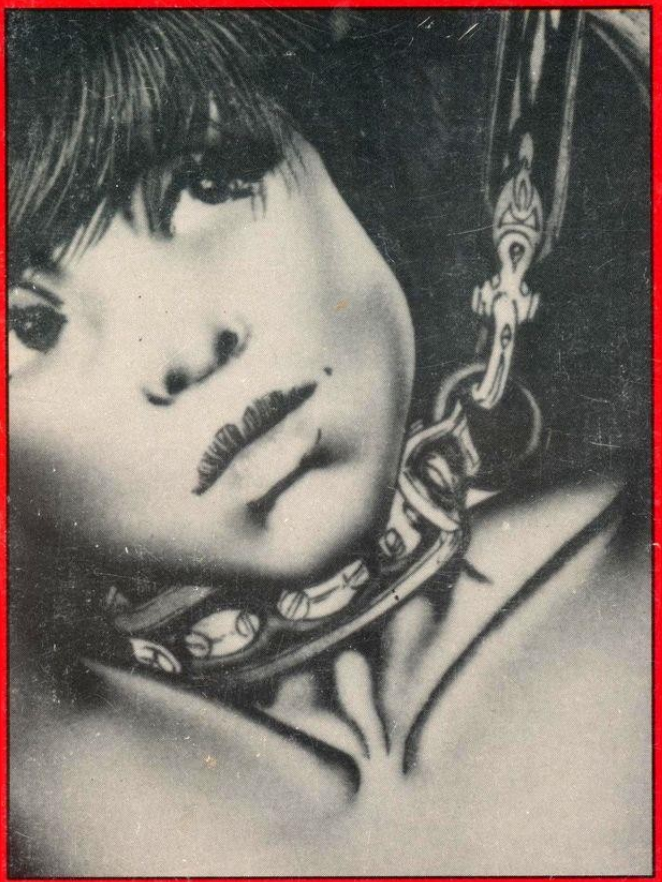
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MIA ARGENT



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Mia Argent

by F. E. Campbell

Chapter 1

Communing with Nature

Mia conceded fresh, unexpected emotions and sensations resulting from being one with the elements through the entire twenty-four hours of a day. It had never happened before and she knew of no one who had shared this frightening communion with nature. The effect was to make her feel small and insignificant, far beyond the compulsion of the rope collar upon her neck and the rope leash trailing away to the tree. She guessed the twins had made the tether twenty feet long in the supposition she would require exercise. It had certainly enabled her to study a greater variety of botanical specimens than would a shorter span but it did not enable her to reach another tree or improve her view. For three days her world had centered around the tree to which the end of the long rope was knotted tightly and then securely wired. The wire was the most irritating thing of all, without it she could have easily gotten free within the space of an hour or so. It defeated her completely in the same way a similar wire around the cords about her wrists behind her back rendered her hands so helpless.

Mia Argent surveyed the seventy-two hours of her imprisonment knowing they had shattered her world and hence-

forth nothing would be the same. She had gone through half a day of rebellion. It was impossible to believe she was truly helpless and would have to stay exactly here for as long as the twins desired. Her wrists and neck chafed from the outrage of being thus confined. She had tried hour after hour to defeat the rope and the cord without success. Mia knew herself mantled in shame when she realized the twins had been watching from a not too distant bush. She must have appeared ridiculous in all the contortions she contrived to seek freedom. They would have chuckled over the way she stood resolute and gazing around as though certain of help and striving for composure by which to defeat a captivity in which she did not then truly believe. She believed it now!

On the second day she had begun to find a rhythm, a progression, not of herself but of the universe in which she was increasingly an infinitesimal part. The sun rose, it swept in its wide arch overhead across the sky to sink and deliver her to evening and the shadows which later would become ghosts. In the changing light and temperature the foliage emitted its own succession of scents which affected Mia strangely in an elemental response. It was the same with the soil and the grass. There were times when she told herself she was picking up the perfumes of morning or of night. Ordinarily she would not have bothered to even notice but now, captive to the cord, she had nothing else to do and was realizing these natural cycles possessed her being

in a way she had never known. Mia was in no way reconciled to captivity, but when her explorations to the end of her tether had revealed such tiny things of interest as an ant hill, a few beetles and a multitude of tiny, unsuspected growths, she had been forced to sit down with her back against her tree and allow herself to flow with the invisible tide of the woodland the twins had chosen. Sometimes she slept, but at others she reviewed endlessly the conversations.

“You know you’ll get into trouble for this. You’re thirteen and ought to have more sense.”

“You always told us we didn’t have any sense anyway, so what’s the difference?” Their answer was glib.

“It’s disgusting the way you’ve stripped me of everything and left me naked like this. And you’ve no right to tie me and tether me the way you have. It’s as though… as though… I was a puppy dog!”

“You are a puppy dog, a pretty little girl puppy dog. Just think, darling, we’ve got a puppy dog twenty-four years old.”

“OK, so there’s this big disparity in our ages. I’ve never been mean enough to warrant this. Let me loose and we’ll say no more about it.”

Angle and Fancy did not answer. They stood surveying her in a quiet speculation which told Mia too clearly there was something else afoot in their busy, mischievous, young minds. The knowledge left her uneasy and a trifle scared. Thirteen might be a responsible age, but on the other hand…

“Don’t you see how cruel this is, this thing you’re doing to me, this captivity. I can’t possibly get free, I’ve tried and tried. You could keep me here forever!”

Mia instantly wished she had not said it. The twins nodded brightly in agreement. There was between them a vivid sibling communion needing no words. “That’s right, Mia darling, at least we can keep you to your next birthday. That’s only a few months away. By then you’ll probably be polite to us.”

“I’ll be polite to you right now if you’ll let me loose. Do you want money or something?”

Once more they stood and stared making their prisoner triply naked. Angrily she demanded, “Look, is there anything that strange in seeing me without clothes? You’ve seen me this way before—without the rope, of course.”

“We like you that way, Mia darling. We’ll come and look at you often, just to get our money’s worth,” they tittered in unison. “We know we’ll maybe get into a pile of trouble

over this but we think it's worth it. Don't bother to plead too much, we don't even hear."

One conversation was much like another. All Mia gleamed from them was a realization of something permanent in this condition. The twins had planned it carefully and were still exuberantly confident. In portentous mischief they made a careful scrutiny of her bondage night and morning, the band and knots around the tree and the cords around her wrist. There was also the rope circle around her neck which she was increasingly coming to loathe. Mia knew the twins all too well and realized they might let her loose at any moment or might keep her as she was until some neighbor or relative forced the issue to compel them to come scampering to set her free. Meanwhile they could run the affairs of their home and enjoy themselves in whatever way they chose. Mia wished she had not withdrawn the expense money from the bank. They unblushingly admitted to having found it and were not using it for the purpose intended. When Mia's anger had cooled, she asked herself how mean the two younger girls really were. There was no cruelty about this strange captivity. For them it evidently had a purpose, but not for her. They were robbing her only of a day of her life and these days had succeeded each other until now there were three. Each night they tossed her a blanket but repossessed it each morning. Mia considered her diet an outrage.

“Look, you two, are you trying to starve me? Water, an apple, a little piece of cheese!”

“It’s marvelous for your figure, darling. We do love your curves and we hope to have some like them one day.”

“There’s nothing wrong with my figure, it doesn’t need starvation. And you’re being beastly making me eat as though I really am a dog. Do you realize how difficult it is to feed myself when you’ve taken away my hands?”

“Of course we do, darling! We’re thinking of making you have your dinner while we watch. You go into the most amusing contortions.”

“Of course I do. How else can I manage it! And this sucking up water from a bowl… Why can’t I have a cup of coffee?”

“Because we’re mean,” they laughed at their refusal of her plea. “Just think, Mia dear, we can give you anything we like or give you nothing and there’s not a thing you can do about it. You’re not a big, wise sister anymore, you just a gorgeous pet we keep on leash so you can’t go away. Isn’t it lovely!”

She was always glad to see them come but equally glad to see them go. Mia had exhausted her vocabulary of threats and pleadings to bring her to the realization of total dependence on these giggling moppets. She found shame in this condition, as though she had done something wrong or

was working out a penitence for misdeeds. Savagely Mia told herself her only error had been to fall thoughtlessly asleep in the garden chair and thereby giving her younger sisters the opportunity of noosing her neck and binding her wrists before she had recovered her wits sufficiently to prevail. The twins were strong and there were two of them! When all else failed, Mia tried sweet reason.

“Look, if you’ve got to keep me here you can do it with the rope around my neck. I can’t possibly get it free, not the way you’ve got it wired. So why can’t you let me have my hands. They don’t have to be tied behind my back, it doesn’t prove anything?”

“It does to us, darling. You look so sweet, so helpless and you have to do the puppy dog act when we feed you.”

“But it’s been three days and nights! It’s horrible not being able to use my hands. Even that rug you give me at night… I have to sort of roll myself into it, I can’t use it properly. Please untie my hands!”

They appeared not to hear but studiously discussed her more female attributes in tones faintly envious and designed to tell their captive she might as well shut up. It was wickedly frustrating. Mia found what comfort she could in fantasies where she had Fancy and Angle tightly tressed to separate trees and left them there for a week. She would make certain they were very tightly tied and totally naked

to receive the unkind attentions of flying insects and such tiny creatures as might chose to mount the incline of their legs. Mia was becoming well acquainted with insects and spent a good deal of her time coping with them. This coping without hands was never easy. Several species she would normally tramp upon found her flesh a desirable resting place, some regarded it as a legitimate meal. Mia's hands had only the shortest range and she was forced to dislodge her enemies by frictioning against her tree or laying on the ground and rolling over and over until they were crushed or went away. The exercise left her hot and disheveled. To date the twins had refused to brush or comb her hair which compelled her to be forever shaking it into some sort of order. She had no idea what she looked like, she was certain it was terrible.

Mia Argent had reached a point of resignation in which she no longer cared about conversation. She would answer her captor's questions with brief affirmatives or negatives, delivered in a wary hostility. Mia sensed her captivity was likely to be of long duration. She saw the twins as declaring war, battle lines were drawn and she would fight fiercely if she had the chance. But no chance was ever offered, Mia Argent was as helpless as a canary in a cage and more and more became accustomed to her tether and tied hands in this leafy, woodland scene which was her prison. She found herself more and more inclined to sitting or laying in a drowsy contemplation of the limited view. She slept

and dreamed constantly of rescue. Her rescuer ranged all the way from a knight in shining armor to a member of the local police. There was also Cyril Updike. Mia supposed she should think of Cyril as her boyfriend, a term she loathed. Cyril would have been her principle hope of escape had he not been absent on a business trip likely to last a couple of weeks. Of course, she might still be where she was in two week's time. This was becoming more and more probable. But she seriously wondered if she wished Cyril Updike to behold her present condition. If he walked through the trees to see her now she would burn up with shame and mortification. She supposed that after a couple of weeks she would be grateful for anyone and would forget what shame was like.

Mia spent a lot of time looking at herself. Her enforced nakedness had emphasized her female state in a way she had not previously viewed it. Every day and every night the elements made sport with her breasts and pubic hair, forcing her to reassess what is was like to be a girl. She felt certain a man would have been more resourceful and by now obtained his freedom, but she was as far from hers as ever. The lascivious chatter of the twins often made her blush but again emphasized what she was, she was a girl naked in sylvan solitude. Mia supposed it preferable to the dungeons and chains of fiction and legend but it was nonetheless complete. In a manner both fey and fanciful she likened herself to the tree to which she was attached and

all the other growths. None had any choice but to live through each day and each night and to get their drama from the elements which changed them yearly and altered the temperature every day. In short, Miss Mia Argent had become one with her surroundings.

