never see her again?”

“I’m afraid not. Her instructions are explicit: sell you. But I am afraid you are no longer as saleable a property as when we first met. Runaway slaves are not favored in the bidding. You have also changed hands with unusual rapidity. I am afraid the island is well aware of you and your crimes.”

“That means Laura won’t get much for me—she’ll lose a lot of money?”

“I am afraid so. I have seen these situations before.”

“I suppose I deserve whatever I get,” she said sadly.

“My problem now is to sell you at all. The island is a tight little community, and you are known here.” He sighed. “Someone will buy you, of course, but I would like to get Mrs. Ratcliffe as good a recovery as possible. To that end we will display you to the best advantage, and I will have Amy do everything in her power to make you presentable.”

“You are very kind. I’d like to give you my assurance of good behavior. Honestly, I won’t be silly.”

“Of course not. You are a sweet girl. But we will keep you properly tied and behind bars.”

She had spoiled things, even with this kindly man. Mr. Lowther did not really trust her. She followed Willis to a cell without protest. He locked the door on her and shot the bolts shut. Once more she sought sleep. As on the night be-

fore, she was weary beyond concern.

“Didn’t take you long to get back,” Amy said to her.

She listened, delighted, as Caroline told her tale of woe.

“Gosh, I never had nothin’ like that happen to me. What are you going to do now?”

“What can I do? I’m tied and in a cell!”

“You can’t do nothin’. This Mrs. Ratcliffe of yours must be real kind. She says she don’t want you whipped on her account, and you’d be whipped half to death. The brand is only part of what we gets for running away. Yours is going to look lovely when it heals.”

“They put me in the pillory all day yesterday.”

“The pillory ain’t no fun, but a gal can put up with it. I stood in a pillory more times than I remember. Thing is now to get you a good buyer, someone who’s kind. What you want, man or woman?”

“I honestly don’t know, Amy. I’d give anything to go back to the the Ratcliffes, but they don’t want me now.”

“Yes, but are you really a lesbian?”

“I don’t know that either. I’m not anything right now.”

“Want me to go ask Mrs. Ratcliffe to take you back? Mr. Lowther, he’s liable to whip my ass.”

“Oh, Amy, would you?”

Mr. Lowther broke the news the following day, his manner unusually crisp.

“Mrs. Ratcliffe has agreed to take you back, my dear, conditionally.”

“Oh, Sir, anything—anything!”

“We owe this to young Amy. Really, I don’t know whether to whip or commend her. Have your hands been tied like that the whole time?”

“I’m afraid so, Sir.”

“Amy was right—you enjoy being like that.”

“I’m sorry. I feel so silly.”

“Don’t be sorry. Slavery does strange things to girls. But to return to Mrs. Ratcliffe. Her condition for your return to the fold is fifty stringent strokes on your bare back.”

“I accept.”

“Come, come! Don’t be too hasty. I suspect your fifty strokes will be extremely severe. But if you are resold, you will not be punished at all.”

“No, please—I accept them gladly.”

Mr. Lowther sighed. “Ordinarily, I would regret the loss of my commission, but in this case I really do believe we have

a happy ending, apart from the fifty lashes."

"I don't mind them. Oh, Mr. Lowther, thank you!"

"Probably we should thank young Amy."

"Of course! If she were here and I had my hands, I would hug her."

"You can negotiate the matter of your hands," Mr. Lowther said. "The Ratcliffe carriage will pick you up sometime during the day. I can only congratulate you on an unusually felicitous slavery. You are a very lucky girl."

No slave girl with fifty lashes awaiting her had ever been so happy. Caroline was in seventh heaven. She was not to be sold to after all. She would go back to her adored mistresses. She refused to think of the fifty lashes. All she could see was April's smiling face.

"You sure got it bad for that girl," Amy said doubtfully. "You sure you don't want your hands untied? I'm allowed to do it now."

"No! Oh, no! And, yes, I've got it bad for April. It's her I really belong to. I suppose it seems crazy because of our age difference, but April is my mistress."

"I sort of wish she owned me too. Think you can get her to make Mr. Lowther an offer for me?"

"Amy dear, I'll try."

“She can whip me all she likes.”

“I’ll tell her that too. She loves whipping girls.”

The carriage was on time. Caroline had been prepared by loving hands. She looked radiant, and she was most stringently bound at wrist and elbow. Her elbows hurt, but she did not complain. There was much kissing. At journey’s end, April was waiting and there were more lips and ardent declarations. The more serious matters in hand awaited the delinquent slave in Mrs. Ratcliffe’s office.

“I must freely admit to gladness in having you back, Caroline. You must thank that girl, Amy, for being here. Yes, I know, if you had your hands, you’d have your arms around me. But you don’t have them, and you’re not going to have them. I suppose that dressing covers your brand. I’m glad I had nothing to do with it.”

“I’m so terribly ashamed!”

“So you should be, dear.” Laura took the pitiful girl in her arms. “You know about your punishment?”

“Mr. Lowther told me. Laura, does it sound silly to say I’ll scream but that I don’t mind?”

“Right now I’m in a mood to let you out of them, but I don’t think I should. Some other idiot may offer you a chance to escape. Memory of what you’re going to receive should help you say no.”

“I tried to say no this time, but his offer seemed plausible, and I had stood in the pillory for so long. Please believe me.”

“I was gong to whip you myself, dear, but seeing you like this I simply don’t think I can.” Laura sighed. “April would gladly whip you, but she’d give you the first ten or so strokes really hard and then break down and either set you loose or give you love pats.”

“Laura, you do it—please? I’d be so grateful. Please don’t make me be whipped by a man.”

Once more the slave was kissed. Laura Ratcliffe was obviously thinking hard. It was then that Caroline remembered Amy.

“There’s a girl at Mr. Lowther’s,” she said hesitantly. “She wants me to persuade you to buy her. She’s a sort of wardress there, and I bet she’d be able to whip me properly.”

“Darling, this is absurd. Surely I don’t have to buy a new girl because I’m squeamish. Let’s forget about it. I’m not going to have you whipped today anyway. And don’t forget either, I’ve met Amy. We both owe Amy a lot. Does Lowther have a price on her?”

“I don’t even know if she’s for sale. Amy said she hoped you’d make an offer.” Caroline twisted bound arms in embarrassment. “I expect Mr. Lowther would lend her to you to whip me. I’m sure she’d be conscientious.”

“Hmmmm… it is a thought, dear. I suppose I could send you there to have it done. Terribly impersonal, though. But, as I said, we’ll drop it for now. Run along and find April. You can compare backs.”

“I shouldn’t untie your arms at all,” April admonished with mock severity. “But I can’t see your back properly the way you’re tied. Turn around.”

Caroline obeyed. She would have obeyed anything. She was still glowing from the hugs and kisses of an avid young mouth. It was so good to belong to April again. She did not care what happened. She did no more than gasp as the ropes were peeled from within her flesh.

“Mmmm—mmmmm! Oh, darling, they’re almost as beautiful as mine.” The moppet was already nude as she swung around to display her marked back. “See for yourself. Aren’t they lovely?”

Scarlet on ivory! The bailiff’s lady’s whip had implanted a macabre beauty on April’s back. The girl herself was palpitating with delight.

“Wasn’t that simply scrumptious to have to stand there with our boobs showing and listen to those men—the things they said! Could you see I had the loveliest orgasm rubbing against that post?”

The child was irresistible. She had Caroline laughing ruefully as she massaged her rope burns.

“I didn’t try to see much of anything,” Caroline admitted. “That beastly thing fit so snugly around my neck. Did you really get a thrill up there?”

“Of course I did. I knew I would that day when we watched the other girls being punished. To be strapped so I just had to stand and listen to men make fun of my different parts—oh, wow! You got cheated, darling. If they’d tied you instead of locking in that rotten pillory, it would have been so much better. Caroline, I nearly went crazy when I awoke and you weren’t there!”

“When did they let you loose?”

“At dawn. Men came and unstrapped me, and I walked home. Mummy says she’s going to get even with that Mrs. Portland one of these days. The whole thing was her fault. You wouldn’t have been punished, and that poor man wouldn’t be dead if it hadn’t been for that miserable old cow. Darling, I’m trying to think up some way to make it happen again. Can you think of something?”

“But I don’t want that to happen again—not ever!”

“We might manage to trade places next time. Then you’d feel better. I wouldn’t mind being in the pillory.”

“You’d want that awful whip again?”

“Well, not really—it sure did hurt—but for only five strokes it was so delicious. Caroline, come and eat me now before I

tie you again. Mummy said I mustn't let you run around loose."

Drugged with happiness and relief, Caroline used every bit of herself to pleasure her young mistress. Her free hands clutched, her lips fed. When they had gasped themselves into repletion, Caroline arose, turned, and crossed her wrists in the familiar pose. As April's cords bit at them, every nerve and emotion of her being responded in a turgid wave of eroticism she could not conceal. April laughed gleefully.

"You love it, don't you? Mummy doesn't really guess just how much you adore being bound. She plans to bind you for a long, long time and make it severe enough so you won't like it. But I bet you will. You will tell me, won't you?"

"Of course. I'll be curious about it myself. If it lasts for a long time, it may wear me out, and I'll be crying. But that's something I have to find out for myself."

Caroline found out sooner than she expected.

"I can't trust April with you any more," Laura Ratcliffe said reflectively. "The pair of you are so outrageously in love. Since you came back she sparkles like a diamond. I'll have to do the bad things to you myself. Come along."

Caroline followed as a firm but tender hand clutched her hair. They walked beyond the house and gardens, out into the slave quarters. In the cleared quadrangle the whipping

post and the pillory stood in stark isolation.

The slavegirl gasped in relief. “Oh, Laura, you’ve changed your mind! You’re going to whip me yourself after all!”

Laura laughed at her eagerness. “No, I’m not. I’ve decided to let that whipping weigh on your mind for a while—let it hang over your head. If I gave it to you right now, you’d be too euphoric for it to affect you properly. You’re actually pleased by the sight of that post, aren’t you?”

“Well, I do want you to do it to me. I sort of hoped—”

“I’m doing things backwards, just to jerk you back to reality. We can see how it works. I’ve had fresh shackles installed on this just for you, pet. I had them constructed so they are one with the post; a team of wild horses couldn’t budge them now. You put your wrist in the metal circlet, which is as much a part of the post as the post itself, and then the other half locks on top. No chain for anyone to cut. My blacksmith is a genius.”

“But, Laura, I never have gotten loose from anything.”

“No, you haven’t, but some idiot man might want to cut you loose. You’re a desirable morsel, y’know. Look what happened to you in the pillory on the green.”

“But that was at night!”

“You’re staying here for the night, pet—don’t think you’re not. I really am going to teach you a lesson this time.”

Caroline shrugged. “Which way do I face?”

“You face against the wood, breasts pressed tight. Arrange them if you like before you raise your hands.”

Heart fluttering, Caroline obeyed. Her bare breasts would not enjoy their contact through the night, but she did her best with them. Seething with emotion, she raised bare arms and placed her wrists in the waiting slots. When Laura Ratcliffe snapped the upper sections hard into place, the fit was perfect. So was the height. She would stand erect but would not be stretched. The captive girl realized they had been made for her alone and thrilled accordingly. She could never, never get loose.

“No damn man will steal you now, love.”

Laura’s hands were busy with rope. Several coils went around the slim waist and the post, then were cinched tight in the center to draw a squeal from the girl thus held.

“Laura! Oh, wow!”

“I meant what I said about being tied. Oh, and I just remembered—I’m turning the dogs loose. They’ll keep you safe.”

Clamped hard against the wood, the slavegirl was almost breathless. She now had a sudden vision of the night.

“But, Laura,” she gasped. “The dogs! You know what they’ll do to me—I’m naked!”

“Hmmm… you’re right.” Laura considered. Her reply was amused. “Of course, if you got bored—”

“Oh, please, not the dogs!”

“You can simply close your legs.”

“But, Laura!”

Laura laughed and patted the slave’s bottom. “Oh, all right. I’ll relieve you of the temptation, dear. I’ll tie your little bottom to the post so damn tight nothing can get to it. Kill two birds with one stone—punish you a bit more and preserve your chastity from canine carnality. How’s that?”

This time the ropes were deep within the crease dividing Caroline’s thighs from the curves of her bottom. They cinched her frighteningly tight.

“There darling,” Laura said. “Can you move?”

“I can’t move a thing below my knees.”

“How about your pussy?”