Mia's fourth day of a captivity, as she was compelled to view more and more seriously the passage of time, did no more than cement the convictions of the preceding three. Day number five took her even deeper into a tranquility of helplessness she would not have deemed possible. Her initial struggles against the cords about her wrists and the rope around her neck had stretched both to whatever small tolerance they had. They were now bearably snug, constricting nothing. Mia sometimes worked on them for something to do but not with any hope of freedom. She found herself counting the day until the weather would turn too cold for her to remain outdoors, but that was a contingency so far distant as to bring no comfort. The twins had timed things well.

The sixth day the twins, bored with repetition, thought up horrific prospects their older sister would never have thought of. Mia worked hard to discount their humor and sly jibes, but some of them had a fearful plausibility.

"How would you like us to bring Cyril Updike to visit you, darling? He'll be back in a week or so."

“You know I wouldn’t like it. Don’t be a pair of little beasts any more than you need be.”

“Beasts? My, my.” Fancy and Angel exchanged knowing glances as though confirming an old suspicion. Their chuckles were gall to the captive.

“Or, if you don’t want Cyril, darling, then how about we pick just any guy who is around handy?” The two teenagers were almost overcome by their own hilarity. “Think of what he could do for you. You’d have to lay down, you know and then he could—well you know the word. He could do it to you as often as he liked.” Hilarity broke into open laughter. “If we got the right guy, maybe he would give us money. Would you like that?”

Mia disdained to answer, but her voice was husky as she retorted, “Don’t be so horrible, you’re making me want to cry. Don’t you realize how awful it is to be helpless like this? I never know whether you’re just teasing or you really mean what you say.” Mia twisted against her bonds in an ineffectual seeking for words with which to touch the shining eyed maidens who seemed to have no mercy. “I know you can do anything you like to me or with me,” she said miserably, “but have you forgotten I’m your sister? I thought we liked each other.”

“Oh, but we do, darling. We love you like this, you look so beautiful and you’re all ours! We’re never going to let you

loose. If you don't want a man then how about a dog? I'm sure we could find you one who would love licking you and they have such wonderful tongues."

"Don't be disgusting! That was a horrible thing to threaten me with. If you bring a dog anywhere near, I'll kick him to bits!"

"We could hobble your ankles, darling. Or better still stretch them wide apart and tie them that way. Fido would have a marvelous time with you dear little thingummy."

They were joking. They had to be! Mia felt positive this last thing Fancy and Angel would never do, but their next threat held greater plausibility. "Remember Mary and Jane, Mia darling? Suppose we brought the two of them here and let them enjoy you. You know, give them carte blanche? I'm sure you wouldn't be bored."

Mia knew it best to simply ignore. If her younger sisters got her going there would be no end to it. She would be on the run, constantly fearful and apprehensive. Without overemphasis she said quietly, "Sure they'd have a marvelous time. They'll abuse me and use me in all sorts of horrible ways. But they would also go to Momma and Poppa and they wouldn't keep their ugly little mouths shut. You'd both be in trouble."

"We're sure you're absolutely right, Mia darling. We're such lucky girls to have an older sister to give us good ad-

vice. So how about we shorten your tether so that you have to stand next to the tree all day. We can easily lengthen it again at night so you can lay down. Do you think that would help you to treat us with more respect?"

"I don't care what you do. All I want is to be free. If you had a streak of decency you wouldn't keep me like this any longer, it's been six days and six nights."

"But, Mia sweetness, your captivity has only just started! You mustn't get all excited. We've been watching you and you've been sort of settling down. We can see you when you can't see us and don't know we're watching. We've often seen you settle down comfortably and bet you've been getting the most wonderful thoughts and getting all hot and bothered."

"What do you know about being hot and bothered at your age?"

"Have you forgotten already! Well, perhaps you have, after all it was eleven years ago and after all the men you've slept with…!"

"That another beastly thing to say. I don't sleep around and you know damned well I don't."

"But you have been—you know that lovely word, darling, the four letter one, we know it's been done to you more than once."

“Well, so what? I’m not a virgin. You won’t be a virgin either when you reach my age. I don’t see how it has anything to do with keeping me a tied up prisoner with only a tree for company.”

“But, Mia dear, if you’re lonely there’s always that nice boy who comes to look after the garden. We can always send him out here and tell him what to do.”

It was hopeless. Mia knew she could never win, the twins held every card and she held none. In her heart, Mia Argent knew she would welcome any male visitor, not for what he could do to her but for what he might do for her. He could set her free! Almost certainly any man would set her free, it was inconceivable any of them would leave her bound as she now was in this woodland loneliness. If nothing less compelled them it would be respect for the Law. She shrugged and leaned back against the tree while the giggling duo, these teenage nymphs who were her sisters, shortened her tether to no more than two feet long, securely anchored at the level of her neck to compel her to stand until they decided otherwise. Fancy and Angel went away laughing to leave their older sister to her new travail.

It was innocent at first. Mia had often stood like this as a relief from sitting down or walking aimlessly within the radius of her rope. But now she had been robbed of choice. It was not long before the enforced, erect stand became onerous and imposed its own, unkind weariness. The rope

around the tree had been wired again with the pliers thoughtfully brought by the twins. There was nothing tight about anything but she could not leave the tree or do ought but stand, sitting and laying down had become something of the past. Thinking of the bright eyed couple who had left her thus, a tear actually trickled from Mia's eye, everything was becoming simply too, too much. She was no longer sure the twins knew what they were doing. The sixth day passed and when Fancy and Angel came that evening they found their older sister far more eager to please and far less prone to acid comment. In a hope of lessening her ordeal, Mia told them simply, "OK, I've had enough. Look, if you're going to break me, you've done it. I'll do or say anything you want. Just tell me what you want and I'll be obedient."

It did no good. The twins, although visibly impressed, changed nothing of her routine. The tether was lengthened to its full span and the blanket was tossed contemptuously as on other nights. But in the morning, after she had been fed, she was once more compelled to stand and her tether shortened to insure a dreary and a tiring day. At day's end and in this termination of a full week of corded captivity, the older girl fell to her knees upon release and pleaded abjectly, "All right, I don't know what you want but I'll do it, I'll be it, I'll say it. Please don't make me stand like that again."

They gazed down at her, entranced, seven days had brought them victory. But there was always something more, “Would you kiss our cunnies, darling?” The young voices were breathless.

“Yes.”

“And will you ask us to kiss yours?”

“Yes, I’ll do that too.”

“My, my, you are upset! We thought you’d say no to that one, expected to get a blast…” Suddenly the captive girl was enveloped in loving arms and was deluged by loving lips. Loving hands sought places they should never go but in the space of only moments they were laughing retreating to the house. Watching them go, their captive sister knew herself more baffled than ever. She was shamed by her surrender and what she had promised, but there was evidently more to it than that. The twins had something up their sleeves!

The eighth day brought change.

For the first time in this captive Mia heard an unmistakable sound that she had long prayed for—a heavy, male footstep! The tether on her neck was not long enough for her to circle the tree but she listened in intent eagerness and when she deemed the time was ripe, cried out, “Help! Help! Oh, please help me, I’m here, tied to a tree.”

The footsteps stopped then quickened. A few moments later Mia found herself gazing, with mixed emotions at a man she recognized. He was the eccentric artist everyone talked of and hinted about. His name was Ryan Gentry, it was understood some of his work actually sold. They gazed at each other in surprise. Mia became increasing conscious of a blush. The man said, obviously pleased, “Well, I’ll be damned!”

“Please let me go,” Mia pleaded humbly. In case this man would not recognize her in her nakedness, she hastened to explain, “I’m Mia Argent. I think we met at the Randell’s garden party. I’ve been tied like this as a silly joke. Please untie me and if you could cover me up…?”

It was not to be that simple. Mia sensed instantly the stories about this man were true, the stories of an endless succession of alleged “models” to frequent Gentry’s home were probably true. He was surveying her now in obvious admiration. His voice was devoid of excitement.

“Of course, I remember you, who wouldn’t! Ever do any modeling?”

“No, never. But never mind that, please untie me?”

Gentry was in no hurry to comply. He stood surveying her nakedness with a gaze both approving and assessing. “Pity you haven’t modeled, but you’re a natural, we won’t have

any trouble. I'm glad I decided to walk this way to the village."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gentry, but I'm not a model. If you would be kind enough to cut these ropes…?"

"Hmmmmmm, not sure I should do that." Gentry was obviously deep in thought. "Supposing I did, would you come home with me?"

"What! Like this! I couldn't!"

"Well, then you might as well stay here."

They stared. Mia hoped her blush was of a lesser proportion that she feared. Optimistically she suggested, "Please don't tease me, Mr. Gentry. I've had to stand like this for so long, I'm tired. I'd be so awfully grateful if you'd use your pocket knife."

"What and nothing at the end of it!" He grinned at the amiably but without sympathy. "I'll like to paint you as you are. That's a picture in a thousand! I suppose it's those two moppets, those two sisters of yours, who are responsible, aren't they?"

"Well… yes. They let their mischief run away with them. I do have to apologize."

Once again the stare. Mia longed for hands with which to cup her breasts or shield her pubic patch. Despite of em-

barrassment, she decided against turning around to face the tree, it would be absurd and would probably offend. In genuine shock she demanded, “You’re not telling me you’ll go away and leave me like this, are you?”

“Yes, why not!”

“Why not indeed! A girl gave nothing so she received nothing.” Gentry was evidently a pragmatist of the first order. Dully, Mia asked, “What would I have to do or promise to persuade you to free me?”

“Hmmmmmm, nothing.” Gentry was infuriating casual, “You’re no good to me so I’m no good to you. I’ll be bidding you good day.”

“But, please…”

“Well, maybe tomorrow. Maybe tomorrow I’ll take another walk and see how you feel. I never argue with my girls, they have to want to do what I want them to do. Think it over.”

Mia watched him walk away. It was pure heartbreak. It seemed impossible a man could treat her thus. If the twins were watching they would laugh their heads off and be slapping each other on the back in their delight at her discomfort. Mia’s sense of captivity intensified a hundredfold. She leaned back against the tree, shook her head in irritation at the confining rope and worked her wrists angrily

against the cords. She had never felt more possessed by her two young sisters than she did at this moment.

Mia said nothing of the incident. When the twins lengthened her tether and threw the blanket for the night, she kept silent about Gentry's visit. There was no profit in telling them, there was always the possibility he might return in a more charitable frame of mind. If only once she could get free, Mia was certain no power on earth would bind her again. It was a tiny hope, but she cherished it. When the twins, sensing something hidden, made demands Mia shrugged them away and told them only that she had spent a miserable day and would they please untie her hands.

"What is it, darling, there's something. C'mon tell us!"

"There's nothing at all, you're dreaming. You needn't look so pleased with yourself, Angel. And you, Fancy, wipe that grin off your face. You're going to be so sorry for this when I get loose."

"But, darling, you never will get loose. And as for refusing to answer our questions, has it occurred to you we do have ways and means…"

It had not occurred to Mia at all that coercion could ever be applied by these shining eyed nymphets. She suddenly realized her vulnerability. She supposed that Fancy and Angel could do anything they pleased with her. All she could

do was kick and they could put an end to that with the greatest of ease. Miserably she exclaimed, “You’re being mean, deliberately trying to frighten me.”

“We could tie your elbows tightly, Mia. We think that would be very uncomfortable.”

Mia kept a hurt and dignified silence. There was no use encouraging the two girls. It was best to let them expend their mischief in words rather than deeds. It would be terribly easy for them to give her more hurt and more discomfort as reprisal for some real or imagined slight in the past. The captive suddenly realized that, by the standards governing such situations, they had been treating her with relative kindness.

“We could tie your feet, too, you know, darling. Then you’d be in a real fix.”

“In fact, we could tie you to that tree so you couldn’t move at all. Or how would you like it if we whipped your bottom, we could y’know?”

When Angel and Fancy tired of their baiting and dark and fearsome implications, they left their captive for the night. But the bound girl now had more to think of. Suppose they could be that cruel! Mia knew herself powerless to resist. She shivered at the thought of the twins taking more punitive measures to break her will or mold her to whatever concept was in their minds. It was an uneasy, young

woman who, fighting bound hands, contrived to roll herself in the rug and wait for darkness and beyond the darkness, for…?

The twins were as good as their word. After watching the shameful eating of the captive's breakfast they produced a roll of wide, white adhesive tape. Mia fought but her struggle was brief. Fancy clutched the tether and by its compulsion on the captive neck forced their unwilling prisoner to stand still and do what they called "behave." With tears of shame and chagrin filling her eyes Mia stood for the fresh indignity of the binding of her elbows. She had never had any previous idea they could be joined, actually touch, but while one girl exercised control, the other wound the tape with tremendous skill. Perhaps they had practiced on each other, so well did they execute the binding. When the adhesive tape had been wound and wound again, the captive found herself more hurt and helpless than she had ever been. It would be not only her elbows but also her shoulders as they were wracked. The elbow binding had other effects on your young, firm body. The distortion caused her taunt breasts to protrude far more than they had ever done before and far more than was natural. Mia looked down at her twin treasures in dismay.

"Look what you've done to me!" she exclaimed angrily. "I'm all… all… well, anyway, I'm all wrong. I'm tied so tight

everything moves. And look at the effect it has on my breasts. Besides, it's hurting."

The twins giggled. "You're tits must like it, look at the way they're sticking out."

Neither blandishment nor threat changed the youngster's minds. Fancy and Angel were enthralled by what they had done to their big sister. The transformation of her torso above the waist had exceeded their expectations. The captive got but one benefit. When the twins departed, hugely amused and chuckling in glee, they forgot to shorten the tether to the tree, Mia could still walk her ten or twenty paces if she so desired. She took these first few steps then stopped in an overwhelming knowledge of helplessness. She struggled angrily against the fresh binding on her elbows, but that was useless, it achieved no more than a fluttering of her stressed shoulders. Miserably she knew she was going to have to come to terms with the two moppets in whatever they desired of her. It seemed impossible they could simply wish to keep her tethered and bound as she was forever. Surely they would get bored! But no doubt the strictures joining her arms now were the first steps in a new, more restrictive captivity. Mia wanted to cry, she was always wanting to cry and she chided herself for weakness. In the end, she returned to her tree, leaned against it and wept. After having endured her new bindings for a couple of hours, she had forgotten Cyril Updike, her previous sta-

tus as head of the house and the visit from Ryan Gentry. Mia had but a single desire: freedom!

Mia's taped elbows were a constant nag. No matter how she turned or twisted they gave her no comfort. Instead their nagging increased to where the bound girl knew she must somehow impress the twins with the urgent need for release. It was while she was twisting and turning in total absorption in trying to find nonexistent comfort that the male voice shattered her world.

"Well, well, something new has been added, I see."

Mia stopped her struggle in shame. She scrambled hastily to her feet and stood there under Ryan Gentry's regard. She was in no mood for pleasantries and wasted no time in turning her back for him to see the new, restrictive bond upon her arms and plead, "Look what they've done to me now! Please, I'm in pain—you can't refuse…"

"I certainly can," Gentry said cheerfully. "Don't you realize how beautiful you are like that? It's a new one on me and I'm certainly going to have to use it with my next model. The effect of those bindings on your arms is out of this world! And look at your breasts!"

"Don't you dare look at my breasts! If you can't look me in the eye, I'm going to turn my back on you."

"It's already turned, dear girl."

Mia bit her lip, she was doing everything wrong. If she failed to handle this man right he might easily go away and leave her bound. But Ryan Gentry spelt freedom. She turned in abject surrender and asked, “What do I have to do or promise you to persuade you to set me free?”

Gentry was an attractive type, early thirties, expensively yet casually dressed. His features were good. The unhappy girl felt she should be able to discern weakness, but none was there, nor was here cruelty. Ryan Gentry was simply amused at having discovered a naked young woman with a good figure in an unorthodox situation. His eyes were laughing as he drank in the helpless femininity so neatly bound and delivered to him free of charge.

Beneath his laughing scrutiny, Mia did the last thing she desired.

She wept.

Chapter 2

Bound

Mia had found the key. As she was gathered into male arms she chided herself for forgetting the male susceptibility to female tears. Had she cried as girls were supposed to cry yesterday she might have avoided all that had happened since. But she snuggled against Ryan Gentry's silk shirt and Harris tweed, liberally dampening both and she felt the security she sometimes felt with Cyril Updike. The smell and feel of men when a girl was in trouble held a magic of their own. When her sobs turned to sniffles, her eyes were dried with a silk handkerchief and she was held by firm fingers on her bare shoulders. Gentry was smiling in complete understanding. "Feeling better now?"

"Yes… I'm… sorry," Mia sniffed and tried to smile. "It's just I've been tied here like this so long and nobody pays any attention…"

Ryan Gentry unblushingly grasped Mia's neck tether and turned her slowly around. With an equal absence of shame he felt the contours of her strained breasts and followed her beauty with his hand until it rested upon the moist, hot orifice between her thighs. With another man it might have been described as "feeling her up" but with Ryan Gentry it was more a reassurance of her being all there and properly accounted for. Knowing she could not get the best

of him, the captive girl stood in meek docility and waited for something to happen.

“I’ve decided to steal you,” her visitor said reflectively. “You’re too good to waste, those two sisters of yours can’t possibly appreciate the jewel they’ve left tied to a tree. Damn it girl! It’s a good thing I’ve found you!”

Mia wanted to agree but she was still tightly tied and Ryan was making no effort at release. He was shamingly absorbed with her as she was. Mia could well believe certain female features were enhanced by the strictures on her arms, perhaps also despair and weariness were depicted in her pose. Perhaps for some purposes a girl needed to be thus bound to meet with the erotic approval of an artist. She was now sure the stories about Ryan Gentry were true. Prudently she kept silent. She was his!

“I’m going to take you exactly as you are, Miss Mia Argent. It’s a bit of a walk and you may change your mind about using me as an instrument of release. If I untie you we may have a tussle on the way back to my place. Much better I treat your tether as a leash and lead you back home. That way there’ll be no use your changing your mind half way. That OK by you?”

Mia said, Yes, it was OK. She knew that were this the first day of her strange captivity she would have said a very firm negative. But she was weary of captivity and sought

any way out she could find. Gentry would have to untie her sometime and that would be her chance!

Keeping her voice even without the tone of hidden reservations, she told him simply, “I can’t bargain, you can do as you wish with me and I’m not going to argue about it. But, please, let’s hurry to where ever you’re going to take me so we can cut away these beastly adhesive bands around my elbows, they’re pure agony.”

They started out with the Male in the lead and the captive girl struggling along behind at the end of her leash, but this was not conducive to conversation and it was not long before they walked side by side, Gentry taking the precaution of a firm grip on the rope around her neck. It hurt Mia outrageously as the motions of their progress made for greater stress upon her bound elbows. But she had ceased to complain about anything, she fell into step beside the man for whom she had no name, either captor or friend, and warily watched where she placed her bare feet. Wanly, she realized a girl would have no need of hobbles upon her ankles; the twigs, the stones, the venom of unseen objects in the grass were hobbles enough. They impeded her progress adequately enough to prevent any escape attempt. Mia, bound and helpless, tried hard to match her captor in polite conversation.

“Wonder what I’m going to do with you?” Gentry inquired with interest. “Could be pretty bad, you know.”

“No, I’m not wondering. And I don’t think it will be bad at all. I think you’re simply taking advantage of a situation but I’m in no position to plead or bargain, I’m thankful to get away from that damned tree.”

“Think of the expressions on those little darling’s faces when they find you gone.”

Mia had been thinking about exactly that but she was an older sister and was feeling concern. “Look, please, Mr. Gentry, let them know, give them a phone call or send them word some way about what you’re doing with me. If you’ll let me, I’ll talk to them on the phone myself, but please don’t leave them worried and uncertain about me. Will you do that, I’ll be ever so grateful.”

“Hmmmm, you want something, I want something. I expect we can effect a trade. Am I walking too fast?” Gentry was walking too fast, but she told him, no, it was OK and she was glad to be able to walk at all. Mia told him how glad she was for the dubious freedom he vouchsafed her, it was little enough… But after a week secured to the tree…!

“I’m assuming you’re a gentleman, Mr. Gentry?” Mia said, hopefully. “I think you’re getting a charge out of having me the way I am. I suppose most men would. So, OK, I’m your prisoner, let’s leave it at that.”

Mia had seen Gentry’s house from the road but they now approached it from the rear, seeking concealment of her

condition. It was simply a country house, the sort of thing rich men possessed and kept in readiness for sudden weekends. Safe within its walls, Gentry wasted no time in peeling the adhesive from her arms. The release was almost frightening in its intensity. For moments Mia stood in mingled pain and thankfulness as the blood resumed its course within her veins. She then ejaculated an absurd, “Ohhhhhh, thank you, Mr. Gentry. Thank you! I can’t tell you how good that is.”

Her captor nodded, partly at her thanks and partly in consideration of the situation as it now sat. “What am I going to do with you?” he asked musingly. “I’ve never owned a girl before, not the way I own you.” He paused to scrutinize her own uncertainties so clearly depicted on her face. “If I untie you completely, you’ll simple run home, won’t you? I suppose I could prevent that, I’m stronger than you, but tussles are a bore. Maybe I should keep you the way you are?”

It was not what Mia wanted but she did not push. Her longing for the freedom of her hands was almost painful in its intensity. She would need to treat this man with care and caution. “I don’t want to stay tied up the way I am,” she said thoughtfully. “I’m sure you understand that. I’ve had enough of it! But I suppose you’re right, if you gave me freedom I’d run. But, look, there’s an easy way out. Let me give you some sort of parole. Look, you want me as a

model so, OK, I'll stay here a reasonable period of time. And I'll do what you tell me. After you've painted your picture, I'll go home."

"That's horseshit! The moment I untie you you'll head for the door. I'd have to use force." Gentry was still seeking ways and means of retaining the services and person of a young woman against her will. "Damned pity I don't have handcuffs or a chain and a padlock, they'd be far and away the best way of looking after you. I don't want to keep you tied and noosed the way you are. I'm the least sadistic man in the world, but when I get a girl I want I suppose I'm a bit ruthless. Think of something else, that parole bit didn't strike me as practical."

Mia sighed, she could see Gentry's point, but she more vividly saw her own. She had a burning longing to return to the twins and impose retribution. And it would be nice to be home again and free of fetters. Doubtfully she suggested, "Well, it would be nice if, to begin with, you took this rope off my neck. Unless you want to keep me tethered in one place, it serves no purpose. If you keep my hands tied the way they are, I'm helpless enough. I can't fight you."