“I think you’ve buried it. For sure it won’t do me any good, but it’s quite safe now. Oh, Laura, I’m fixed so tight!”

“Hurt?”

“Not much yet, but I’m sure it will.”

“Good! Feel safe for the night.”

“I—I suppose so.”

“Damn it, I’m afraid I love you too. You’re such a menace. I’d better leave you here before I do something silly, like letting you loose and letting bygones be bygones.”

“Thank you for being so kind,” Caroline said, bidding her mistress farewell.

“You call this kind?”

“Well, yes. It is, isn’t it?”

The slavegirl stole a sideways glance, but Laura Ratcliffe was already walking back to the house.

Caroline sighed. She tested her bonds. She had never been fastened like this before. The clamps on her wrists were frightening in their implacability. The rest of her was just as bad. Without hands she could do nothing. Her waist and her thighs were cinched. She would now stand and stand, her branded breasts and her heated sex crying in protest. For the moment she was in a dither of erotic tumesence. Talk of the dogs had intensified her reaction at being thus bound. She knew this could not last, but why not enjoy it while she could? She tried to wriggle but could not move. She wished she had placed her breasts differently, but it was too late now. She raised a foot back and up from her knee. It was the only motion she could make. Perhaps it would deter the dogs. She settled down to endure the punishment she must suffer.

Caroline's euphoria defeated the ropes for a long time, but as the hours passed and twilight cast its gloom it was hard to remain cheerful. The plantation staff must have been warned. None came near. She was very much alone.

What did come was the dogs. They were huge, their snouts wet and cold and powerful. The girl herself could not deny them welcome. They desired her at a time when she had a most anxious need to be desired. They jostled each other for the privilege of a snout between her thighs. Woefully, Caroline knew that had she been able she would have separated her legs to give them entry, but she was not able. Laura's ropes defeated the probing tongues of the hounds. After awhile the dogs tired of her flesh from which they had licked, and they went away. By now it was very dark and the hour late. Dozing as best she could, supported by her bonds, the captive girl was startled into wakefulness by a whisping voice.

"I find you most easily, chérie."

It was Jean Dubois.

For the rest of her life Caroline would remember that moment and its quandary. She was flooded by a multitude of emotions. But all she could do was exclaim, "Oh, Jean! Jean!"

They kissed ardently, the old fire returned. The captive girl was back behind the wagon, her neck noosed and her

hands tied behind her back. The lips of Jean Dubois held magic. But in their Eden the serpent lay in wake.

“I cut you loose now, chérie—one moment.”

“Jean, no! No, don’t! You mustn’t! You must leave me, Jean—there are reasons. Just leave me here, and go away and forget.”

“Nonsense, ma petite. You are distressed over nothing. My knife, she is sharp. Behold!”

Suddenly, Caroline’s loins were free. The post held her only by her wrists. It was as though being clothed she was brutally stripped naked. Her instinctive thought was of Laura and what she would say.

“Oh, Jean, you shouldn’t have done that—you shouldn’t! You can’t get me loose; there’s no way.”

“I have you free in no time. Now your hands.”

“But, Jean, you can’t. My hands are locked, and there is no key where you can get it. You have to leave me here, you must!”

“There is no ‘must’, chérie—not for Jean Dubois.”

Had ever a girl been placed in such a quandary? One escape and now another, neither by her own choosing but both deserving of penalties and punishments. But how could she make this man understand? If Jean Dubois had

loved her enough to come this far, he would not relinquish her now. Knowing him, Caroline could believe he would allow her no say in the matter. She had not expected to be grateful for clamped wrists, but she was now.

“Jean, you can’t get my wrists free. It’s not possible without a key. Please don’t try. You’ll only hurt me.”

“Of course I’ll free you. Ah, what have we here?”

“They’re metal clamps especially made for me.”

“I can dig them out. I have my knife.”

“You can’t! You just can’t, Jean!”

Dubois paid no heed to feminine fears. He chopped busily. Caroline moaned in anguish. There was so much to tell and so little time to make him understand. How could she bluntly tell him that she was now in love with a girl? He would never understand. If she persisted, he would become angry. They could not defeat the island. She would then be twice a runaway and liable to most frightful punishments. Her perplexity was suddenly dissolved by the barking of dogs and the sound of voices. Jean cursed to himself, kissed her quickly, and vanished into the dark.

“You all right, miss?”

“Yes. It was a man. He cut the ropes but couldn’t get my wrists free. Has he gone? I’m quite safe. I can’t get free.”

They were unsure. They kicked the severed ropes and examined her clamped wrists. They shrugged and decided not to wake their mistress. They went away.

Once more alone, the naked girl shivered, not with cold but in an awful awareness of forces converging upon her existence and in a shivering knowledge of impotence. She could do nothing. She had become a pawn in a game played by people who did not even know each other. She might make Laura Ratcliffe understand. but never Jean.

Laura Ratcliffe could not be blamed for a faint doubt. “You did not scream,” she accused.

“I loved him.”

“You must still love him.”

“Perhaps—yes, I suppose I do—but he made me a slave, and he would keep me a slave wherever he took me. I want to stay here with you and April.”

“If he wants you so badly, why does he not call on me in a civilized way?”

“If only he would! Maybe you could persuade him to to forget me—to understand that now I love April.”

“Like to get loose, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes, I sure do want to get loose. I’m scared. Jean Dubois is not civilized. He’s a predator. He’ll take me by force—steal

me. He would never pay you what you paid for me even if I was for sale."

"He can be dealt with. Will you scream next time?"

"You mean—?"

"Yes. You'll spend another day and night as a prisoner at the post. It will be part of your punishment, and perhaps it will entice this bandit into the open where we can attend to him. There will be those who watch."

"You're angry with me. Oh, Laura, please—"

"I'm irritated, pet. This whole thing is disturbing."

"Laura, I'm so tired."

"One hour of rest, food, and a wash. Then you come back here. I'll unlock you now."

It felt so good to have her arms down. Laura's arm around her waist felt better. They walked to the house in a fresh amity, the slave unbound. April fed, bathed, and listened, enthralled by Caroline's story.

"Darling, a French red Indian who wants to steal you? How gorgeously exciting!"

"It won't be exciting if he succeeds."

"He won't. They'll catch him. Just think, Caroline, he will have given his all for love of you."

“But I don’t want him killed. I just want him to go home and leave me here with you. Did you know I’m to be tied back on the post in a little while?”

“Well, you were a naughty girl, y’know, and it is working out—the punishment Mummy’s sentenced you to.”

“I haven’t even been whipped yet. I’ve got that to look forward to as well.”

“He’s spoiled your enjoyment, darling, I can tell. I just hope they catch him and you can go back to being happy. If I could go and see him, I’d tell him to leave you alone.” She giggled. “I could offer him a black girl instead.”

It was not easy to walk back to the post with Laura, but Caroline knew herself in the middle of a welter of disagreeable things she could not evade. She would work her way through them. Without question, she reached up and placed her wrists in their metal prisons. The click of locks as Laura made them safe still held its potency. Caroline could only move her feet. They did not matter.

“It’s a punishing tie, love. I’m sure you will hate it after the first hour.”

“Yes, I’m sure I will. Oh, Laura, please help me not get into any more of these things I do all wrong. Last night really scared me, and now I have to stand through another.”

Caroline had no expectation of Jean Dubois walking into a

trap. He was too much of an Algonquin to be easily d ealt with. She sadly knew she had failed to make Laura and April understand his resourcefulness. Almost anything he did would leave her suspect, and she was tired of punishments. Most of all she feared her love for him; it was not dead. Last night he had fired her pulse and could do so again. She truly wanted to belong to April only. It would be so easy if Jean would only go away, but he would not go away, so where did that leave her? She hugged her post. Sometimes she slept, sustained cruelly by rope and clamped wrists. She did not think of escape. For her there would never be escape. And what could she do even if it were possible?

She was a slave.

7

Captives Ironed

TWO OF THE FACES at the table were grim. Caroline was close to tears. All three contemplated disaster.

The bailiff said what he had said several times already. “’Tis a French ship. She’s out from the harbor beyond the limit. To board her is an act of war. Anyway, there’s not a king’s ship near the island. All the force I can muster—” He grunted angrily. “They’d blow us out of the water. She’s heavily gunned.”

Laura Ratcliffe’s voice was weary. “But you have some forces. There are soldiers, are there not?”

“Land based and few in number, ma’am. Damn ship’s out of range of the fort.”

Laura read the scrawled missive aloud: “Madam: You hold mine. I hold yours. We make exchange.”

Caroline had never felt more impotent or more guilty. She was, as usual, naked. Her hands were tied behind her back. The dressing had been wrenched from her brand, leaving the raw scarlet S to proclaim her status. Perhaps it was this consciousness of being a slave which kept her mute. Her whole being cried out for April. The child was held for ransom, and Caroline was the ransom. She would gladly go to Jean Dubois in exchange, but she was owned by others

and unable to offer herself. It was her owner's privilege to dispose of her, not her own.

Dully, Caroline said, "I will do whatever you want—anything."

The bailiff gazed at Laura Ratcliffe. "'Tis the easy way out, ma'am. But 'tis not for me to say. This girl here cost ye a lot of money, and ye've got clear title. Then, too, she's been branded. She's a valuable property. Will the rascal take no gold?"

"He believes himself to be in love with Caroline. She is all he wants. He has not asked for gold." Laura compressed her lips. "But I want my daughter. I want April back. I doubt she's safe in such hands." She turned to the bound girl. "What do you think?"

"No female is safe with Jean Dubois. I'm not safe. But I'm a slave and do not matter. April is probably safe as long as he believes an exchange can be made, but only as long as that."

"You have not asked me to give you to him. I'm surprised."

"I am not my own girl to give, Laura. I thought it presumptuous. I'm a slave."

"Hmmm, taking it seriously, aren't you? Must be the brand."

"It tells the world what I am. It also tells me. But if I must

declare myself, I want more than anything to stay here with you and April. I'm in love with April, and I adore you." Caroline considered her immediate view. "But if you give me to Jean Dubois, I will not go in screaming hysterics. He captured me once and forced me to love him. He will do it again. He is a force I cannot withstand, and anyway, I'm always bound. I have no will of my own." She looked desperately from one to the other. "Can you understand?"

Laura Ratcliffe came around the table and kissed her anguished slave, then cradled Caroline's distressed head in a protective arm.

"Yes, we can understand, beloved girl. Life has thrust so much on you in such a little time. And now—well, now I think you are making it as easy for me as you can." Laura laughed. "And that makes it doubly hard to let you go."

"But you must. We all know you must. I am resigned to it." Caroline's eyes widened in anxiety. "But take care with the exchange. Jean Dubois is not an honest man. If he can take both April and myself, he will do so."

"Rowboats, ma'am," the bailiff said heavily. "Two men to row. They meet halfway and make the exchange. The girls will be bound and can give no trouble. 'Tis not perfect, but the Frenchman holds the cards."

Caroline the slavegirl was kissed and held in loving arms for a long time before the bailiff took her arm and led her

to the carriage and the jetty. There the small boat and the two men who would row it were waiting. Even the bailiff was affected.

“’Tis not what I’d wish for thee, lass. But, damn me, I’m stumped. I’d give a lot to see a king’s ship come into view.” He patted her bottom affectionately. “Get along with thee now, and may the saints go with thee.”

Bound hands did not stop the slave from daintily stepping into the small craft and bestowing a good look at her private parts to the oarsmen. They were appreciatively vulgar.

“’Tis a sheer waste to send those tits to a Frenchie, lass.”

“And I could do thy cunt more good than he’ll ever manage,” the other remarked.

But Caroline was too preoccupied for banter. Thankfully, she saw the lowering of a boat from the French ship and a flash of oars. She stared as the opposing craft drew near. Her answers to questions were mechanical.

“Ye’re going willingly, lass? No need to bind thy feet?”

“Yes, willingly—My hands are tied, that’s enough. Please think not ill of me.”

“They’ll fuck ye to death aboard that ship, lass.”

“’Tis better me than the girl ye’ll take back home.”

As the two crafts came together and were hard held, the two girls stood and stared longingly. The hands of each was tied behind her back, so they could not touch, but their eyes and their lips were theirs to use.

“Dubois did not harm thee, darling?”

There came a thrill of laughter. “He was the most charming of men. I think he hoped I would not be ransomed.” April’s face clouded. “You are his price for me. I know. He told me.”