"But you could still run away." Gentry sounded doubtful. His eyes still roved as though they expected her nudity to provide an answer. In sudden inspiration he said, "Look, how about I tie you so you're helpless, then go to the village

and buy whatever chain and padlocks I can find. I don't suppose I can possibly get handcuffs there. And that's a pity."

Mia shrugged despondently. It appeared she was fated to be the perennial prisoner. First the twins, now this man and his unwanted admiration. Her voice was uncaring, "Very well, Mr. Gentry, do whatever you wish. I haven't much to say about it, have I?"

"Well, first off let's get human, you call me Ryan and I call you Mia." He grinned and was suddenly an eager boy. "I suppose you're right, you don't have much of anything to say about it. I'm going to feel a bit of a bastard, but that won't stop me with what I intend."

It was a pleasant house, the sort often referred to by those with money as "a little place in the country." It was not too small and only slightly isolated from the rest of the community, it was visible from the road but had no immediate neighbors. The surrounding was mostly woodland. It was borne upon Mia Argent that, if a man truly desired to paint pictures of her, he could paint a great many in this house before she was discovered. Based on his precautions to date, she had little hope of escape. A studio had been contrived on the upper floor and taken to it, she saw the evidence of this man who held her captive being a true artist. The place was littered with canvasses, mostly finished, plus all the paraphernalia associated with the painting of a pic-

ture. The small dais and the subject matter of the pictures not turned to the wall left little doubt Ryan Gentry dealt in the nude figures of girls and only to a lesser degree in scenery. His work was good, there was no denying it. A phrase flittered through her mind, “In the hands of a master.”

“Are you hungry, Mia, or do you need…?” Ryan was suddenly the solicitous host.”

“Of course, I am and yes, I do…”

He laughed in an amusement Mia did not share. “By Jove, bit of a contretemps, say. You don’t have hands.”

“Have you only just noticed?” Her voice was icy. “I not only do not have hands, I do not have anything.”

“Except the most beautiful body I’ve ever seen. Far too good to be wasted on those twins of yours.” Ryan consulted his watch. “Look, there’s just about time, I’ve got to sprint to the village and get something I can keep you safe with instead of having you tied up like the redskins captive. How’s that?”

Mia shrugged. She was not sure it was good. Uncertainly she repeated, “If you would only take my parole…”

It was done with decision. One moment Mia was standing erect and the next she was seated in a kitchen chair, her tied hands raised over its back and then tied down to the

rungs between its legs. Her feet were dealt with by dragging them up to either side and binding the ankles tight to the convenience of other rungs to each side. Being now experienced in such matter, she knew she could never free herself. She also knew she was blushing at the exposure of her parted thighs as The Male knelt to bind her feet. His face was outrageously close to that private part of her body. Gentry gave her an unexpected kiss on the forehead before speeding on his errand and leaving her alone.

Apart from outrage at her helplessness, Mia's first realization was of a condition worsened rather than helped by the intervention of Ryan Gentry. She shifted against her bonds and knew them unmovable. If her struggles became violent, they might upset her chair, sending her crashing to the floor, and leaving her worse off than before. Bitterly she thought back in regret to the tree in the woodland and her liberal tether. Her hands were still tied as the twins had tied them, the same wire denying any loosening of the knots. Unless Ryan informed them, the twins would be going crazy with anxiety. The bound girl knew she had taken a step in the wrong direction. Her only hope was of Ryan becoming nervous of a charge of kidnapping. Mia supposed she could reasonable consider herself kidnapped.

The girl tied naked to the chair considered possibilities. One day, two, three…? She had no knowledge of how long it took to paint a naked girl. Having gone to this trouble, it

was unlikely Ryan would be satisfied with a single picture. He would want a reward equal to his risk. She found it impossible to hate his boyish exuberance and was annoyed by being flattered by his articulate admiration. If it had come about differently she might well have been anticipating her posing for an artist with pleasurable excitement. It was hard to know why being an artist gave a man license to look at naked girls, but it was an ancient privilege from which she gained comfort and release from guilt. Mia made some further futile struggles then relaxed into the resignation of awaiting her captor's return. From her roped neck the familiar tether fell away to make a loop upon the floor.

It was Mia's first experience of being immovably bound. She could turn and twist to her heart's content, but was basically forced to sit. Her bound hands were pulled down tightly to drag her armpits hard against the chair's back. Her feet were bent up and bound in such accurate perfection she found herself wondering if Ryan Gentry gained such expertise by having tied up his models. The prisoner sat and listened to the quaint small sounds all old houses make. The place had atmosphere, the studio in which she sat was filled with light and would undeniably be described as a cheerful room. If there were dark basements down below, Ryan had failed to mention them. If only the twins knew where she was…!

“Sorry I took so long.” Ryan dumped a heavy, metallic bag on the floor. “Had to go to two places. That’s the nice thing about England, if one village doesn’t have a thing, the next one will.” He dumped his purchases upon the floor, obviously pleased with them. “This will be a bit crude, but it will get us by until I can get something a bit more modern.”

Mia surveyed the items intended for her restrain with shrinking dismay. Rope was one thing but these shining links of chain, a chain by no means light or ladylike, did nothing to encourage hope, even less the padlocks. Her features spoke more eloquently than words but failed to dampen boyish enthusiasm. “There’s quite a few of these padlocks but I made sure they all work from the same single key. It will help no end in looking after you. Save all the fumbling. Look, I know you must be sick of that chair, I’ll go right to work.”

First her feet. They were untied from the chair but then joined by a length of chain, obviously cut to order, each end wrapped around one ankle and a padlock shut upon the links to allow a span of fifteen inches. It would make walking possible but she would neither kick or run. Mia found herself blushing, it was like being fitted for intimate garments by a man. In fact that was exactly what Ryan Gentry was doing. The rope tugging down her bound wrists, to enable Mia to stand erect. With pause a chain passed around her waist to be pulled snug and locked in a

belt of metal links. But before its padlock snapped a large metal ring had been inserted within the belt at Mia's back. This ring was now threaded with more chain while her captor anxiously inquired, "Look, I'm going to free your hand. I hope you'll be sensible?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake don't be so damned polite! Get on with what you have to do. I hate every bit of it, so there's no use asking if I approve."

"Thought you might like to rub your wrists a bit, they've been tied a long time. You can take a minute if you want."

Mia wanted to badly but knew she would feel ridiculous under his laughing eyes. Irritably she retorted, "Never-mind. Do what you must."

Links of metal now replaced the bit of cord upon her wrists, they were not drawn together but simply joined by a span similar to that upon her ankles. Ryan stood back to admire. "Neat idea that, huh? Kind of gives you one free hand at a time, you can choose which one."

Mia would have liked to refuse but she was curious. With one fettered hand she reached to scratch her nose, an act which drew her other hand tight against the ring within her belt. Then grasped its ingenuity, one fettered hand would have a limited freedom at the expense of the other. She said a stiff, uncompromising, "Thank you, Mr. Gentry, I

suppose you mean well but I find this utterly degrading. I'd be obliged if you would take the rope from my neck."

Ryan stepped back. He was quite simply enjoying her. He reached to finger the rope circlet upon Mia's neck while she stood stiffly and flushing to the indignity of what he had done to her. He appeared to be a man who reached decisions with easy. "No, the rope stays. It's possible I'll want to tether you myself." He chuckled mischievously. "Wear it with pride."

As the chained girl walked, under her captor's guidance to the bathroom and then the kitchen, she could not believe it had ever been possible to be other than awkward, clumsy and feel ridiculous in the metal restraints. Each step she took was snubbed as though in unspoken admonition against escape. Both chain and padlocks rattled gayly with every motion. Her hands slid back and forth against each other as she allowed them to hang passive at her side. Silently Mia Argent made a bitter resolution that the twins and this ridiculous man would pay heavily for this humiliation.

Mia was permitted to sit while her cheerful companion who held the key to her chains busied himself with food and drink. It was a bachelor kitchen with sink and drain board filled with incrusted plates and soiled glasses. She was told, almost as a privilege, that when they had eaten she could wash these relics of this and other meals.

“Don’t be ridiculous, I can’t possibly wash dishes with one hand and I’m certainly not going to do your dirty work.”

“You will, love, you will. You’ll be surprised at all the things you’ll do. If you talk nicely I may dry them for you but you’ll do the washing.”

The captive girl swallowed angry words. She was not sure of Ryan, it would be best to feel her way cautiously. She ate and drank and enjoyed everything except the constant clink and rattle of chain and padlock. It was hard to believe this was actually happening.

“Would you give me some idea of your intentions for me?” she asked when they were done.

“I can use you for two or three weeks,” Ryan said thoughtfully. “It’s a bore having to keep you chained but I simply won’t trust you. That parole thing is for the birds.”

“Very well then, but will you let me phone the twins, if we don’t they’re certain to go to the police?”

“Sure, why not. I won’t phone them but you will. Tell them you traded two or three weeks of your time for freedom.”

“But I’m not free!”

“They won’t know that, will they?” Ryan laughed away her dilemma. “If you believe they’re becoming panicky, why not have them visit. I’ll permit that.”

“I’ll bet you will! You’d make them prisoner, too. And then you’d have all three of us.”

But it was far easier than Mia had supposed. After breathless questions, they were content to listen. The twins had always cherished an erotic curiosity about the painter and his reputation. Listening to the calm voice of their sister they were reassured but perceptive of discrepancy. “But, darling, this absolutely is not You. You’d never do a thing like you’re saying. There has to be something wrong?”

Mia knew herself trapped. She could tell her younger sisters to go to the police and rescue her from Ryan Gentry’s chains. But she could well imagine the publicity, the raised eyebrows, the doubt in which her story would be heard. It would be far better for her to work out the sentence Gentry had imposed. Instead, she offered her captor’s own suggestion. “But, darlings, you can come and visit me if you want, just to make sure I’m all right and stop your worrying.” With big-sister severity she added, “This whole thing is your fault, you know. If you hadn’t done what you did to me…”

Flushed and uneasy about her sisters, Mia now found herself confronted by the contents of the sink and by her master’s questioning eye.

“You can do you dishes yourself,” she said flatly with firm hostility. “I’m no housemaid and it’s not possible anyway.”

“You will go to the sink now and commence your work, Mia. If you don’t I shall place you on your back on the kitchen floor here and rape you on the spot. I suggest you do not quibble.”

Mia stared aghast. Here it was, the male/female confrontation, the act implicit in her chains. But her retort was instant, “You can’t. I don’t think you would anyway but it’s not possible the way you’ve chained my feet.” She knew herself one huge blush.

“Come, come, are you that inexperienced? Think of it, dear girl, that chain won’t hinder a thing.”

She was being laughed at. When she thought of the mechanics of the act proposed she knew was right. She could easily be raped and would remain helpless throughout. Whether Ryan Gentry would be that brutal she could only guess. But it was a chance she was not prepared to take. Without another word other than an angry sniff she went to the sink and reached her one free arm towards the tap.

Mia surprised herself, the impossible became possible. One by one she disposed of Ryan’s dishes while her mind was aflame with speculation. Surely he would not do it. Surely he would have the decency to leave her involute while he painted his pictures. But she knew the thought of being used by The Male had been present in her mind from the being. It was nakedness by which she became doubly vul-

nerable. In a placating tone, she asked the man who was drying as she washed, “There’s no need for me to be naked like this, I’m sure you’ve got things to cover me up.”

“You don’t need them. I’m an artist, remember? You’re not my first naked girl.”

“At least a pair of panties, or something I can drape over my hips?”

“No!” It was a most decisive negative.

Her week attached to the tree had inured Mia to nudity. She had now spent sufficient time in the possession of Ryan Gentry to erode normal sensibilities about being bare in the presence of the male. Mia accepted what she must but did so with ill grace.

“So where do I go from here?” she asked aggressively.

“We go to work, that’s what we do. There’s a bow or two of decent light left.” There was a businesslike air about him now. “But I wish you’d look a bit happier. You’ve been a regular thundercloud ever since I got you those chains. I would have thought you’d have been grateful.”

“I’ve been kidnapped. What have I to be grateful about? On top of being abducted, I’m also chained like a slave in ancient Rome. Good gosh…!”

“That’s the way I’ll paint you, the naked slave-girl on the block. I don’t have to include the padlock and I’ll have to paint in wristlets and anklets. But the rest of you is perfect.” Ryan gathered up the rope leash and tugged at the reluctant neck. “Come on.”

It was not until their return to the studio the unwilling slave-girl made a stand. Pushed up on the dais she felt twice naked and rebelled. “You surely don’t think I’m going to stand here in this condition while you ogle me all day. I know I can’t run or fight but I’m damned if I’ll do that.”

Gentry was setting up a fresh canvass and spared only a cocked eyebrow at his perturbed model. “OK, love, so what are you going to do?” he asked politely.

Mia longed to scream, longed to do anything or be anywhere than where she was. Gentry had helped her up to the platform where she stood, to retreat would probably entail stumbling and falling while trying to get down. She felt innocent and isolated, angry and impotent. She turned around to present her back. “There, that’s what I think of you and your painting.”

“Very nice, sweetheart, we’ll get to that view when we finish the first. You can stand that way if you wish, I have a few things to do.”

It was hopeless! Mia knew she could do nothing right. She was trapped and might as well make the best of it. She

turned back to face the artist busy with his paints. Thoughts of the absurdity of her condition forced a smile she hoped he would not see. If only they were doing this for fun, something between friends, instead of her playing the role of captive slave maiden in undisputable reality.

“That’s better,” Gentry nodded approvingly. “Now, if you won’t mind sort of moving around. Let the motions flow and I’ll grab the one I want. When I say “stop” you freeze.”

Why not! She was stuck with it, there was no escape. If she could please Gentry, he might lower his guard, give her a bit of freedom. Mia smiled a small, false smile and did as she was told. Her shocked query was instant, “Look, you’re not going to paint my… my… Oh, damn, you’re not going to paint my thing down there, are you?”

“Not specifically, my pet. I don’t think a full canvass of a twat could sell. But, of course, I’m going to paint it, it’s a part of the ensemble. Don’t you dare cross your legs.”

Surprisingly, Gentry chose a moment when his model was cupping her breasts in fettered hands and glaring at him wryly in suspicion, her shackled legs ready for a leap they could not make. Mia froze obediently to his “hold it” and realized, with some chagrin, she had ceased to be a naked girl subject to instant violation and had become instead the slave-girl of ancient days, responsive to an artist’s whim. Despite herself she became interested.

While Gentry worked, his subject's mind was busy with escape. It seemed inconceivable she could be held any length of time. A day or two perhaps…! Then, if the twins made enough fuss… Surely Gentry would come to his senses and realize the hazard of what he was doing, he had stolen a girl and there were laws…!

Tentatively she asked, "You said something about handcuffs and such like that. Are you really going to get them?"

His reply was cheery, "Don't you like what you've got on, my pet? They'll hold you safe."

"These chains you've got on me and the beastly padlocks you've got on me are horrible. They're not the least bit feminine. They belong on some huge man who's seven feet tall."

"Looks OK to me, sweetheart. This is going to be a smashing picture, I can feel it. You're heaven's gift to any artist. I'm going to make you famous."

"I don't want to be famous—and naked!"

"You'll get over that. They all do. Stick your chest out another inch."

Gentry was impossible. Fixed as she was now, Mia knew she could not best him, he held all the cards and made all the rules. Once more she asked, "About those handcuffs…?"

“Yeah, I’ll get them, I’ll get the most expensive set I can find, but you won’t like them. I know what you’re thinking. You’ve got the notion you can slip out of them, that they’re made for big men and not beautiful girls.” He chuckled, preoccupied, “You’ll have a chance to find out.”

It was an exhausting two hours before Ryan Gentry called a halt, complaining of fading light. Mia was tired and grateful of his helping hand to get her back on the floor. The question Ryan asked then was one she had debated with herself. “What about sleeping? Do you want to be with me in my bed? Or maybe on the floor? I suppose I could give you your own room, but you’ll be lonely.”

“Thank you. I’ll be lonely.” Mia sniffed, “Isn’t it a bit early to be putting me to bed?”

“We could have a nightcap in the lounge, but I warn you, I’m an early raiser when I’ve got a picture on the block. You’ll not lay abed sleeping.” He gathered the coils of her rope tether. “This way, come along.”

Perhaps it was the release of emotion or Ryan’s casual manner, but for the first time the chained girl was aware of curiosity in her condition and a certain generation of warmth in her belly from the genuine erotism of what Gentry was doing with her. There was no pain, no threats, she was simply his prisoner and ironed to prevent escape. Everything fell into place and seemed natural. Mia hoped she

could sustain the mood for the duration of her sentence. Even when Ryan tossed the coils of her tether to the rug and said abruptly, “There’s the bar, you can mix the drinks, damned it, what does a man have a slave-girl for!”

She was unperturbed. They were playing a game and if she could score points…

She mixed him his scotch and soda and delivered it to him before dealing with her own libation. She was momentary taken back by his abrupt demand, “Serve it kneeling. You know the pose. Maybe I’ll get a picture out of it.”

“I can’t possibly, I’ll fall on the way down.”

“Try it.”

Mia was young, her motions were fluid, it was easier than she had supposed. Ryan Gentry took the glass, nodding approval. She clinked her way back to the bar. Returning with her drink she asked mischievously, “Do I sip this kneeling at the feet of my master?”

It was the right cord. Goodwill flowed from Gentry in a wave she could positively feel. They had found their wavelength and if she could play the cards without fumbling, there might be hope. If she could buy release by a brief surrender of her body, she would do so. The chained girl knelt with surprising grace then sat back upon her heels, sipped

her drink and gazed up coyly for the approval of her lord. This could be fun!

“Why didn’t you call upon me when I first moved into the district?” Gentry inquired. “I thought this was de rigueur with county people. All the old buffers came for their glass of sherry.”

“Your reputation kept me away. Judging from what I’ve seen and what you’re doing with me, your reputation is well earned.”

Ryan laughed, “It’s just sour grapes, sweetheart, they hate to see a man possess girls. And I’ve had a fair number staying with me on and off since I moved in. Damn it, that’s the way I make my living—selling the pictures, of course, not the girls.”

“Don’t tell me you’ve kept other girls in chains the way you’re keeping me!”

“If I had, I’d be better equipped to look after you, sweetheart. No, they came of their own free will either because they liked me or wanted money. You’d spread your legs, you know, if I offered enough.” He gazed down derisively. “But those chains you’re wearing save me a lot of money. You can’t argue.” He paused again as if to read her mind. “How does that make you feel?”

Mia was loath to tell. She knew it the most sensuous moment of her life. She was totally owned. She only need move a hand or a leg to reassure herself on this point. She was kneeling humbly before a man who could do as he pleased with her. She could refuse him nothing. Engulfed in a flood of female heat, she managed to articulate, “It makes me feel exactly the way you are supposing. I’m so terribly ashamed, you should be, too.”

“Supposing at the end of two or three weeks I wish to keep you permanently, what then?”

“If a man wants to keep a girl all her life, he usually asks her to marry him.”

“Oh, well, we are making progress! Are you proposing to me?”

“No, I’m not! I’m just stating a fact. Ryan, you’re impossible. You’ve got me naked and chained and expecting a rape and you ask academic questions. If it would be any help, I’d like you to unlock these chains and let me go home.”

Ryan laughed at her earnestness, “I suspect you’re a good girl at heart, as good as any girl ever is. Here, fill my glass again and forget about going home. You’re home right now.”

Mia hastened to obey. She made a musical path to the bar and back. She knelt in approved fashion, she received gra-

cious permission to pour another and she did but not without wondering…!

“I may be a right royal bastard when it comes to pretty girls,” Ryan informed her over his glass. “I’ll tell you straight, if I can get those two little sisters of yours into my power, I’ll do so.” Observing her stricken features, he added, “I wouldn’t hurt the pretty little darlings but I’ll add them to my stable same as I’ve got you. I’m sure we’d come to some sort of working agreement or arrangement.”

Mia said nothing, she was torn between a wish to see the twins chained as she was chained and a fear of what Ryan might do to them. “I’ve told you before,” she pointed out reasonably, “you should consider the hazard you run with the police. If they get on your tail, there’s nothing I or the twins could say or do that would save you from going to prison. Please leave the girls alone. If they do come to visit, to make sure I’m still alive, treat them as visitors. I’ll find some way to explain why you keep me chained.”

“You’re not a virgin, are you?” He sounded anxious.

“No, but the girls are. Leave them alone.”

“I may use you instead?”

Mia stared the dominant male squarely in the eye to say, unhappily, “OK, let’s be done with pretense. You can violate my sex to your heart’s content, I know that, but the twins

don't know it, they can only guess. Tell them nothing. Surely using me should be enough!"

"My, my, the big sister and mother hen combined! I'd have supposed, after the way they treated you, you'd be glad to get a bit of your own back?"

"Never mind, just leave them alone. Do whatever you wish with me." She gave a bit of a chuckle. "I know this sounds silly because I can't give you permission to do anything, you already have me, you don't need permission. I don't want to be violated, I want to walk out of here as intact as when I came. Whatever happens to me is up to you."

Bedtime was simple. Once more the tether was gathered up and Mia was led to a surprisingly pleasant room devoid of disorder. The rope from her neck was threaded through the lower rail of the bed and its far end tied in a place she could not reach. That looked after that. There was a bathroom she could reach and that looked after that, too. She received a big-brotherly kiss and was left alone to hear the snap of the lock from outside. She did not bother to test the knob nor strive to unfasten the rope. She knew herself a prisoner and that, also, was that. Mia Argent surprised herself by laying down and falling fast asleep.

They breakfasted earlier than Mia would have wished, but Gentry desired to obtain her more humane restraints and this necessitated a trip to London. If he was to paint today,

he must hurry. He tethered his captive so she could do the chores without hope of escape and hurried on his way.

An hour later there was a knock on the door.

At the end of her tether, Mia could view the front doorstep from a bay window she could not reach, nor could she approach the front door itself, her tether had been artfully tied to deny her contact with any door or any window. But, watching her two sisters waiting expectantly, she cried, “Help! Help! I’m here inside.”

They must have heard. She saw their startled glance and in an effort to help, sought ways and means to let them in. She found an ornamental vase from the mantle and hurled it with all her might of a single chained hand at the window. The glass shattered with a truly horrific noise and a moment later two youthful female faces looked within.

“Kick away the glass from the edges, then crawl in,” Mia instructed desperately. “Come along darlings, we’ve got it made, we really have.”

Fancy and Angel were nothing if not enterprising. A moment later they stood inside the room surveying their big sister with a mixture of alarm and approval. They were breathless in admiration. “Oh, darling, how sweet you look! Did a man…?”

“Yes, he did. But never mind that, get me out of here quick!”

“But, darling, couldn’t we look around a bit? He isn’t here, is he?”