Caroline stepped across the gunwales. The two girls kissed avidly. After April too had made the fatal step, in her case to liberty, she turned to Caroline.

“I’ll get you back, Caroline!” she declared vehemently. “I will, I swear I will!”

“Goodbye, beloved April.”

“I won’t say goodbye, I won’t!” The youngster stamped a bare foot and cried in pain. “I’ll get you back, darling, I promise I will—I promise!”

The two boats drifted apart, oars biting at the water. Neither girl could wave. Each was dragged back on the seat by an anxious hand. Soon they were far apart.

“So you do not love me any more, chérie?” Dubois looked at the naked girl, still bound, and sprawled across his bunk after an angry and most urgent coupling. “You please tell

me why, eh?"

"I don't know why, Jean."

Caroline sat up awkwardly, arranging herself for comfort. Haltingly, she told him the story his most urgent carnal need had swept aside. At the end of it he waved disgustedly.

"You think yourself besotted with a pretty little girl. It is nothing. It is gone—poof!"

"Her mother was so kind to me, and April's so very sweet."

"Sweet, yes. I should have fucked the little baggage. She was well ripe."

"Jean, I'm sorry. I'm terribly sorry. You came all this way, and now I feel this way. Look, if you'll let me go free, I'm sure Mrs. Ratcliffe will reimburse you for all you've spent."

"That is most kind," Dubois spat with angry sarcasm. "I want a girl, and she will give me gold. How do I fuck a gold sovereign?"

"You can buy lots of girls. If all you want is the slit between my legs—"

"It is more—you know it is more."

Caroline knew. She could not ignore this journey he had taken in search of her. She should have been overwhelmed by such devotion, and indeed she was deeply touched, but

she would never be able to make him understand her lesbian love—not ever.

Doubtfully, she pleaded. “Jean, please untie my hands.”

“No.”

“There’s so much to talk about. It would be nice if I could move them a bit.”

“I like them bound, and so do you. They stay as they are.”

Caroline did not mind, but she wanted to make a point.

“You see, Jean, you’re so damn masterful. I admit I love it—any girl would—but it prevents me from getting across any new idea. You only see what you want to see.”

“A man who sees the other side is lost, little one.”

“You think this thing of mine with April and Laura is just silly woman’s nonsense, but it isn’t. It will remain between us like a ghost.”

“There was no ghost in our bed just now, chérie.”

Caroline flushed. Dubois was right. His masculinity had erased all else. She had known it would. She shrugged in defeat.

“Very well,” she said. “Have things your way. I’m your captive again. You can do what you like with me. What I’ve told you is something I had to tell you.”

“If I whipped you, chérie, would that help you forget those pretty perfumed cunts?”

Caroline shrugged distractedly. “If that’s something you want to do to me, do it, but I have no need of being whipped. I don’t think it would change a thing.”

“We can try.”

“Very well.”

Dubois laughed delightedly. “You are too willing. You defeat me. So I keep your whipping in reserve. It is there.”

In wry amusement, Caroline remembered her punishment, Laura’s sentence. She had escaped it. It had been forgotten under the stress of a greater urgency. It would be ironic for Dubois to whip her now, but she did not care. All she wanted was to resolve the chaos in her mind.

Without concern, she asked, “Where will you take me?”

“To one of the Gulf ports. There I will tie you behind a wagon so you can walk to where we finally make our home and raise our sons. You will walk for a very long way.”

“Very well, but you best keep me tied.”

“Ah, yes. We have this journey at sea ahead yet. The captain wants you in irons.”

The slave girl tensed in dismay, exclaiming, “Irons! What on earth for?”

“He is of the old school. He believes a woman aboard ship is bad luck. He wants you where you can do no harm.”

“But, Jean, I was ironed on the way across. It’s horrible.”

Dubois waved away her objections. “This captain is a friend of a friend. He does me a favor. His wish is for me to enjoy you and then sell you on one of the other islands. He wants to be rid of a woman on his ship.”

“So you’ll let him put me in irons?”

Dubois shrugged. “I cannot stop him. It is the only way. The time will pass, and I will spend much of it in your prison with you.” He gazed at her hungrily. “I desire you again. Is it so with you too?”

“Yes.”

Caroline would make no pretense. In the aftermath she asked herself if she could truly love a female and a male. It seemed she could. It was all too baffling for her. But was it love or merely an infatuation with sex? More immediate now in her mind were the chains, the detestable weight of irons a ship imposed on girls. There was no escape.

Caroline submitted to her ironing with ill grace, but she was helpless. She watched the blacksmith beat at metal circlets to make them small enough for her wrist. She then watched as they were riveted on her wrists and ankles, wrist to wrist and ankle to ankle. Then a collar and chain

were placed upon her neck, the hammer blows ringing in her ears as she bent across the anvil. Then she was padlocked to the bulkhead beside the hard bench on which she and Jean Dubois would make love as the winds took them back to America. Soon the beloved island would begin to fade in her memory. The weight of metal she must now carry on her limbs told her so emphatically. The scarlet S burned mockingly below her breast. It would not matter any more.

Dubois was irritated by delay. The captain awaited a rendezvous and would not depart until it was consummated. Perhaps a day, perhaps two. To pass the time and to appease his passion, Dubois spent most of each day with his chained lady. In spite of Caroline's irons, they made love with imaginative facility. Her prisoned state simply spurred them both to fresh fields of endeavor. Caroline quite honestly welcomed the carnal diversion. To be ironed in the hold of a ship and left alone was a sad and defeating state. She was grateful for Dubois and felt herself slipping back into submission. At night they slept. But the girl's bench was hard and narrow for a couple side by side, so Dubois slept in his cabin in his bunk.

It was on the second night that Caroline was awakened by a finger pressed lightly to her lips. She started up in sleepy apprehension to find herself staring in disbelief at the smiling face of April Ratcliffe. The girl was nude, dripping wet, and she held a formidable knife.

“I’ve come to take you home,” she whispered simply. “Keep quiet, darling, while I cut you free.”

Was there ever such cruelty? Caroline’s whole being was suffused by love for this eager nymphet. She longed to clasp April, but her irons denied her desire. April shouldn’t be on the ship at all, Caroline thought. She must not be captured.

“I swam, darling. It was so easy. I got acquainted with the ship when they held me prisoner.”

“April darling, you must run—get away! You mustn’t be caught!”

“Not without you, Caroline. You’re what I came for.”

In desolation, Caroline knelt and held up her ironed wrists. “April, it’s useless. They’ve got me in irons.”

“But I’ve got this lovely knife!”

“It can’t cut iron. And I’m chained to the bulkhead. There aren’t even any keys. Only a blacksmith can set me free.”

They stared at the implacable irons and at each other. A tear started to roll down April’s cheek. Desolate, the youngster whispered, “You mean…?”

“Yes. A dozen men and a dozen knives couldn’t help me. Dubois himself could not get me loose without carrying me to the smithy. If we could unlock the padlock, I still could

not swim in all this iron. Oh, darling, you're taking such a risk!"

"I won't go without you. I can't leave you here in these awful chains." April's chin was stubborn.

"You must!" Caroline was distraught with apprehension. "If you stay, they'll catch you. Then they'll keep you. Even the captain would consider that they have the right. You mustn't ever be a slave."

"But Mr. Dubois was so charming. I understand about being tied."

"Oh, he's charming when he wants to be, but there's another side to him you'd better not see. Darling, run!"

"But I can't! I can't leave you!"

"Yes, you can. If I ever get a chance, I'll come back to you and the island—I promise."

"A noble sentiment—touching and sweet."

Horrified, both girls turned to where Jean Dubois stood, blocking the exit. Caroline's heart sank.

"Jean, please let her go," she pleaded. "Please!"

Dubois was a happy man. Fate was lavish with its gifts. He examined the naked nymph with a collector's eye. Desire flamed within him. His request was clothed in a chuckle.

“You will allow me to tie your hands, eh, ma petite?”

April’s slim nudity dived between his legs. Dubois handled her with consummate ease. Flat on her face, his knee in her back, he crossed her wrists and bound them fast. Then he raised her up erect.

“Welcome to our home,” he said, kissing her surprised lips before their owner could protest. “You will give me much pleasure, then fetch a most magnificent price.”

“Jean, don’t!” Caroline was erect herself, dragging helplessly at links. “Let April go—please! You don’t need both of us.”

“Keep me and let Caroline go.” April was panting and twisting at tied hands, but very much aware of what was happening. “I’m young, and I’m beautiful, and I’ll do anything you want.”

“April—no! You’re encouraging him.”

The older girl was distraught, hating her bondage, longing for freedom, but what could either girl do? April was now bound. She could no longer swim. They were neatly netted without any chance of escape. Caroline wilted in despair, turning her stricken gaze upon the man who now held two beautiful girls.

“Jean, what are you going to do with her?”

“Take her to my bunk, of course. What else?”

“You can’t. You mustn’t. She’s little more than a child.”

“She is most mature. She is far too lovely to waste. She rejuvinated me.” He picked up the bound, bewildered nymphet and carried her out of sight.

Alone, Caroline faced the nadir of despair. The sacrifice of her body had been in vain. Now, instead of one girl, Jean Dubois held them both, and there was no hope of rescue. Angrily, she twisted in her irons. She was having vivid mental pictures of what was transpiring in Dubois’s cabin. April would lose her virginity as surely as she herself had done back at Fort Stapleton, and there was nothing that she could do nothing. Never had she so hated the metal circlets riveted on her neck, wrists, and ankles. They held her implacably right where she was. She would sit or stand in the captain’s irons while her beloved mistress was ravaged by a man who professed to love her. For Jean, the carnal act was without romantic significance. He planted his seed where he could. Fate had made him a gift of April, and he was grateful.

Caroline slept fitfully, her heart torn by thoughts of Laura and what Laura would suffer. Caroline suspected Laura did not yet know. April would not have dared confide such a hazardous venture to her mother. But Laura would soon guess. It was too, too cruel.

The ship still did not sail. It simply moved out further from the island jetty, beyond easy contact or April’s ability to

swim. The captain grudgingly provided another bench and another set of irons to enable the two captive girls to share the same bulkhead in the same space. When Dubois wanted intercourse with one, he bound the elbows of the other behind her back and tightly blindfolded her while he enjoyed his dalliance. It was wickedly frustrating to the one who was blindfolded, but each was grateful when it came her turn. Dubois was unabashed. Caroline and April both discovered a strange mixture of shame and ecstasy in what was done to them.

The girls were grateful for the proximity to one another in their imprisonment. Caroline did not have to worry about what was happening to her love; she knew. They could talk and talk and talk. While April played in idle fascination with her chains, she wantonly admitted to pleasure, both in being ironed and being raped. Caroline felt like a mother hen in her admonition.

“But, darling, we can’t do a thing, so why shouldn’t we enjoy it? That’s what I’m doing. The first time was really marvelous—to know it was actually happening to me. Jean’s a marvelous hunk of man, and he gets all inside me! I don’t think it has a thing to do with you and me and Mummy. It’s so utterly different!”

Caroline was disarmed by the pleasure she herself felt in what was done to her too. It was silly to be hypocritical. They could not deceive each other. There was a repetitive

thrill in the use of a word. Things were not done with her or for her; they were done to her. She and April were helpless recipients of acts instigated by others. She supposed it was what being a slave was all about.

“Darling, you must absolutely stop worrying about me. I’m having the most wonderful time. Think of it: you and I have each other, and Jean has us both. They didn’t think of chaining us far enough apart so we couldn’t play with each other.” She giggled. “I bet those seamen who fastened me don’t even know about girls playing. Now, remember, you belong to me. I am your mistress. You have to do as I say.”

April was a delight. She dissipated gloom. She was youthfully convinced of some fortuitous circumstance by which they would be set free. She truly believed they had best enjoy Jean Dubois while they had him—or while he had them. Her happiness infected Caroline. But Dubois fumed over their delay in sailing. He was in constant altercations with the captain. No doubt it was this friction, added to the captain’s distaste for females aboard ship, that led to the decision to brand April.

Caroline heard of it and was aghast. It confirmed her worst fears for the girl she loved. Dubois tried to make her understand the captain’s position.

“He’s got you ironed and out of the way of his crew, but any kind of contact or inspection would show him holding two girls, one slave and the other free. He wants you both to be

unmistakably slave so he's not open to criticism."

"Jean, you can't let them brand the poor darling. It hurts unbearably, and there's no way she's a slave."