“No, he isn’t but he will be. And if he finds you, you’ll end up the same as I am. For goodness sake, don’t quibble.”

The twins looked at each other and at her. Mia was accustomed to their thinking in unison without words. “I know what you’re thinking,” she told them irritably. “But you wouldn’t like it one little bit. I’m so damned helpless!”

“So we noticed, darling, you’re simply scrumptious. Those chains are so clever. Can you walk back home in them and with nothing on?”

“I walked here with nothing on, so I can walk back. With the chains it will be a little slower, that’s all.”

“But we won’t have a key, darling?”

“I don’t care, get me out of here and get me out of here quick if you don’t want to end up the same as I am.” Mia’s urgency was infectious. The girls picked up her tether giggling hugely and led her to the front door which opened easily from within. By skirting the traveled paths, they got back home safely in the space of an hour of difficult going. Once their own door closed behind them, they stood within

the spacious hallway to survey their sister's fresh predicament.

"You can't get loose, can you, darling?"

"No, I can't. And you can't get me loose either. The best thing is for one of you to get away to the village real quick and buy a hack saw and some blades."

Angel and Fancy appeared not to hear. They gazed at her with young, speculative eyes filled with mischieve, their argument specious. "But, darling, if we let you loose you'll be terribly mean to us. We had you prisoner, or have you forgotten?"

Mia's heart sank. But it was better to be prisoner to her sisters than to a man she did not know. Gentry might be fun in his own way, but he was an uncertain quantity. She knew the twins—sooner or later they would have to return her freedom. Mia could tell from their amused expressions that they had no intention of giving it to her now. Irritably she exclaimed, "Well, run along. If they don't have a hack saw or blades, I seem to remember hearing about a thing called a bolt cutter. Don't just stand there."

"But we like having you prisoner, darling! We think the way you're fixed now is really wonderful. We're wondering if we shouldn't just leave you this way."

“Don’t be so damned mean! I don’t want to be left this way. A man locked these things on me and so long as I wear them it’s as if he were in the room. Look, if you love me at all, you’ll get rid of them. I don’t care a bit what you do to me otherwise. You can tie me up to your heart’s content, but for heaven’s sake get rid of these chains.”

They reached decision, they too were female, they could sense and understand their sister’s distress. But before going farther there was a question they must ask.

“Darling, did he… do… well… you know what? We mean, did he…?”

“No, he didn’t. If you want to know about him, you’ll have to unchain me then I’ll tell you about him. The guy’s a mystery. He said he wanted to paint me and he actually got a picture started…”

“OK, OK!” Angel departed in a hurry. Fancy said, “We do love you so much, darling. Our pussies curled up every day when we had you tethered to the tree. Would you mind very much if we put you back there?”

“I don’t care! I just don’t care!” Mia said angrily. “I don’t see why you have to keep me prisoner, if it pleases some stupid notion in your minds, well go ahead. I’m not going to fight about anything, I’m so damned glad to be home.”

Mia's declaration was the unlocking of a door. Fancy could not do enough. The chained girl was bathed and fed and made a fuss of. There was hot coffee and loving arms but there was also the silky voice, "Darling, you do understand, don't you. It's so gorgeous having you our prisoner. We've talked about it a lot and we want to keep you always. I don't suppose we can but we want to try. I know we can't keep you tied out to the tree forever, but there's all sorts of ways we can prevent you escaping. Just before that man stole you from us, we had bought the loveliest things."

Mia watched the unpacking of the heavy box in a total certainty of what she was about to see. There were chrome handcuffs and exquisite black handcuffs in a matte finish. There were what she supposed would be called "leg irons" and a great deal of chains. In addition there was an assortment of collars, presumably for her neck, some were beautiful, others sent a shiver up her spine. She wondered if ever before a girl her age had been thus dragged from the mundane into a world of fantasy.

"Everything will be gorgeously comfortable for you, darling," Fancy said with ardent concern. "But you'll never get free, not ever! Isn't it wonderful!"

Mia supposed it was indeed wonderful, but her mind was busy with thoughts of escape. Whether she was held captive by Ryan Gentry or her two sisters mattered little, what she desired most of all was freedom. If freedom must be

obtained by trickery and deceit, she would use cheating and trickery unblushingly. Looking at Fancy now she indulged herself with the satisfying vision of the younger girl in the bondage of what the box displayed. But she sighed and said, matter-of-factly, “I don’t suppose this man Gentry will leave us alone. He enjoyed having me his prisoner, he’ll want me back. He wants you too. Don’t give him the faintest chance and if you must, go to the police. Promise?”

“Of course, I promise.” Fancy nibbled her elder sister’s nipples as though to cement a pack. “Darling, Angel and I have talked about you a lot. We’ve talked about training you so you’ll be absolutely humble and obedient always. Is that too terrible?”

“I’m not going to say a thing, you’ll hold it against me. No girl wants to be a prisoner and you know that without me saying it. I think you’re being terribly unkind but I can’t do a thing about it.”

“We were thinking of getting a man to do, you know what, to you. Would you be terribly angry?”

“That’s a rotten thing to do to your sister and I don’t see what good it would do, it wouldn’t prove a thing.”

“But we could watch,” Fancy’s voice was breathless.

“If you introduce a man into this setup, he’s not going to be satisfied with just roe. He’s going to turn his attentions to you, too. Really, Fancy, I’m ashamed of you.”

It was a breathless Angel who returned with tools. Genuinely unconcerned, but amused by their earnestness, Mia watched her younger sisters saw away at the padlocked link on one of her ankles. When it fell away in two separate parts, the band of links was immediately replaced by one of the shining cuffs of their new leg irons. The same process was repeated with her other foot. The twins were cautious, aware of her superior strength. They did nothing without debate.

“I think we should hold her real tight so she can’t jump us when her hands are free.”

“Put her against the post in the basement room and tie her tether to it. That way she won’t have a chance.”

It was done. After much labor, Ryan’s work of art fell from both Mia’s wrists and from her waist. But the noose was tight upon her neck and after the handcuffs had clicked shut upon her wrists at her back, the twins availed themselves of her helplessness to play with her in outrageous ways until she cried aloud.

“Stop it! Stop it! You know what you’re doing to me, you shouldn’t, you know you shouldn’t. If you keep on like this, I’m going to… ohhhhh! Oh, damn!”

The twins brought their big sister to climax again and again as though in a clinical study. She could not resist either the clutch of steel or the evoked responses within her sex. What the twins lacked in experience they rapidly learned until their sister realized their control and ceased to fight. She belonged to them and that was the end of that.

That night Mia slept in her own bed, but her hands were cuffed behind her back, her feet wore the sliver leg irons and the familiar rope still tethered her in a manner she could not reach. Testing her bonds when she was alone, Mia realized her plight was much the same as on the previous evening. But at least the twins sexual antics were contrived, they were not the hard thrust of a male phallus with all its hazards, for this she was thankful.

The twins, when unsupervised, tended to sleep late. Their big sister had ample time in which to consider her captive. It was frightening to know she could be kept exactly as she was indefinitely. She could not deal with chrome restraints purchased commercially for control of male convicts, that inhibited her movements with miraculous ease and were impossible to escape. She tugged and twisted but these motions were no more than an expression of resentment against control.

At breakfast Mia was forgiven the degrading bowel upon the floor. Instead, she sat between her bright eyed sisters who took turns feeding her and lifting the coffee cup to her

lips. The younger girls possessed that facility of close siblings of knowing each other's thoughts without need of utterance. Unfortunately they knew most of Mia's, too. She would never be able to hide much from them. They paid little attention to her sulky silence but bubbled over in their own delight.

"Just think of all the famous prisoners, darling. There was that one of some famous poet's, 'The Prisoner of Chillon,' and then there was that Anthony Hope's story, 'The Prisoner of Zenda,' and I'm sure there were lots more. Now we can call you 'The Prisoner of Dovecove Cottage.'"

"You can call me a fool for ever letting this happen."

"You look lovely when you pout, darling, don't stop. Don't you feel all excited about starting your lovely new life?"

"No, I don't."

"We could have left you in the villain's power, y'know," Angel giggled happily. "I wonder what the Mr. Gentry is thinking now? I bet he's sorry he didn't do that-that thing, you know the one, while he had you. Do you think he'll guess you're back with us?"

"Of course, he will. And you'd better watch for him. Look, you little idiots, if you insist on keeping me helpless like this, it's going to be you who's going to have to deal with

him. He's had a taste of something he likes and he's not going to give it up easily."

"Taste of you, darling? How simply gorgeous!"

"He started a picture of me in those chains you saw and you can't expect him to not want to finish it. The guy's really an artist and you best not judge him by ordinary standards. Look, surely you can let me have my hand?"

Mia's plead was drowned by Fancy. "We've been talking about you, darling and what we can do with you. We've come up with the most scrumptious idea. We'll take off the leg irons but we'll leave your hands behind your back like they are and we'll take you over to Mr. Gentry's place real early in the morning and we'll lock you with a real heavy chain and a great big padlock to one of the trees in his garden. Then we'll hide and watch. When he starts on the job of getting you free we'll sort of casually walk back and confess we did it for a joke. Then we bring you home."

Mia was shocked by such blind optimism. "You're both crazy. Don't you realize the first thing Gentry would do is grab you. He can handle the two of you easily, so don't kid yourselves. I'd have to stand and watch the way you've made me helpless. And you have to remember all three of us would be trespassing on Gentry's property. Forget it!"

The twin's ardor was only momentarily dampened. "It would a bit of a bore, darling, if we don't do things with

you. We could leave you just the way you are and let you wander around the house and I expect we will for a while. But all three of us are going to need a bit of spice." They eyed her brightly, "Suppose we fasten you the way you were out there in the woods to that tree. But this time it will be with a chain and padlock instead of rope and of course, you'll be handcuffed, you'll be a pretty package ready for delivery. Think how flustered that Mr. Gentry will be when he finds you and there's not a thing he can do."

"He'd think of something, he's a man and they know about such things. Look, if you want to play silly games like that, at least allow me clothes."

"Don't be silly, Mia dear, I'm sure you know you'll probably never wear clothes again."

It was all silly and hopeless but terribly real. But Mia accepted her captivity with the best grace she could. The youngsters were drunk with power and there was no point in provoking them into worse inflections than she now bore. There had already been hints about "lovely whippy canes" and a "dark, dark room in the basement."

Mia did not believe the twins would go to such lengths but could not be sure. The only defense she could think of was to be so passively obedient the twins would become bored and let her loose and pick up the thread of their former

lives. Mia kept assuring herself it was only a couple of weeks since she had first been fastened to the tree. It was no great span of time. Something would happen.

Fate moved slowly. For four days Mia was compelled into more shames and humiliation than she would every have dreamed possible. The twins were infantile in invention and continued to hint at dark possibilities for disobedience. Mia Argent knelt, she crawled, she ate demeaningly from a plate upon the floor, she said “Yes, Miss” and “No, Miss” in bitter acceptance of something she could not change. The handcuffs and leg irons barred thoughts of liberty. The twins kept the keys well hidden and their elder sister found no argument by which they might be used. If Fancy and Angel were going to become bored with their prisoner, they showed no sign.

The fourth day brought the knock on the door.