"But, darling, I'd love to be branded," April interjected glowingly. "Think of it—a lovely S the same as you. I know I'll scream when they hold the hot iron against me to burn through my skin, but after it's done…! Oh, darling, please don't try to stop them."

"Stop it, April! You don't know what you're saying. It hurts worse than you think, and you're not a slave. Remember that—you absolutely are not a slave! You must not be marked for life as one." Caroline's admonition was severe.

"Oh, poof! It'll only show when I'm naked. The rest of the time no one will know."

Dubois listened to their arguments. They could dither between themselves as much as they liked. He found amusement in their reasoning. But the captain's mind was made up, as was his own. It would please him to see both girls bear the same mark. It made them doubly his. It would also simplify a sale should one be needful.

The captain was crafty. He had his blacksmith fabricate an iron to exactly duplicate the brand below Caroline's breast. Both girls were carried to the blacksmith, and much care was taken matching iron against the livid S Caroline would wear her whole life through. April watched, enthralled and

breathless. When she was bound fast against a post, she made no complaint and hushed those made by Caroline.

“Promise not to get all upset when I scream, darling.”

“But it’s so cruel. It’s an awful thing to do to a girl so young. Don’t you realize, April, that S on you takes you most of the way into actually becoming a slave? Most dealers will accept you for sale even without papers.”

“Then we can stay together forever, darling. Gee, they’ve tied me tight! Oh, wow!”

“Do you wish to be gagged, ma petite?”

“Gosh no, Jean. That would be awful—not able to make any noise. Please don’t gag me.”

Another girl might have found agony in watching the preparations for placing a brand upon her living flesh, but April was not as other girls. She watched every motion the blacksmith made, including placement of the iron by which she would be branded into the fire while his assistant manned the bellows. Only when the glowing metal approached her young breast did she close her eyes. She could not move.

The screams of April Ratcliffe tore at Caroline’s heart. But they were no more than her own had been when she herself had been marked for life. The anguish of a maiden beneath the caress of a heated iron is something terrible to

watch, but Caroline Dover and Jean Dubois watched it to the end. When the smoking iron was withdrawn from below the sweet young breast, it left behind a livid S. In the space of moments April Ratcliffe had become a slave.

It was a much chastened maiden who was again padlocked to Caroline's adjoining bench.

"I wasn't a bit brave," April mourned. "I had no idea it would be so painful—and it's still hurting something awful."

"It was a beastly thing to do to you," Caroline said bitterly. "Branding me at least made a little sense, but doing it to you was only cruel."

"But it's going to be so lovely when it stops hurting. I'll be so proud of it."

"Your mother won't. She'll be terribly angry." Caroline stopped short of completing her thought—that her mother would probably never see her again.

Dubois was pleased. The branding held for him the same fascination it did for April. He had been intrigued by Caroline's own brand. Now both his girls were similarly marked, and he could disclaim responsibility for either one. The scarlet S had been implanted in their flesh by order of someone else. Leaving Caroline to commiserate with her young mistress, he sauntered up on deck, there to be confronted by high drama. Bearing down upon them in an

offshore breeze was a pair of British men-of-war, from their masts a white ensign and the Union Jack.

The engagement was not of long duration. The Frenchmen had no choice but to engage; they were too close to land to flee. Their guns blazed valiantly, but within minutes their masts were down and their guns shattered. British ship closed in on either side and boarders swarmed onto the renegade vessel.

To the two girls chained in the hold it was a time for horror. They could only guess at what was happening and clutch each other in terror. It was long after the final shot that they were discovered by an embarrassed lieutenant whose familiarity with naked girls was slight. He sought vainly for covering for the nude loveliness while explaining what had taken place.

“You see, darling,” April said to Caroline, “I told you we’d be rescued, and here is our rescuer.”

But it was not that simple. Captain Bascomb of the Royal Navy was a martinet of the old school. He had seen more of naked girls than his lieutenant, but his experience with them had led to deep distrust of the female of the species. He viewed April and Caroline as sources of trouble. He wanted no females aboard his ship. A pair of white girls in chains, each of them marked with the tell-tale scarlet S, filled him with misgivings. The French captain had been killed, and Jean Dubois had vanished. There were none to

vouch for the pair of strays, most obviously criminal.

Caroline and April stood before the captain, shattered by distrust, their protestations in vain, Had they not both been branded and naked in chains Captain Bascomb might have placed some small credence in their story, but under the circumstances he could only believe the French had been transporting them either as slaves or as criminals. In his eyes, the brands below their breasts obviated need of further investigation. They would be sold at the first opportunity, the proceeds reverting to the Crown. It was an established procedure.

“But all you have to do is put into port!” Caroline wailed. “Everything can be verified. This girl is Mrs. Ratcliffe’s daughter, and I am her slave.”

“You’re my slave, darling, and don’t you forget it,” April corrected primly. To the captain her demand was firm. “I insist you put us ashore, and I’d appreciate it if you’d get all this iron stuff off of us.”

Captain Bascomb gave April the same attention he would have bestowed on some unknown species of marine creature pulled up from the deep. April was new to this kind of treatment, but he knew how to deal with what he did not understand.

“How would you like to to be triced up and have your bottom warmed with a rope’s end, young lady?” he enquired

pleasantly.

“She’s too young! You couldn’t possibly!” Caroline was aghast.

“Hold your tongue, woman. I can most certainly have the little baggage whipped, and you too, if need be. For a self confessed slave, you’re being damned impertinent.”

“But, Sir, if only you’d put us ashore…?”

“There’ll be no going ashore. We’re already under way, and ’tis no great distance to Port Aylesbury where ye can be sold right and proper and have your papers issued.” He held up a warning hand. “I’ll hear no more from either of you.” Wearily, he pulled a bell rope. “Wilkins, take these girls and chain ’em in the brig. The Frenchman must have had ’em ironed as they are for a reason, so leave their irons alone, but make ’em as comfortable as you can.” Captain Bascomb sighed testily. “Oh, and Wilkins, see if you can find some scraps to cover their breasts and that other thing down below.”

Lieutenant Wilkins blushed throughout his captain’s orders. His helper, less inhibited, chained the girls with gusto. His appreciation overflowed.

“’Tis some fine young stuff, Sir.”

“But not for us, Roper. They’re to be sold in Port Aylesbu.”

“And a fine price they’ll fetch. If I could pay it, I’d buy one

of the pretty little dears, Sir."

Two torn shirts, along with needle and thread, were provided for the covering of the two girls' private areas.

"Perhaps you can contrive something ladies," the lieutenant suggested diffidently.

"'Tis a shame to cover 'em, Sir."

"Captain's orders, Roper."

The two prisoners plied needle and thread without enthusiasm. Nakedness no longer mattered to either of them as the King's ship plowed its path away from where they wanted to be.

"Our necks are chained the same as on the French ship. We're not a bit better off," Caroline mourned. "We'll never ever escape."

"Of course we're better off," April enthused. "I bet we can seduce the lieutenant, and we're getting something to wear, and Port Aylesbury isn't all that far from home. I've heard people speak of it. You'll see, darling; we'll be home in no time."

"Oh, April, I wish that was so, but you know it isn't. We're going to be sold, maybe separated, and taken goodness knows where. What I hate to think about is you being sold by the British Crown. It will make your slave status terribly real."

“Mummy will fix it. Mummy fixes everything.”

“The only way she can beat that is to make a legitimate purchase of you and get your papers.”

“All right then, she’ll do it.”

“If she finds us, and if she’s got enough money. April dear, you have no idea of the huge sums girls like us fetch on the market. Stanley Burdett paid over two hundred thousand pounds sterling for me.”

“That was because he wanted to fuck you, dear.”

“Sure, he did, and someone will want to do that to you too. You’ll fetch a tremendous price.”

“Oh, Mummy has it, Caroline. Stop worrying.” April giggled and held up two joined scraps. “How’s that for covering for my tits?”

“You might as well be naked. But put it on anyway. Here, I’ll help you. We can’t even dress ourselves chained like this. Back up.”

“You know, darling, we’re sort of damsels in distress, and we’ve both been branded as slaves,” April mused reflectively. “You don’t treat me with a bit of respect any more. After all, I am your owner.”

“I’ll treat you with proper respect when we get back to where we belong.”

“I bet I could make you obedient now, just by chalking up all your bloopers so you’d get whipped when we get back home.”

“Sure, you do that.”

“You’re not the tiniest bit scared?”

“No. We’ll never get home.”

“Yes, we will, dear. You just wait and see.”

Lieutenant Wilkins was demoralized. Never in his whole life had he seen received an offer such as April made him. Her springtime laughter lingered hauntingly.

“But, dear Lieutenant Wilkins, wouldn’t you like to fuck Caroline or me—or both of us? All you have to do is set us free.”

“That’s quite impossible. I’m sorry. But thank you, Miss…?”

“I’m Miss April Ratcliffe, and this is Miss Caroline Dover. We’re awfully nice, you know.”

“Yes, I have no doubt of that, but it is still impossible.”

“It’s not the least bit impossible, lieutenant. You can fuck us right now if you’d like. We’ll trust you.”

“Trust me?”

“Yes, to set us free the first chance you get.”

“Really, I can’t possibly do it.”

“You can do it to us more than once, you know. We’re beautifully available.”

“Yes, so I see.”

“Well, then…?”

The red-faced lieutenant made his escape. April could not follow. Caroline’s reaction was one of outrage.

“April, you’re impossible! If he reports that to the captain, you’ll be whipped for sure—probably me too.”

“But he won’t report it, darling. It will go around and around in his mind, and he’ll keep thinking about our pussies. Something might come of it.”

“The poor boy’s never had a girl. He wouldn’t know what to do.”

“That’s better still. He likes me; I can tell he does.”

“Any man would like you,” Caroline sniffed in despair. “I shudder to think how much money will be bid on you.”

“I do wish the captain would visit us. He could do so much more.”

“April!”

“Well, he could. I would just as soon be fucked by a captain as by a lieutenant.”

“April! Stop talking like that! What would your mother say?”

“She’d whip my bottom and lock me in my room.”

“It’s a pity she can’t. Really, April, the way you talk!”

“Well, why not? If we’re slaves for life, like you say, we might as well enjoy ourselves any way we can,” April retorted angrily. “I’m trying hard not to think about all the things you keep thinking of. They’re just too awful.” April buried her head in Caroline’s lap and sobbed.

Their savior was not Lieutenant Wilkins. It was Seaman Roper in the dead of the night. His terms were terse.

“I get to fuck you both all I want, right?”

“Yes—for freedom.”

“I can’t get the irons off you until we get ashore. I’ll carry you up to the boat.”

“We agree.”

Roper held up the key to their padlocks. “There are risks, lassies, but the watch will turn a blind eye and give us a hand. The boat has a sail, and the wind’s in our favor. I’ll get ye back to Davenport town, and if I do, would there likely be a bit o’ gold waitin’ there for me?”

“Yes. We promise.”

Roper used the key. He picked up April first. Caroline cursed the irons, seeing now their purpose. Ironed, a girl was no more than a package of female flesh. No matter how willing she was, she could do nothing to aid Roper in their escape. If only they had been bound with rope, he could have cut it with a knife.

But it was good to be out of the brig. The night air was a caress, and the sea was silver. The two girls sat in the boat, chained, helpless, and apprehensive. It would take both Roper and the watch to get the boat over the side and into the water. Impotence bit at both of them with bitter frustration. Beholding the immensity of the man-of-war, Caroline realized how desperate was their cause. She sat, tense and fearful, as Roper took the winch at one end and his henchman took the other. They were taking an appalling risk, and for what? For the body of a girl. For those few fleeting moments of ecstasy when flesh is clasped tightly by flesh in arising tide of sensuality. At that moment it seemed a poor bargain. As yet, neither she nor April had paid any of their agreed price for liberty. But when the boat was safely under way, no doubt they would pay dearly. She viewed their price without emotion. It did not matter. All that mattered was the freedom to once more be April's slave.

The shots shattered the sigh of the wind and sea and the creak of timbers. Roper and his man staggered back against the rail. They slumped, then slithered overboard.

Men emerged from the shadows. Captain Bascomb's voice was heavy with disgust.

"Women! You can't have women aboard without trouble. Damn girls—they're poison! Deal with 'em, Wilkins. Now the rest of us can get some sleep." He spat savagely and stamped away.

"That was most imprudent," Lieutenant Wilkins said, his usual embarrassment apparent as he rechained the two girls back in the brig. "The captain is angry, and we've lost two good men."

"We had nothing to do with it," April lied indignantly. "They just picked us up and took us." She held up ironed hands. "It's all your fault. You keep us helpless."

"I fear Captain Bascomb will accept no excuses. You could have screamed or struggled. You were obviously willing participants."

Even April was mute. Their guilt seemed obvious. Lieutenant Wilkins coughed in deprecation and delivered the bad news.

"I will be surprised if you are not punished," he stated flatly.

"You mean whipped?"

"It is the customary thing. Ladies, I must bid you good night."

In the flickering light of the lantern the captive girls surveyed each other in their irons with dismay.

“I suppose he’s right,” Caroline admitted wanly. “We’re a nuisance. We cause trouble. We don’t belong.”

“What you’re really saying, darling, is there are several hundred men on this ship, all with visions of us naked while they busily fuck us,” April said with disgust.

“I suppose so.”

“It’s so terribly unfair! We can’t help being girls.” April grimaced. “And I suppose whatever way they whip us it’s going to hurt something awful. That’s unfair too. Darling, will they hang us up all naked in front of a shipload of sailors?”

“Probably.”

They went to sleep with the prospect of a whipping in their minds, holding each other as closely as their irons allowed.

Captain Bascomb entertained no doubts whatsoever as to his duty. The two girls were troublemakers. They had caused the loss of two men. They were undoubtedly legally slaves even though white. They must be taught a lesson before leaving his care. He sent them to the blacksmith for the removal of the irons on their wrists, then ordered them to be triced up to the rigging. His crew could watch the girls’ thrashing and perhaps be warned away from their

carnal temptations.

Caroline was glumly miserable as she stood, naked, on her toes, her arms spread wide and her wrists firmly corded to the taut tarred rope. Upon her ankles the irons impeded nothing. Twenty feet to her right, April was bound in a similar manner. The two exchanged rueful glances over bare shoulders. Caroline was certain the youngster was getting thrills up and down her naked spine by being thus exposed to a myriad of male eyes. Her own bare skin felt scorched by the intensity of male desire they could not ignore. It was a tangible thing.

Captain Bascomb felt it incumbent upon his station to deliver a pious homily to the maidens about to be whipped and a stern adjuration to his crew to turn their backs on these scarlet women. Caroline felt a bitter irony in his admonition to modesty and virtue, and wondered how he could reconcile either with his act of tricing her up naked before a hundred men. Captain Bascomb offered his apology for not having them flogged with the regulation cat-o'-nine-tails, which he considered too severe for white female backs. He apologized further for the lack of a lesser instrument, offering the hope that repentance would be derived from a rope's end instead.

It hurt the girls bitterly and hatefully. The second mate wielded the length of rope with keen appreciation of the flesh he struck repeatedly. Having wealed one maiden, he

sauntered over to the other to implant a similar weal upon her too. Back and forth he went while his firmly fastened victims writhed and moaned their tributes to his skill. Twenty times he made his pilgrimage until a like number of rope marks were clearly delineated on feminine flesh. It was by no means a regulation navy flogging, but both girls had been severely thrashed. They were returned to the blacksmith for their hands to be once more ironed. The following morning the ship entered Port Aylesbury harbor.

There could be no doubt of official acceptance. The commander of the garrison and the island's governor had much in common with Captain Bascomb. They saw girls as a menace to be confined and disposed of with all dispatch. The ironed damsels were examined and given sermons by which they were impressed with loyalty to the Crown and submission to their superiors. The sermons did not explain how they were to repulse the carnal advances of the male but placed a heavy emphasis on the desirability of doing so. There was a tremendous flourish of parchments, quills, and ink. There was the melting of wax and the Crown seal imprinted thereon. Captain Bascomb was handed an official receipt for two live bodies, female and ironed—both slaves. Caroline eyed this array of documents with a heavy heart. They cemented April's slavery and her own. They were to be sold under the auspices of His Majesty's goverment. It was a fearful fate.

Hands were shaken, toddies downed. Omnipotent males

went about their affairs while a pair of well whipped maidens were locked behind bars by a jocund Negress.

“They lace yo’ backs real good, eh? What y’all done?”

They told her. She listened with the air of someone who had heard it all before. She waved aside their pleas for help and promises of rewards.

“Ever’ gal I gets got herself a rich friend,” the Negress dismissed, “but it don’t do ’em no good. They gets sold just the same.” She smiled sympathetically and added, “With them brands on yo’ skin, you ain’t got no chance at all. You is both slaves, and that is that!”

It was frustrating beyond words. Their brands would never vanish, so they were now slaves for life. April was beginning to feel the weight of lost freedom.

“You’ve got us locked up. Do you have to keep all this iron on us too?” April glumly asked.

“Why not, gal? You ain’t goin’ no place. If someone unlocks the door, it stops you runnin’.” Their wardress chuckled. “Maybe you don’t know it, but you looks real good in them chains. They sets you off sort of fancy really.”

They sat in dolor—two ironed maidens naked in a strange land and locked inside a tiny cell. Even April’s effervescence was dampened.

“Darling, we haven’t a thing to look forward to,” she said to

Caroline. “What’s going to become of us?”

“I don’t know,” Caroline admitted drearily. “I just don’t know. But let’s try and not get ourselves whipped any more. That rope hurt horribly.”

“Will I be chained like this always?”

“Probably not. But I expect since we’re already ironed at someone else’s expense, they’ll leave us chained until after we’re sold. It saves them worry. We can’t possibly run away.”

“At least they struck off our collars—that was something.” April fingered her chafed neck. “It’s not all that much fun being a slave. It’s so… so permanent.”

“It’s for life, April. We mustn’t kid ourselves.”

“So now we get sold and fucked… and fucked,” April mourned with female wisdom. “If we were homely, we might get bought to work, but we’re far too beautiful. Whoever buys us will want us for sex. That isn’t fair either: not having a thing to say about it.”

“There’s no use looking for fairness, April. That’s all gone now. Now we do what we’re told.”

“That nice Frenchman of yours won’t ever fuck us again.”

“April, stop using that word!”

“But, darling, it’s one of those words that is so absolutely

right. When I speak it, I can almost feel that lovely thing of his inside me."

"April!"

"Oh, all right. I was just trying to be cheerful. What do you want me to talk about?"

"About escape, that's what. The next time someone comes I'm going to ask to talk to the commander and try to get him to understand."

Caroline was granted her interview, but was told it was an unusual privilege and would do no good. Standing before the military presence, she could well believe it. Ironed, naked, and branded, the name of Caroline Dover became a mockery. She realized how she must appear.

"Sir, we are neither one of us what we have been made to appear."

"Indeed?" He sounded weary.

Breathless and briefly, Caroline told her tale. The commander listened with quiet courtesy, then waved her vehemence aside.

"I believe you, Miss Dover, but consider my position. The institution of enslaving a white girl such as yourself holds many evils, but I can change none of them any more than you can. If I could communicate with this Mrs. Ratcliffe before you are due to be sold, I would do so. Believe me, I

would. It is a small thing you ask, but I cannot communicate with her." He examined Caroline's chained nakedness with wry displeasure. "I am afraid your condition, especially the brand and the official documentation, denies delay. You will be sold in routine fashion, with the proceeds going to the British Crown."

Caroline knew herself on the brink of dismissal, but clung on in dogged persistence. "Sir, are you aware of the huge sums paid for girls like April and myself?"

"Can't say I am. Why?"

"The first time I was sold, a planter paid two hundred and ten thousand pounds for me."

The officer was visibly impressed with the amount but not the fact. He waved it aside.

"White slaves are scarce here," he said primly. "We may easily assume the use he made of you. I doubt you saw a cane field."

"But such a sum—"

"What you have just told me, Miss Dover, does no more than confirm your slavery. You have changed hands through an official auction. I presume there were papers."

"Yes, they are in Mrs. Ratcliffe's possession."

"Ah, so you changed hands a second time."

“Well, yes,” Caroline began, sensing entrapment, but continued. “I don’t dispute my own slavery. I am resigned to it. But April is not a slave. Mrs. Ratcliffe bought me as a companion for her daughter. I legally belong to April. Then, when the Frenchman took us, he branded April to make us alike and rid himself of any suspicion. Please, Sir, let April go. Send her back to her mother.”

“Miss Dover, I have signed for two slaves, and I must account for two slaves.”

“Then give Mrs. Ratcliffe a chance to bid on her own daughter—please!”

The commander was not an old man. Confronted by this nude supplicant, he began to see her as a beautiful girl, young and desirable. Caroline became for him less a slave and more a damsel in distress. He set aside an impulse to take her in his arms.

“Very well,” he conceded. “I’ll see what can be done. There are small craft that sail these waters. If I can find one, I will try to contact Mrs. Ratcliffe.”

His rough kindness brought tears to the slave girl’s eyes. There had been little enough of kindness lately. Her thanks were heartfelt. Caroline took her short snubbed steps back to the cell and April in a daze of hope. But events moved even more swiftly. On their fourth day of dreary waiting in the cell Caroline was summoned to the commander’s office.

He viewed her now with an added curiosity. Standing before him her in chains, Caroline sensed excitement.

“There is no word yet from Mrs. Ratcliffe, Miss Dover. There has not been time. However, there is an unexpected development on which I should move with some caution.”

“Yes, Sir?” The ironed girl was trembling.

“I discover regulations permit your sale by private treaty.”

He gazed at her fixedly. “I have had an offer for both of you.”

“Oh, Sir…!” Caroline was lost for words.

“The man is not a gentleman. He is a flamboyant character I am not at all certain about. But he has the gold. He says you are in love with him from some previous association.”

Caroline stood in disbelief, blushing. “Jean… Jean Dubois?”

“That is the name he uses.”

“He owned me once.”

“He told me that too.” The commander’s tone was dry. “You appear to be a popular young woman.”

“But, Sir, all that money—”

“He has a sum I am prepared to accept. Where he got it is no affair of mine. It is adequate for regulation requirements.” The commander leaned forward earnestly. “I have

taken a liking to you, Miss Dover. I have decided to ask your preference—this man Dubois or the uncertainty of the auction? There is also the possibility of your Mrs. Ratcliffe, of course."

It was a cruel decision. Caroline made it instantly. "We would prefer to await Mrs. Ratcliffe, Sir."

"And if she does not come?"

"Then Mr. Dubois can bid on us at the auction."

"Ah, you know what you want. I begin to believe in this Mrs. Ratcliffe. May I take it that you are not exactly enamored of Mr. Dubois?"

Caroline clinked her chains. She was uncertain of the right answer. "Jean Dubois holds a tremendous power over me," she admitted slowly. "If he gets me, I'll obey him utterly. I won't be free, and he'll keep me tied always, but I will not be unhappy. Perhaps what I feel for him is really love—I don't know. At this moment, while I am free of him, I want only to return to Laura Ratcliffe and April."

"You throw your dice in a chancey game, Miss Dover."

"I am grateful to you for the dice, Sir."

When she heard the news from Caroline, April was indignant. "But, darling you should have let him buy us, that lovely Frenchman with his—"

“April, stop that!”

Caroline was irritable and in a dither about her future possibilities. She wished she had not been given a choice. How could an ironed girl possibly judge the disposition of her own body? It had been a long time since decision had been granted her. In slavery she had made none at all. Now it came hard.

“Dubois would take us to where we would never see Laura and the island again,” she told the younger girl.

“But how do we know that!” April was excited. She had become animated in her chains, gesturing with linked hands. “Maybe he’d have fucked us both for a week and then sold us back to Mummy!”

“You’re only dreaming, April.”

“It would be better than being locked in this tiny cell.”

“This won’t last much longer. The auction is very soon now.”

“And I bet he wouldn’t have ever whipped us. I’m sure I could twist him around my little finger.”

“More likely twist yourself into the pillory or against the whipping post. He’d keep your hands tied too, the same as he did me.”

“Well, I still think it would have been wonderful, darling.”

The moppet threw her chained hands around the older girl's neck, kissing with an ardent vehemence. "Never mind," she whispered. "You still have me."

"Shouldn't it be you who has me, April dear?"

"It doesn't matter, as long as we have each other."

They left it at that. The next day they were taken to the blacksmith to have the irons struck from their wrists. They could guess why. The auction was near.

They revelled in the new freedom. In the cell, their ironed feet mattered little. They put their now free hands to every imaginable use. The following morning their jovial Negress took them an unsuspected powder room and told them to make themselves into houris of delight. They did their best, and their best was very good.

"We may as well do our best for the Crown," April said bitterly as she busily reddened her nipples. "Darling, you look gorgeous."