Mia was in her bedroom, Angel in the kitchen. It was Fancy who answered the summons. A moment later there was a horrified cry from help, sounds of a scuffle, then silence. In fearful premonition, Mia went to the door and started the slow, shackled progress down the stairs. She had long since discovered it easier and safer to slitter on her bottom in a series of wiggles rather than walk down the stairs. She heard Angel’s running steps, an exclamation, then the sounds as before. By the time she reached the hallway the two girls were prisoners and Ryan Gentry was beaming in

satisfied accomplishment. He noted Mia's restraints and said, chidingly, "That's what I was going to get you if you'd stuck around. They suit you, you look charming."

"Mia, tell this idiot to let us loose," Fancy demanded.

"Look what he's done, I'm going to call the police," added Angel in heated pink-cheeked resolution.

Despite dismay and apprehension, Mia wanted to look. Gentry had come prepared. The twins sprawled upon the floor each with their right hand handcuffed to their left ankle. Handling them one at a time, Gentry's task had been simple. Neither girl had had a chance. There were now three forlorn maidens dependent upon the single male.

"You shouldn't have opened that door, y'know," Ryan shook his head as though disapproving of feminine intelligence. "You might have known I'd come a calling. I want to finish that picture."

The twins were busy with their handcuffs. From somewhere Ryan must have obtained an extra small size. The wrists of Angel and Fancy were slender indeed but the steel circlets were snug and tight against their disbelieving struggles. It was not easy for their elder sister to repress a smile. Instead, she said to Gentry, "Let them go. You mustn't take them prisoner." Her voice trailed away expectantly, "I suppose that's what you're going to do with me?"

“That’s right, love, you’ve got the idea. That picture’s on the stocks, waiting for us and there’ll still be some light left. What I’m going to do with these little moppets will do them a world of good.”

“But you can’t possibly drag all three of us across the fields the way you dragged me!”

“Don’t intend to, love. I brought the little van. I simply pop all three of you inside and drive home in triumph.”

“We refuse to go. The idea is unthinkable. You’re behaving like a mad man. You can’t possibly collect girls the way you would stamps.”

“Try me,” Ryan said with a sniff, as though the scent of female indignation was a costly perfume. “I’ll have the three of you over there in no time. Look at the way these two little so and so’s are glaring at me. They need a lesson or two and by George, they’ll get them!”

“Drop dead,” said Fancy.

“You’re out of your tree,” Angel added with emphasis.

“See what I mean.” Gentry invited Mia’s attention to her sisters. “I’ll have them polishing my shoes with their tongues before I’m through with them.”

It happened swiftly. Ryan took the twins first. By the time he led Mia to her fate, he had one on each side of the van

on narrow benches. Their previously free hands were now handcuffed to the sides, this with the joining of wrist and ankle below imposed total helplessness. Each was busy twisting and tugging and demanding of their elder sister, “Can’t you make him do something. Can’t you make him stop. Look what he’s done to us!”

Mia was lifted to the seat beside the wheel. She supposed it an honor. She made only one brief communication to her fellow captives. Turning back to look over her shoulder, she said sharply, “Keep still, stop your whining. I’m as helpless as you are. And if you hadn’t opened that door…”

“That’s my girl!” Gentry said approvingly as he started the motor. “Three chains of command, me, you and those two little moppets. I’m looking forward to attending to their backsides.”

Mia’s hands and feet had been joined so long that she had become accustomed to the steel restraints. She sat easily beside the driver and now stole a sideways glance at his self-satisfied grin. First the twins and then Gentry, had so conditioned her to shackled subservience that she could see humor in their plight. But Gentry was still an unknown quantity. He might be kind or cruel. He had spoken of holding her captive for two or three weeks. But if he could hold all three of them that long, there was nothing stopping him from confining them as long as he liked.

In sudden panic she said, “But Dovecove Cottage? What about it, we’ve left it empty?”

“Not to worry, love, we’ll take a run over there every day or so and check things out. If you’re a good girl, I’ll take you with me. You don’t mind riding like this, do you?”

“You know I have no choice. Look, Ryan Gentry, you’re playing with fire, the police are bound to come looking for us.”

“We’ve gone through all that before, love. Three is no different than one. The pictures I’m going to paint…!”

“I’ve spoiled you by standing still that time,” Mia said angrily. “I’ll warn you now, Fancy and Angel won’t stand still for you at all. You’ll never get their cooperation.”

“They will if I warm their little rumps.”

Mia found the thought of pink and scarlet girl cheeks appealing. She felt ashamed but nonetheless, if Gentry did what he said, it was no more than they deserved. If he knew when to stop…

“Don’t suppose they’ve ever had a thrashing in their life, huh?”

“Of course not. Girls are not thrashed these days like dogs.”

“More’s the pity. Might thrash you too if you put on that haughty princess act you try to freeze me with. How’s that grab you?”

Mia’s blush was his answer. Mia was certain he was capable of making good his threat. She ignored the hazard and returned to her favorite topic. “It’s beastly to keep me handcuffed and leg-ironed like I am now. Can’t we come to some other arrangement?”

“No, we can’t. I noticed the girls took the rope off your neck?”

“Yes, they did, it kept getting in the way and it wasn’t doing any good anyhow. I tell you straight, Ryan Gentry, I’m getting sick of being fastened like a wild animal,” Mia said disdainfully. “Look, I’ll pose for your picture, I promise I will and you don’t need to chain or tie me in any way, I’ll stand up on your dais and strike any pose you want. If you’ll just let the twins go home. What you’ve done to them already had taught them a lesson.”

She got no answer. She guessed it would be negative anyway. Mia wiggled against the handcuffed to turn and view her sisters. They had stopped struggling and now sat, one hand chained against the side of the van, the other to their ankle. They were staring at each other in a sullen communion of alarm. What they had so gaily and thoughtlessly in-

flicted upon their sister was not reality for them. Mia could guess their thoughts were sober.

It was all so easy, so quick, so simple as to be beyond believing. Gentry wasted no time. On arrival he picked up the girls, one at a time and took them away. They would not be difficult to imprison or control. Their freedom had vanished with the opening of the door of Dovecove Cottage. Within a matter of minutes Mia found herself standing on the dais in the studio watching her captor go through the artist's motions of painting a naked girl. Ryan was as unconcerned as if he had picked up the week's groceries instead of three live female prisoners.

"The difference in your chains doesn't matter," he explained thoughtfully. "I can paint in any chains that seem suitable to your condition. It's the girl that counts. Like I said, you're absolutely perfect for this job."

There was little to say, it had happened before. Mia knew herself back at square one with the addition of the twins somewhere around the house.

Bluntly she asked, "What are you going to do to my sisters?"

Gentry took time to use his brush thoughtfully. "Got the little darlings in a nice, small bare room in the same spot they were in the van. One hand cuffed to the wall, the other to their ankle. I'll bet they're talking their little heads off

and wondering about you and me. Forget them and hold that pose."

Mia found herself in the grip of a strange inevitability, as though she had always been destined to stand here in this condition. In two weeks of captivity, freedom had become too nebulous. It was no longer the reality, what was real was the handcuffs on her wrists and the leg irons on her ankles, they governed her whole existence now. They dictated obedience to this insouciant male. Mia Argent thought of freedom now only as an abstract improbability. She said to herself that Gentry would be a fool to free her of either of her bonds, they held her beautifully for his convenience.

Gentry's absorption with his painting robbed the erotic situation of some of its potency. A clothed man and a naked girl would have but a single connotation in the public mind. Sex hung heavy in the air but it was in abeyance to male desire. Mia feared she was more heated in her loins than the artist. No matter how she tried, she could not suppress awareness of a man gazing intently at every crevasse and curve of her being. He arms held painlessly behind her back told her she was unquestionably at his disposal, she had little hope of having the bedroom to herself for long. Ryan Gentry would use her in his own good time, but this slight inflamed her the more. Standing thus was captivity

with a capital “C,” a far more potent captivity than being locked behind iron bars.

The ironed and naked captive wondered if, had she met Gentry socially, she would have given in to his request and stood as she was now? She could not believe it could have happened. But she remembered laughing assurances of others, that any girl with the right man in the right place would remove her clothes, it was simply a matter of rapport. She toyed with this idea but discarded it. Girls just did not strip naked for men. There was, of course, the act of love. But this she did not want to consider. If it happened with her and Gentry it would come closer to an act of rape.

In the first rest period Mia asked for a cigarette but was refused. “No—damned bad for a girl. Does nothing for them either. I’ll cure you of the habit.” That was that! Mia was secretly glad but vouchsafed no more than a sulky pout, asking bitterly, “And bread and water for a diet, I suppose?”

“Not a bad idea, that. I’ve given it some thought. The picture’s doing fine. By tomorrow I may let you look.”

“Do you really sell them and get money?”

“If I don’t then you won’t get the bread with the water. And the twins will be down to an apple a day.” Ryan laughed cheerfully, “Don’t worry, I’ve got a following.”

The cuffed girl became conscious of an intensification of the sexuality in the air now that the artist had stopped his painting. Ryan Gentry was looking at her with a quite different regard and bluntly voiced the thing within her mind. “I’m going to do it to you this evening. No reason why we shouldn’t enjoy ourselves. You’re a big girl and it won’t be your first time.” He paused and looked down searchingly. “Look, Mia, since we’re going to be talking about it, whether you like it or not, what name should be used? There’s a handful of them and I’m not fussy.”

“I wish you wouldn’t, please don’t.”

“You have to say that, sweetheart,” Ryan conceded. “So now you’ve said it and got it off your chest, your conscience is free. Now about that name…”

“I don’t want to talk about it, it’s horrible!”

“No, it isn’t. And you know damned well it isn’t. We English are a bunch of hypocrites about a piece of ass. The fuss we make…!”

“You just think you have to do it to me because I’m your prisoner,” Mia pointed out miserably. “I bet half us girls get laid because some idiot wants to prove he’s masculine.”

“You know damned well that wouldn’t be the way with you and me.”

“Well… no, I suppose not. Although, considering the way you’ve got me helpless…!”

“You know you’re looking forward to it, you can’t tell me different. Now, about that name…?”

“Call it anything you like, I don’t care. It ends up with me being…”

“You see! You needed a word right there and you didn’t have one. C’mon, do you want us to use the good old-fashioned four letter word starting with ‘F’?”

“No, I hate it. It’s a beastly word.”

“Intercourse?”

“Oh no, not that! It sounds so clinical, like getting a needle.”

“OK, then, a piece of tail?”

“Oh, Ryan, stop it. I don’t see why we have to call it anything. I don’t see why we have to do it.”

“If you don’t act sensibly, sweetheart, I’m going to call it what it is, a fuck and I’ll fuck you as long as it takes to get some sense into your pretty head.”

“All right then, let’s say you ravish me. We’ll use the word ravish,” Mia retorted angrily.

Ryan shrugged. “Well, if that’s what you want, I’ll ravish you. Where on earth did you pick up that fool word? It isn’t even strictly true. It implies force.”

“Well, what else do you call the way you’ve got me? Ryan, I’m going to pose again and you’d best get back to your easel! You’re giving yourself an erection with all this erotic talk.”

He appeared satisfied, returning to his brush and his oils. Mia stood blushingly conscious of having spoken of things she had never previously discussed so frankly with a man. As though having thought the matter over seriously, Ryan now queried, “Further to this affair of my ravishing you—gosh, that word really gets me! Are you going to lay down and spread your legs like a good little girl or do I have to rough you up first? I don’t mind which.”

“I don’t want to talk about it, leave it be.”

“Oh, what you’re up against, sweetheart, is the old guilt complex. You have to feel that there’s some way you can appeal to my better nature or perhaps kick me in the balls. Since you can’t do either, I’m going to solve the problem for you by tying you spread-eagle on the bed. Loosely, of course, so you can wiggle and so there is enough slack for me to put a couple pillows under your hips. I hope you noticed I used the word ‘hips.’ I could have used another,

those things have got quite a few names, too. I'm talking about your ass, darling."