Then came the tying of their hands behind their backs and the roping of their elbows.

"I gots to tie you this way, honeys," the Negress assured as she tugged earnestly. "Adds a lot to a girl's price to have her tits stick out. There, I got yo' elbows real tight."

She had indeed. Caroline walked to her destiny in pain. The first face to catch her eye was that of a naked white woman

bound as they were bound.

It was Laura Ratcliffe.

8

The Last Escape

THE SHOCK WAS MUTUAL. At her side, Caroline heard April's gasp. "Keep still, and don't do anything. Laura's seen us too," she muttered.

It was a mystery. It was an impossible outrage, but Caroline was forced to believe her eyes. Laura Ratcliffe was draped in the same white slip they themselves had been dressed in. It would be whisked away from them at the crucial moment in the bidding. She stood in the same line of waiting slaves which they themselves were to augment. Her ankles were ironed as theirs were ironed. Below her left breast she had been branded with the scarlet S.

The daughter and the daughter's slave stared in horror. Laura shook her head in a silent admonition of caution. She shrugged as best she could, but it was a small, sad motion of defeat.

Caroline soon realized this government auction could have used the services of Mr. Lowther. There was no salesmanship. The girls to be sold were neat and well groomed, but the whole affair was conducted in an atmosphere of quiet distaste. The garrison did not want the responsibility and disposed of it with an offhanded dispatch. There was no saving of the whites to last. The bidding was businesslike and scarcely competitive. Each girl was lifted to the plat-

form, her virtues extolled, and her shroud removed.

In shock from their glimpse of Laura, the two girls had paid little heed to the disposal of the first girl. But the auction was hard to ignore. Soon enough they too would be on the platform, their own fate decided by curt nods and raised fingers for the male bidders.

The next girl was a pretty mulatto who, when her turn came, suddenly went berserk, straining against pinioned arms and kicking whoever she could. The guards subdued her easily and hoisted her to the platform. They stripped her, gagged her, and tied her feet tightly together. She stood in an unwilling eminence and glared at the amused faces. Somewhere among them was the man who would purchase her. It was as though she was reading every mind. When the last bids had been made, she was lowered into the waiting arms of the servants of her new master. Her struggles were useless. She was competently carried from the room, and the watching girls had little doubt as to her fate.

Laura Ratcliffe was next. She did not fight. She looked at her daughter and her slave, then faced the audience as though not seeing them. The auctioneer began his pitch, but it was an uninspired bit of routine rhetoric. Stress was placed on her indisputable white skin. The fresh brand below her breast was explained away as punishment for an attempted escape. The bidding began modestly at ten-thou-

sand pounds.

Caroline stole a glimpse at the daughter whose mother was on the block. It was hard to read April's reaction from her fascinated stare. It was an undeniable fact that Laura Ratcliffe had acquired a fresh beauty in her distress. She stood erect and proud, but parts of such a pose could be credited to her bound elbows. When her shift was thrown aside, a sigh emanated from the crowd. The woman offered for sale was beautiful. Laura's features bespoke most of her age, but her body did not. It was April's own loveliness in maturity. Laura Ratcliffe was slowly turned around to enable all present to observe her breasts and pubic hair, her concave stomach, the proud lift of her chin. This was a woman to be desired.

The principle bidder was a nondescript man whose features betrayed his nationality. He was dressed as planters dress and did his bidding with a raised finger. Repeatedly, he allowed his opposition to subside, then responded to the auctioneer's enquiring eye by topping the previous bid. He purchased Mrs. Laura Ratcliffe for a far smaller sum than Mr. Lowther would have got for her. She was escorted sedately from the chamber by a flunky's hand on each bound arm. She walked to whatever awaited her without a sideways glance. Mrs. Laura Ratcliffe had officially become a slave.

April wept on Caroline's bare shoulder. The girls had no

one to turn to, no way of sending a message to the woman they might never see again. Hovering heavily in each girl's consciousness was the terrible awareness of being bought and transported to different destinations. This last communion of desuetude came with the hand on April's arm and the chained snubbing of April's feet as she mounted the fatal steps.

Slowly, an impossible hope dawned in Caroline's mind. When the bidding on April Ratcliffe reached its plateau, the impasse was broken by the same nondescript male, his raised finger taking the young nudity one more step from all she loved. But was this so? This man had bought the mother and was now bidding on the daughter. Breathless, she heard the last bid, saw the raised finger, and then watched as April was led away in the same manner as her mother. Their last glance at each other held a heart-rending hope.

The man was still there. Caroline stood upon the block in her insolent nudity and tried to stare him down, but his regard was utterly impersonal. Quite possibly he was a trader in slaves and saw the values achieved here as offering profit. Perhaps there were other slave markets where prices were still higher. Fascinated, Caroline watched the raised finger increase her worth steadily higher. If that finger won, she would see her loved ones again. Or would she? She smiled down at the nondescript face as its finger raised itself again. She had lost awareness of the nagging

ache of joined elbows. All she cared for was the finger. For Miss Caroline Dover it was the most powerful finger in the world.

Caroline, now sold, shook away the hands grasping her arms. She was trained to obedience; she did not need them. She strode as haughtily as ironed feet allowed out into the sunlight. There she was blindfolded, her eyes bound with soft bandages she could not easily dislodge and which excluded all light. She was then guided to the carriage.

For Caroline this was true slavery. She had been placed in limbo by her bonds and bandaged eyes. Now she was grateful for the guiding hands. She dared not speak, fearing that it might give offense. She could tell the carriage took her a good distance. She was picked up and carried. Then she was positioned, the hands insistent. A few moments later the bandages were taken from her eyes.

“Good afternoon, ladies.”

It was the mocking voice of Jean Dubois.

The three nakedly helpless females stood stiffly in a row. The room was large and pleasant. Jean Dubois faced them, his strong male fingers playing idly with the evil slenderness of a limber crop. His smile was one of impartial welcome. It evoked a divergence of feminine reaction.

“Oh, Jean, I should have known!”

“Oh, darling, it’s your lovely Frenchman!”

“You dastardly scoundrel!”

Dubois waved away the ill assorted exclamations. Easily, he set them in their place.

“I will use this on any of you who cannot behave yourself while I am speaking. It hurts.”

“You son of a bitch! You planned this whole thing.”

Laura’s voice spat venom. “You can’t possibly get away with this outrage!”

Dubois uncoiled the whip, his arm flashing. Laura Ratcliffe squealed in rage and pain as the crop sliced her hip. It cut her repeatedly until she fell to her knees, sobbing but silent.

“May I have your polite attention, Mrs. Ratcliffe?”

The kneeling woman managed a muffled “yes.”

“Will you please repeat that louder?”

She struggled to her feet, her voice clear. “I’m sorry. I forgot what I’ve become. Yes, I will be silent and listen.”

“Thank you.” He scanned the row of constrained nudity. “I will expect obedience from each of you.”

Caroline was only too glad to listen. She was consumed by a great gladness and a tremendous curiosity. Dubois’s tone

was pleasantly informal.

“First, Caroline. She has always been my slave, and for her there is no change. And for our so douce April la petite, you will simply give pleasure to myself and to those who I designate. Do you comprehend?”

“Oh, yes, Sir! Oh, Jean!” April was ecstatic.

“Now for you, Mrs. Ratcliffe, I am sure you are curious.”

“All I know is I was kidnapped, and then all of this.”

“You will address me as Sir.’”

“I’ll be damned if I will! Have some sense, man!”

The slender withe hit her again. Laura fought to no avail. Her twisting only insured their biting her skin where she wanted pain the least. Gasping and sweating, she surrendered once again. “I’m sorry! Oh, please stop—Sir!”

“Hmmmm—I am sure you will learn the rudiments of slavery quickly, Mrs. Ratcliffe. I would be sorry to consign you the cane fields for life.”

“You—!” Laura bit her lip, fighting back her fury, and changed her aborted curse. “Thank you, Sir.”

“Hmmm, yes. Well, I am sure it’s all very strange and for you now. I will make some allowances. Now, to explain your condition. Yes, I arranged your kidnapping, and I am responsible for the brand you bear below your breast. That

brand was your first step into slavery. I discover how potent that scarlet S is upon the skin of a girl. Once so marked she can be bought and sold with few questions asked." He turned to Caroline. "Is that not so, chérie?"

"Yes, it is so."

"However, yours is an august name. It is known. You are respected. It is desirable therefore to get your slavery documented. I have friends. I sell you, I buy you—back and forth. Officially witnessed documents accumulate, all of them committing you to slavery. When I heard of the market in Port Aylesbury under the official sanction and supervision of the governor, I knew that was the place. Your sale has the stamp of government approval. Once more I sell, then buy. I am out the auction commission, that is all, and you are now most indisputably mine. I am a lucky man. I kill three birds with one stone, and such pretty birds they are! I guessed the English captain would unload my beloved girls at Port Aylesbury, so it is there I take my new slave. Alas, she does not like me. It is possible I may have to break you, Mrs. Ratcliffe."

Presuming on her status, Caroline asked, "Jean—three women? Isn't that a lot, even for you?"

"Ah, you are jealous, ma petite. I solve the problem easily. The two who please me least go back to the auction block, and any one of you will make me rich."

“But, Jean, how can you afford us? So much money!”

“My pet, you forget the maidens O’Rourke failed to steal when he stole you. They sold exceedingly well, and I made sure there were others.”

Still in the painful bindings from the auction, the three females were cloaked for their ride to the wharf and transfer to the boat which would return them to their beloved island. But, safely aboard and under way, they were again made naked and forced into painful new positions. On the deck of the sizable craft was a cage—a square little prison just large enough for a girl.

Dubois bowed to April and said, “Your new home, ma petite. Please to enter.”

“You can’t! You can’t put April in that thing! I won’t allow —”

It was as far as Laura got. Outraged motherhood was no match for the slender crop. It cut without mercy. By the time the naked mother was on her knees, the daughter had wriggled inside the tiny barred prison.

“It’s all right, Mummy,” April said urgently to her mother. “I’m in here. I can manage.”

“Your daughter has more sense than you, madam.” Dubois held his hand to momentarily close the cage door and snap the lock shut on its trembling tenant. “Your pretty little

daughter will remain caged to insure your good behavior. You will kneel and bow your head at my approach, and you will service me or my men on demand. Come, show me you understand."

Without a word, Laura Ratcliffe bowed her head in kneeling submission and said, "Yes, I understand, Sir."

"Ah, we make progress." Dubois turned to April. "And you understand too, little pigeon?"

"Oh, yes, it's a lovely cage, but now that I'm locked inside, could I have my elbows untied, please?"

Dubois sliced the rope. "Your hands stay tied, chérie."

He then cut Caroline's elbow bindings as well, but to the kneeling woman he said, "Your elbows stay joined, madam."

He then grasped Caroline's arm and led her to their cabin.

"And now, beloved girl, let us return to normal."

Dubois turned his slave around and untied the strictures on her wrists. Caroline stretched for a moment of ecstatic freedom, then obediently crossed her wrists behind her back and discovered the old breathlessness as they were rebound as only Jean Dubois knew how.

"Ohhhh, Jean, it is! You've tied me exactly as I used to be!"

"Of course. How else?"

“But now my feet are chained, and my ankles are ironed.”

“And you do not like that, little one?”

“On a boat it makes no difference. I can’t run anywhere.”

Caroline was conscious of a blush. “But chained feet do not help a girl make love.”

“You are shamelessly wanton,” Dubois said, chuckling in appreciation. “But I fetch some tools. We need no smithy.”

The slavegirl winced with the hammer blows. Fascinated, she watched the expulsion of the rivets which had held her hobbled for so long. Free, she kicked her feet joyously, and then sank back upon the bunk, arranging her bound arms as she had done so often in the past. Soon she had forgotten everything except the male who was within her sheath.

In the reflective time of aftermath, she asked, without much caring, “Jean, what’s going to become of me?”

“You’ll be fucked night and day—is not that enough?”

“It’s never enough. You’re right, Jean, I am wanton—as far as it goes with you—but I meant as the years pass. Where will you take me?”

“I told you once: We reverse our trek. This time we go westward. You will walk behind the wagon, leashed as before. Would that please you?”

“It would please me.”

“Is your pleasure only to be bound?”

“Mmmmmmn, it’s more than that. It’s you. It’s the dream of going west to California. It’s being tied so I don’t have to worry about things any more. Am I crazy?”

“Like a fox, chérie—that is all.”

“But you can’t possibly take Laura and April too.”

“Why not?”

“What—all three of us leashed behind the wagon! We’d get tangled up. Besides, we could untie each other.”

“Hmmmm, you are indeed a little fox.” Dubois kissed her. “I must admit to much thought. First there is the Ratcliffe plantation. I must get title to it.”

“Jean, you can’t!”

“Ah, but I can. With the daughter in the cage, the mother will sign anything. Suppose we become planters, eh?”

“Would you marry me?” she playfully asked.

“I have considered it.”

“April and her mother—what of them?”

“With the daughter caged, the mother behaves.”

“But, Jean, you can’t possibly leave the darling in that horrible little cage you’ve got her in out there!”

“I am thinking in terms of something larger. The mother could join her when not working in the fields.”

“Jean, you couldn’t!”

“I could sell your Laura into a distant slavery—she is a nuisance—but there are times when she may have to be produced and to be on her best behavior.”

“But you’re punishing April.”

“She adores her cage. You saw it.”

“She’ll soon tire of it and want freedom. Jean, be kind to her. I love the child. Let her be my pet. Leave her feet chained so she cannot run. That is all she needs.”

“Irons on her everywhere would not keep that little package safe. Our petite April is best inside a cage and her ankles ironed to boot.”

Caroline sighed, comforting herself with the thought that time would pass and tempers change. She flexed her tied wrists and found them comforting. She was once more happy and guilty because of it.

The scream came from above, a man in extreme agony. Dubois leaped for the door. Caroline followed fearfully. The scene they beheld was not without humor. Laura, still bound and chained, stood defensively with her back against the rail. A member of the two-man crew stood with his legs wide apart, clutching his genitals and cursing.

“The bitch!” he exclaimed. “She got it in her mouth and then bit me!”

“I won’t do it,” Laura said unemotionally. “If I have to do that, it’s the end.”

“You prefer to be flogged, madam?”

“Infinitely.”

“Tie her to the mast. She shall have an hour to think, then the whip.”

Back in their cabin, Dubois permitted himself laughter. “She is remarkable,” he said. “Has she no judgement?”

“But, Jean, it’s an awful thing to ask of a woman if she’s never done it before.”

“You did it your first time for me.”

“Yes, and I’m still ashamed. I know it’s silly. I love doing it now, but for you only. Jean, must you really flog her?”

“A whipping only—but severe. She needs it. I am glad of this excuse. Even at the expense of Emil’s cock.”

“Everything is so hard for her. She has had so far to fall.”

“Doubtless she needs whipping daily. I want you to talk to her now as she stands waiting. Reason with her. Seek a spark of submission.”

“She’ll think me a Judas goat.”

“That is good. It may provoke her speech. Run along.” Laura Ratcliffe was tied to be whipped in a most cunning fashion. Her arms had been freed and her hands retied in front. They had been raised above her head and tied there to the mast so she faced the massive timber, her already streaked nudity an invitation. She was not so much tied to the mast as standing facing it, her bound hands her only compulsion to remain. Under the lash she could kick and writhe and seek to evade. Her punishment was cleverly conceived. Her glance back across a bare shoulder was not cordial.

“You appear unduly privileged, Caroline,” she said tartly.

“I told you what I was to him. He has put me back in that position.” Caroline turned to exhibit captive hands. “This is the way he keeps me—always. I never get free.”

Laura pursed her lips. “Our roles appear to now be reversed. Was it not you who was awaiting fifty strokes?”

“It was I.” Caroline’s heart was in her voice. “Laura, believe me, if this whole thing is corrected, I will happily yield to you.”

They stared at each other as mistress and slave. The mistress tugged angrily at hands bound above her head, but they were beyond her reach.

“I hope you approve of my breasts and pubic hair,” she said coldly. “They appear to have become public property.”

“Laura darling, don’t be angry with me. I’m as helpless as you, but won’t you please bend a bit with these men? I don’t want you whipped every day.”

“They’re going to hurt me horribly this time, aren’t they?”

“Yes, I’m afraid they will. But do what they want.”

“What! Take a man’s stinking sex in my mouth and suck it? They can whip me to death first.”

“Oh, Laura, it’s no use being heroic. I know you feel like this now, but after they’ve whipped you for awhile you’ll see things differently. It hurts so much, a girl just has to adjust.”

“Speak for yourself.”

“You’re about to be given the most awful pain — A girl just can’t bear it. If we had the least hope of getting free, I’d be as brave as you, but we haven’t any hope.”

“Don’t be silly, girl. My servants will deal with these upstart.”

“But you don’t understand, Laura. You’ll have to do everything he says or he’ll whip April the same as he’s whipping you. He’ll dress you and set you up to give the orders. You’ll sign the papers to make the plantation his.”

“Never!”

“You will, Laura—I know you will. I wish I could save you

the agony."

"You silly girl; no one will be deceived. The bailiff will have this rogue clapped in irons on the first day."

"With April half whipped to death?"

"That won't happen. Dubois would never do it, not any more than he'd whip you."

It was hard to make the older woman understand. Laura was still clothed in dignity—authority lingered. But in an hour she would be whipped and would feel differently. Caroline mourned inwardly for both her former mistresses. If only they could learn without the whip, but what girl could? Their backs would bear the imprints of their lessons learned. It was a terrible way to be taught.

"He'd whip me if it served his purpose," Caroline retorted. "But maybe I'm in love, so I give him no reason."

"You're his concubine; I'm not."

"You would be if he chose. Oh, Laura darling, do stop tearing at your hands. You can't get loose, I know you can't."

"But I don't know that. If I can get loose, I will. If I ever get the chance, I'll kill Dubois."

Touched by distress, Caroline whispered, "Can you tell me any way I can get word to the bailiff or the governor?"

"Only by way of the servants. But he'll never leave us alone

with them."

It was, of course, hopeless. It was always hopeless. Laura's will to fight revealed to Caroline the degree in which she herself had accepted enslavement. She could think of no moment when she had possessed a choice.

Desperately wanting Laura's love, she asked, "Is it possible to swim with my hands tied behind my back?"

"I don't know. Why?" Laura turned against her single bond to survey her former slave girl with surprise, "You're not thinking—"

"I'm the only one of us whose feet isn't ironed. When we near shore, I might get a chance to jump overboard. On land I can run."

"You mustn't!" Laura was aghast. "You'd sink, the way he has you tied—and there are sharks!"

It was a forlorn hope, but Caroline tucked it away in her mind. She returned to Dubois and confessed failure. He laughed away her concern. He selected a whip.

"Come, chérie," he said to Caroline. "We go to change a lady's mind."

The whipping of Mrs. Laura Ratcliffe would remain forever in Caroline's mind. Its impact on her was doubled by April's agonized eyes watching from behind the bars of the cage.

Impulsively, she turned to her master and pleaded. “Please, Jean, throw a blanket over April’s cage. Don’t make the poor dear watch.”

Dubois scoffed at such weakness. “It will do the child much good,” he proclaimed. “Perhaps you too. Come close and watch a lady cope with the lash.”

Laura winced and gasped, shifting unhappily against the first strokes. She was determined not to yield victory by her screams. Her teeth were clenched, as were her fists above the bands of rope upon her wrists, but as the strokes continued, more and more of her body and legs responded to the pain. Feet rose in stress and were angrily thrust back, hips weaving. Through several strokes the woman at the mast tugged and fought for freedom from the single tie by which she was compelled to stand, but as she heaved, the thong found a greater intimacy within her secret places to drive her back and flatten her breasts against the timber, exposing as little of her nakedness as possible, quite a pitiful protection but all she had. The whip cut steadily until Laura Ratcliffe screamed.

“You find this painful, madam?”

“You bastard!”

The whip resumed. The strokes were cruel. Caroline flinched with each. She had her own memories of a thong across bare skin.

When Laura screamed again, she heard her own voice plead: “Jean, show her mercy. Please stop! She’s had enough.”

“Indeed.” He accorded his slave’s complaint polite attention. “Do me the kindness, beloved girl, of standing very straight right here.” Dubois designated a spot. “Ah, yes, thank you. Now raise your hands as high as possible.”

It was terribly cruel to be made to stand when she could run, but the slave had no thought of evading punishment. She had invited it by her outburst. Now she would get it. She tugged her bound hands high and tilted her chin. When the lash curled around her hips, she made no sound or motion—only a deep inhalation heard by all.

“And one more, chéri. You may face the other way.”

Both strokes were with the full force of her master’s arm. With bitter pain burning in her flesh, she knelt and bowed her head.

“Thank you, Jean. I was foolish.”

“You are most welcome, beloved.”

The whipping of Mrs. Laura Ratcliffe resumed.

Three chastened females made the return voyage to the island on their best behavior. The male reigned supreme. Mrs. Laura Ratcliffe sank to her knees on request and employed her mouth, lips, and tongue to satisfy the rampant

sex of each male. April watched everything from the detachment of her cage. Only Dubois's personal slave had the temerity to speak. As usual, it was in the afterglow of lust.

"Jean, the three of us are going to be a trial on you. take what gold you can, take me, and run—please?"

"To leave so rich a prize? My pet, you do me no justice."

"I would save your life. I think you risk it needlessly."

"Would you like me to whip you again?"

"If it pleases you."

They shared laughter at her ready submission. Passionately, Caroline wished it was the two of them alone. Dubois's insistence on possession of both mother and daughter, as well as their estate, seemed to her foolhardy in the extreme. In her mind she formulated resolve. Tomorrow they would beach their craft upon the island's sand.

When the time came, she stood with her master and watched their approach to land, an isolated beach with none to ask embarrassing questions. When Jean went to give his men a helping hand in the furling of their sail, Caroline uttered a brief prayer and dived across the rail.

Caroline knew that it was the most desperate act of her life. She believed she could survive but could only know for sure by trying. She trod water frantically to drive her head

above the surface. With hands tearing uselessly at her bonds, she made a seal-like progress to the sand—dive and surface, dive and surface, thrusting with practiced feet. Her defection had not been noticed. The three men were busy. April was in her cage. Laura was helpless to aid or hinder. Caroline fought the salt water with all her young vitality. Reaching firm sand, she sped for the shelter of the trees in frantic leaps of unchained legs. Well hidden, she paused to look back.

Realization struck her like a blow. She was not yet missed. There was no pursuit. When her absence was noted and her escape surmised, they might easily assume her drowned or taken by a shark. With rising hope, she turned her gloriously free steps towards Davenport town.

It was night. The bailiff was testy from broken sleep, but he brightened at the sight of the panting naked girl. If Caroline had possessed her hands, she would have embraced him. Instead, she blurted out her story.

The bailiff listened, nodding from time to time in confirmation of a previous knowledge. It did not occur to either the man or the girl to release her tied hands. They both assumed her condition was unworthy of comment.

“He’ll try his dastardly scheme tomorrow, lass,” the bailiff mused thoughtfully. “He’ll judge thee drowned. We can take him in the act.”

“Oh, if only you can! I pray that none are hurt.”

“Oh, aye, there’s risk—he’s a resourceful rogue—but I’ll have men enough. ’Tis glad I am to see thee. The Ratcliffe servants are uneasy. They’ve made a report, and the governor’s on my tail.” He chuckled. “There’ll be many as is grateful for what ye’ve done, lass. I’ve always admired ye.”

He paused heavily. “Trouble is, ye’re still a slave.”

“Yes, I know I am.” Caroline faced him boldly. “I’m not disputing it.”

“And, as a slave, I can’t let you run free.”

“No, of course not. I don’t expect to. I belong to April Ratcliffe.”

“That’s all right then.” The bailiff sighed thankfully. “You’re a damn sensible girl, and that’s a fact. You’ve never once bothered me with stories about being unjustly enslaved. Ye’d be surprised the fairy tales I get from white girls once there’s a chain on ’em.”

“I’ve been lucky in my slavery.”

“Oh, aye, and that ye have. Ye’ll be safe back in it tomorrow and with a grateful mistress. And now, young lady, I have a small cell for you.”

Caroline was grateful for shelter and for safety. If she could not get out of the cell, others could not get in. She suffered

the shackling of her feet without complaint. She believed the bailiff's assurance of regulations and offered her ankles without demure.

"Must my hands stay tied, Sir?" she asked.

"There's them as tied 'em, miss. No doubt they had their reasons. Best leave 'em tied."

Caroline shrugged it off. The bailiff meant well. By his standards he was being kind, but the cell door clanged shut and its lock turned with the same metallic implacability of all such doors. She shrugged it off and disposed her constrained nudity upon the bench. She was more than tired.

For a long time sleep proved elusive. Like all great decisions, hers brought its aftermath of questioning. She had taken a step to change her life. Because of it Jean Dubois might die. Suddenly and most urgently, Caroline wanted him alive. Should he die by her act she would mourn him forever and blame herself. The tiny cell and the shackles became claustrophobic, but she made her choice and must abide by it. By her own choosing she was a prisoner and could not escape. In this welter of feminine emotion she slept.

Morning brought the bailiff one more shock—a determined prisoner with a desperate plea. Caroline faced him boldly.

"Please, Sir, I beg of you—give me my hands and feet. I need them desperately. Please!"

“Free you!” He was deeply affronted. “How can I free you? You’re a slave.”

“Not that freedom—only my limbs. I must find April. If we do not have April, Dubois can laugh at us all.”

“’Tis most irregular.”

“I will yield myself again afterwards. Punish me then, if you must.”

“Nay, lass, nay. Ye talk sense, arid I’ve a liking for thee. I’d free thee from slavery altogether if I could.”

“Thank you, but today my slavery does not matter. I am the most deeply involved of all in this mess. Please?”

The bailiff fumbled with shackles and rope. It was the rope with which Jean Dubois had bound her wrists, perhaps for the last time.

“And young Miss Ratcliffe,” he said gruffly, “if you find her, what then?”

“If we have her, Dubois is disarmed. He can compel Laura Ratcliffe to nothing. Your men can take him. But if I find her, I am sure her feet will be chained.”

“Ye’ll ride to the plantation in a carriage, lass. We can strike off her irons easily enough there.”

“Oh, thank you—thank you!”

Caroline reached up and kissed the grizzled cheek. Then, like a shaft of sunlight, she fled.

Caroline was certain April was still on the boat. She used the jungle path, glorying in perhaps the last real freedom she would ever know. She sighed thankfully at sight of the ship. It was closer in than before, its nose in the sand. She slipped silently into the surf.

The cage was still there, April still inside. The girl was slumped uncomfortably against the bars—a picture of despair. On top of the cage sat one of the two-man crew, quietly smoking his pipe, lost in thought. When the stealth nudity hit him with the belaying pin, he slumped over a log. Caroline's urgent prayer that he would have the key was answered.

"Caroline! Oh, darling!"

As the older girl dragged the younger from the cage, Caroline asked, "The other man—where is he?"

"With Dubois. They left one to guard me."

There was a feverish tearing at knots, then the clutch of loving arms and the meeting of hungry mouths.

"It's so good to be out of there," April sobbed. "So good! But, darling, my feet! They're still chained. I can't run."

"Can you walk?"

April demonstrated her hobbled steps, then shrugged. “You know what it’s like.”

Caroline knew all too well. First the surf, then the path—it would be a cruel tax upon the chained girl.

“There has to be tools,” Caroline said, remembering Dubois punching rivets from her own irons.

“No! Oh, no! I’m frightened!” April clutched her arm. “Let’s get away now!”

They left the open cage and the unconscious man. Caroline dragged the girl, who might once again be her mistress, through the surf, across the sand, and to the jungle path.

There began then the most frustrating walk of their lives. Try as she might to gain speed, it was April’s ironed ankles that set the pace. To Caroline, their progress seemed agonizingly slow. For April, it was a mixture of wails, giggles, and exclamations. She was so glad to be free and to find Caroline alive and free that little else mattered.

“They thought you had drowned,” April confided gaspingly. “They searched and searched.”

Halfway back they met the bailiff and two of his men.

“Figured this was where I’d find you,” he declared jovially. “Brought you a couple of shifts. The boys can take turns carrying Miss Ratcliffe. We’ll soon have them irons off her feet.”

“We’re so glad to see you.” Caroline looked at the burly man in a great thankfulness. Diffidently, she asked, “Do you wish to tie me again now? I don’t suppose it matters.”

He waved away her offer. “There’s still work to do,” he said grimly. “Mayhap ye’re a part of it.”

The two girls were still in the euphoria of release. The two girls covered in shifts and the carriage bowling along to the plantation, the bailiff’s caution was sobering.

“My boys are spread around the plantation,” he said. “And the servants have been warned. We’ll get his man first, and then we’ll steal to where we can listen to what’s going on. I want to catch that rogue red-handed.”

Caroline refused to think about the rogue, the man who had influenced her life more than any other being. She had set events in motion and was now in the grip of them. In dazed unreality, she followed silently where led.

Then came the drone of a familiar voice.

“Mrs. Ratcliffe wishes to make a conveyance of her estate to myself, Sir. It is that simple.” Jean Dubois was being solemnly polite.

“Most unusual.” It was the lawyer speaking. “Mrs. Ratcliffe, are you quite sure that this is your wish?”

“Yes.”

“You sound weary, madam. Are you sure you are not being subjected to coercion?”

“I am quite sure.” Laura’s voice was toneless.

“It is customary to receive value for value.”

“That matter is between Mrs. Ratcliffe and myself, Sir. It has been dealt with. Kindly proceed,” Dubois said firmly.

“Mrs. Ratcliffe,” the lawyer began, patient but firm, “I would prefer this matter be dealt with in my office and before witnesses. The Ratcliffe estate is vast—”

“Do it, Sir,” Dubois demanded. “You are quibbling. Mrs. Ratcliffe is most anxious to get this matter disposed of.”

They converged from the door and windows—quiet, determined men and two girls. Dubois might have dealt with the men, but the sight of April was his undoing. He no longer held the trump card. He held no cards at all. He drew his gun.

The shots crashed and reverberated around the big room. Where Jean Dubois had stood there was now a pathetic, twisted bundle on the floor. The bailiff took charge. The lawyer escorted the ladies from the room. Caroline was crying.

April stretched luxuriously, yawning. To do so she was ob-

liged to withdraw an arm from beneath the naked girl beside her on the bed.

“I’ve never been so happy,” she reflected idly. “You too?”

“Me too.” Caroline was basking in a blend of repletion and relief. “We’ve been awfully lucky, mistress.”

“Don’t call me that. You don’t have to, you know. After all that’s happened it sounds sort of silly.”

“Yes, maybe, but you still own me, April.”

“We’ll only mention it when you’ve been bad. Poor Mummy—sleeping all alone. Mind if I loan you to her for awhile? She’s had such a bad time, and she deserves you.”

“Of course I don’t mind. I’ve always seen myself as belonging to both of you. You mean I should go to her now?

“You can’t. I’ve got your ankle chained to the bed.”

Drowsily, Caroline said, “All right, you tell me when.”

“Darling, do you really believe it’s all over?”

“I have to work at it. I keep seeing you in that cage and poor Laura with her hands tied up to the mast.”

“I feel terribly guilty, darling, but seeing her like that made me all hot between my legs.”

“It was the same with me, but your mother is very beautiful, and I’d never seen her naked like that.”

“You mean with her hands tied, waiting to be whipped?”

“Yes. I’m ashamed of myself.”

“But, Caroline, it works the same for me when I see you like that. Girls look so beautiful when they’re tied.”

“Or put in a cage.”

“Did I really look beautiful in that beastly little cage? I felt like I was all hair and breasts and slits.”

“You know you looked beautiful.”

“Isn’t it a shame that your lovely Frenchman won’t put that big, wonderful thing of his inside us any more?”

“Don’t talk about him or that—please!”

“You were in love with him, I know.”

“Yes, I was in love with him. It was some way that I can’t explain. Please don’t make me talk of him.”

“Very well then. So I may as well send you to Mummy.” April rose, fetched a key, and unlocked the shackle. “Run along, darling, and be a really naughty girl.”

Caroline ran along. Except for the shackle on her ankle at night, nothing had been said about her return to bondage. She discovered her senior owner sitting up in bed.

“April sent me,” she said. “She told me to be naughty.”

Laura threw back the covers and spread wide her naked legs to display her thick and curly pubic patch.

“It’s still there, sweetheart,” she said to Caroline.

Caroline approached, placed her face between the long beautiful legs, and fed hungrily and at great length. Once more, in the throes of satiety, conversation flourished.

“I keep wanting to thank you, pet.”

“It’s over and done with, Laura.”

“It won’t ever be over in my mind. If you hadn’t dived off that ship and risked your life, April and I would hav been slaves right now. He’d have kept you and sold us.”

“Probably.”

“All right, I won’t talk of him. I know how you feel.” Laura stroked Caroline’s erect nipples. “I’ve been thinking, darling. The least I can do is give you your freedom.”

“You know I don’t want that—unless you’re both tired of me. But, in that case, you could sell me for a huge sum.”

“Don’t talk about selling you. Are you serious about not wanting freedom?”

“You know I am, and so does April.”

“You want to be tied again? Chained?”

“Whatever you want. I don’t mind.”

“You’re a shocking little hypocrite. You adore it all.”

“I’m afraid I do. You’ll have to be terribly severe with me, just so I keep perspective. Don’t ever let me get away with being flippant. I want to always know I’m owned.”

“There may be something you’ve forgotten, pet.”

“No, there isn’t. I was being punished when this all started. Now I have to have the rest of that punishment.”

“That’s right. Fifty strokes. I’m willing to forget them.”

“But I’m not. It’s not so much deserving them as needing them. They’ll put me back where I belong. I suppose it’s all crazy, but can you understand?”

“I understand, precious, but you know it will hurt terribly. If it’s done at all, it had best be done right.”

“Thank you, Laura.”

“You’re welcome, sweetheart.”

They laughed at their own absurdity, but in the heart of each was extraordinary peace. They drifted back to sleep.

Later, Laura mused, “You’ll have to be tied for it.”

“I want to be. I could never stand still.”

They laughed again at her eagerness. “We could whip you properly, darling,” Laura teasingly suggested, “at the whipping post in the slave compound, all the staff watching.”

“Laura, would you!” Caroline exclaimed breathlessly, beholding erotic visions.

“If you want. I can understand why you might. I’m sure April will approve.”

“But, please, fasten me so I can’t leap around. That was beastly the way they tied you to the mast.”

“But, Caroline dear, you’d look so gorgeous dancing under the lash.”

“Oh, very well, if it pleases you. You can rely on me dancing. Will the staff enjoy watching?”

“I’m sure they will.”

“Well, they probably deserve a bit of fun. I expect that’s the way to look at it.”

They both laughed again. They were in that kind of mood.

Caroline felt a ridiculous need to giggle. As she had guessed, a servant tied her to the whipping post in exactly the same manner Laura was tied aboard ship. Caroline looked up at her bound wrists, far enough above her head so that she could never reach them. They were neatly crossed and tightly bound. No matter how she danced, they would keep her by the post. She rested her head against the wood. No doubt she would have to wait thus a long time before her audience gathered. It was the accepted way, and this whipping of a delinquent slave was being done accord-

ing to the rules.

April's voice was anxious. "Are you all right, darling?"

"I'm fine. Don't worry about me."

"Mummy says I mustn't hug or kiss you in public, so I won't, but, darling, I'll love you to bits the first chance I get after this is over."

Over? That was an infinity away. The slavegirl tried to stay cool and collected.

"Who's going to whip me?" she asked her young mistress.

"The girl who whips the other female slaves, darling. Mummy thought it best we didn't do it, and you wouldn't want a man. I don't suppose she'll be very kind. You're the first white girl she's ever got to whip."

"April, I'm going to leap all over the way I'm tied."

"I won't mind, dear. I don't suppose anyone will. Oh, Caroline, they're not making you wait a long time. They're coming now."

The girl with the whip smiled. It was an enigmatic smile. Her hands lovingly caressed the bare white skin she was about to mark.

"You best join yo' mommy now, Miz Ratcliffe."

April was suddenly gone. It was like losing the radiance of

the sun. The silky Negro voice was very close to Caroline's anxious, bound consciousness.

"I's gonna whip you real heard and mean, missy. You's my first white gal, and I wants to mark them tits and cunt real nice. I's gonna make you scream real good too."

"I'm sure you will. Perhaps I'd best say thank you now."

"You gets fifty strokes, right?"

"Yes, that's what they told me."

"Then here's yo' number one!"

Caroline's back was consumed by fire. She looked up at her clenched fists, straining. She refused to move.

"Two!"

Again the burning brand landed on her, scalding her skin. She stood erect.

"Three!"

Caroline clenched her teeth and pressed hard against the post as her world exploded into pain.

"Four…!"