It was as though they had settled something. Mia could think of no more to say that would not make her feel or look worse than she did already. Gentry, being totally in command, saw the matter as at a satisfactory conclusion. In his own time and in his own way he would ravish his charming prisoner. She would look delightful spread out upon the bed and safely tied. He would have to remove her irons and handcuffs, of course, but this would simple titillate her hope of release or escape. He made up his mind to give her these occasional possibilities of liberty. He would not rob her of hope. Mia's change of bondage would make an amusing interlude for them both. He plied his brush busily and with fresh vigor.

Mia posed quietly in her irons.

Chapter 3

Chained Trio

Mia Argent woke in drowsy satiety. Exhaustion and heavily taxed emotions had drifted her into sleep immediately had the Male abandoned her loins for his own bed. No doubt Gentry had been tired too, for he had left her bound exactly has she had been for her ravishment, his only concession to her comfort had been the removal of the pillows beneath her hips. She stretched lazily in the early morning sunlight and was thankful she had not been tied taunt for ravishment. Perhaps Ryan had decided to leave her bound as she was before he had started upon the expert play by which he had driven her to fever heat and an emotional pitch never previously known. At the commencement of their play, he had laughingly assured his spread-eagle victim of the potency of being bound thus and Mia had come to realize the truth of what he had said. This coupling with a man had been like no other. It had gone on and on and had extracted responses she had never guessed. She felt ashamed in having been so plaint to her master's will. But what else could she have done!

It had been so simple for the man. Ryan had dumped her squarely in the center of the bed, unlocked the irons from her feet and then bound her ankles to the far lower corners of the bed to stretch her outrageously and at the same

time, render her helpless to fight when her hands were freed. The girl about to be ravished followed his every move in sulky silence. When the handcuffs followed the leg irons, she lay back in solemn obedience and extended her arms to have her wrists bound in the same manner as her ankles. Ryan took great care and obviously much pleasure in the binding. Mia's only complaint had been a futile, "You've got me obscenely stretched apart down there. Is it really necessary?"

"Can't have you crossing your legs, Love. You'll do just fine as you are."

Either one of her bindings would have rendered her helpless to Ryan's purpose. The bound girl was surprised by his willingness to forgo the pleasure of her arms or legs. She supposed he gained a greater satisfaction from having her bound and spread wide in maiden sacrifice. Kneeling between her parted thighs before mounting her, Ryan asked in jocular derision, "Don't you want to mention my mother? Tell me how disappointed she'd be at her darling boy right now? There's also the one about telling me the penalty for what I'm about to do to you is seven years hard labor. How about that?"

"Consider them said. Get on with it." Mia's ejaculation was bitter. Stretched out on her back now, in drowsy retrospect, Mia was ashamed, there had been no need for such irritability. Ryan Gentry had, with utmost gentleness, taken

her into a wonderland of light and color and vivid sensation, the only flaw in which had been her inability to reciprocate with arms and legs. She dragged at her bindings to no avail, wishing to clasp them around this glorious male thing responsible for an ecstasy she had not previously known. She supposed he ravished all his models and was thus highly experienced, but still…

Her climax was nothing more than a prelude. Her ravishment went on and on until she hoped it would never end. When it did she lay, gasping and replete, to receive his kiss upon her red and swollen lips. She had only the vaguest memory of their sundering before Gentry left her for the night. She wished he had slept with his head upon her bound and naked arm or upon her breast rising and falling so tumultuously, her breasts with which his fingers and his tongue had worked such magic.

Mia Argent sighed, debating whether to return to sleep or continue the dreamy reminisces of the night before. Once again she stretched in feline pleasure and playfully tugged and twisted in a simulated panic to get free. It was then she noticed her left hand was not as tightly tied as was her right, somewhere within the binding of her wrist was an unexpected slack…!

The bound girl froze in disbelieve, a wild hope setting her pulse to racing. She had cherished no hope of escape while spread-eagled. It seemed unlikely he could have made a

mistake or that her struggles during the couplings had been more productive than supposed. But it was there! Unmistakably there was the faintest of looseness as compared to her other limbs. In a feverish hope Mia Argent went to work!

It was wickedly frustrating. Looseness there might be but nonetheless she could not withdraw her hand nor twist her hand to make the slight slack more evident. Her fingers could reach nothing, they sought uselessly for knots but the bit of leeway Gentry had deliberately allowed was not enough to aid her in escape. The naked girl lay rigid, her mind racing with ways and means, while her arms worked this way and that towards a dubious freedom. Slack was there, she was sure of it, she twisted and turned in fluid motion until every portion of her nudity was involved in the effort to exploit the tiny slackness. She was working against time. She knew it early morning, but how early! It would be heart breaking for Gentry to come and find her with one hand nearly free, she could not bear the thought.

It took more than an hour for hope to become reality. A loop slipped and little by little her frantic tugs and twistings slid her hand through its loops to freedom. When it was done she held her freed member before her eyes in incredible disbelief. If she could free one hand she could free two! And then her feet...! Mia wasted no time but went instantly to work.

Once more frustration. She had a free hand but discovered it could reach nothing. Certainly it could not reach her feet but surely it should be able to reach her right hand still firmly bound! She turned upon her side, reaching, straining, giving the effort all she had but her questing fingers fell short of the rope around the wrist of her right hand. The rope binding her left ankle held her nakedness so she could not exploit the advantage which should have brought release. Tears of despair and defeat brimmed her eyes and in a frenzy of animal anger, she tore and twisted her sweating nakedness enough to shake the bed. When she desisted, panting, the fingers of her freed left hand where touching rope!

Once more frustration was Mia's reward. Her frantic struggles had gotten her into a position in which, under infinite stress, she had achieved her goal but her fingers still failed to find the vital knots. That took time and further angry surging against her bonds. She sacrificed her left ankle to her needs, tugging and straining it painfully to gain an inch, but maiden ingenuity prevailed, unexpectedly, her fingertips found a knot and began their task. By the time she found herself possessing two hands in a way she had not done for a couple of weeks, she was wet with sweat and her first gesture was utterly feminine; it was to tidy her hair.

This done, she surveyed her still-bound feet. Like all the rest, it should have been easy but was not. They were stretched so wide apart at the foot of the bed that at first she could touch neither. It was only after twisting contortions her fingers could again be profitably employed in the gaining of freedom. By the time her left leg was free of cords she was panting in near exhaustion but dared not delay. Mia turned the attention of two now free hands towards a liberty she now believed assured.

It was at that moment Ryan Gentry walked into the room.

It was too, too cruel. The naked girl, now held captive only by a single foot, looked up at her ravisher in despair. A few more minutes and she would have been free and out of the house, speeding to freedom and help. Now, because of a few strands of rope, she would return to chains and slavery. She allowed her hands to fall at her sides as she sat facing the grinning man, one foot stretching towards the corner of the bed and still tightly bound. She could have wept.

“Going for a walk, sweetheart?” Gentry inquired affably. “Good thing I happened by. Maybe I can help?”

Mia could no longer deny her tears, they broke their floodgates and she buried her face in her so recently freed hands. Between sobs she accused, “You did this on purpose, you deliberately gave me hope. Now look what you’ve

done! I suppose you'll tie me up horribly as some sort of punishment."

Gentry waited for the storm of weeping to subside, he drank in the lovely curves of the distraught girl as she sobbed bitterly in the despair of defeat. When her last sob trailed away he possessed himself of her arms and clicked tight the handcuffs on the wrists behind her back. Then, with an immaculate square of linen, he dried her cheeks and kissed her trembling lips as lovingly as the night before. Thoughtfully he said, "I'm going to ravish you again."

It was a repetition of the night before, but this time Mia was secured by only one leg. True she had no hands, she was laying upon them as they did their best to find comfort behind her back, but she had a greater freedom and used it to the fall. She accused herself of inconsistency in the joy and ecstasy now bestowed compared with the bitter anguish of defeat when she had been so close to liberty. But she gave up reasoning in a total yielding of herself to this man who now, for all she cared, could keep her prisoner forever.

After they had slept she sat up in bed and watched the freeing of her right ankle. It was too late now, it did not matter, her handcuffed wrists told her it no longer mattered. As though to wallow in helplessness she said, "Don't forget my leg irons, I'm a slave, remember?"

She watched the clicking of the chrome bands around her ankles then was surprised by the freeing of one wrist, the transferring of her arms from back to front and the relocking of the cuffs in front.

“You can make us breakfast, sweetheart, no reason why I should. These little things on your wrist won’t hinder you at all.”

“Can I have an apron?”

Ryan shook his head almost sadly over the request. “You girls, anyone would think being naked hurt. I suppose Freud had an explanation but I’m damned if I have.”

“Ryan, don’t be mean, females always wear clothes. The only reason you keep me naked is to appease your carnal lust. You men are worse than us in your hang-ups.” She flounced her naked bottom at him, almost jauntily, as she retired to the bathroom.

It was pleasant to be domestic again and possess her hands enough to actually do things with them. Mia knew Ryan watched her every move, not in suspicion but in the enjoyment of an artist envisioning pictures. He would always do this so it was useless to complain. Perhaps she should complain only if he stopped. Mia glimpsed the possibility of she and her two sisters vying for this man’s affections and attention. Being ravished would send them into transports of delight, even if the first time hurt. She could imagine the

little moppets pleading for the male phallus rather than screams of protest at being ravished. They might easily outclass her in riveting male interest. She also saw them as her Achilles Heel and purposely refrained from inquiring about them. No doubt they were safely secured somewhere around the house. She got her apron for the cooking and saw it as a minor victory.

While they ate she once more accused Gentry of deliberately contriving the freedom of one of her wrists so she could achieve a partial escape in time to be caught and once again cuffed. He shrugged noncommittally and told her of how such incidents could enliven her captivity in times to come. There would always be the hope of her getting the best of him and making her way into the open air, it was a risk he was prepared to take. Laughing at her frustration, he encouraged her to seek and use every pretext she could to this end. It would keep him on his toes. He promised no reprisals, any captive was entitled to an escape attempt. They went together, almost in a mood of gaiety to begin his artists day. Mia's hands were once more locked behind her back.

It was different now. In the indefinable way no one can explain they had become one. The man had penetrated her sheath and she had responded. Nothing could be quite the same again. Mia knew she was posing to perfection, sensed it from the glances he gave her constantly around the can-

vass on which he worked, sensed it in the rising tide of her own pulse. It was not until they stopped for a noon break Gentry mentioned the twins. “I’ll bet you’d like to have a look at them,” he suggested. “They really are a pair. I can hardly wait to finish this picture of you before I get at them. I’m still trying to think up a pose for them.”

“Why not the two of them in a cage?”

He laughed at her acerbic suggestion and threw open the door. The twins greeted their visiting sister with indignant demands.

“Get us out of here, Mia! He’ll listen to you, he won’t to us. Oh, darling, please make him treat us properly, this is awful.”

Both were naked. Mia realized it had been several years since she had last seen them bare. They had grown up and nudity had become something you did not share as once you had. They were standing a few feet apart, their crossed bound wrists above their heads, tethered from the ceiling. The left foot of each had been bent up from the knee and tied to its owner’s thigh. They stood on one leg like a pair of indignant storks.

“Pretty, yes? Nothing like standing on one leg to make a girl see sense. I’m wondering if I should paint them like this, but it’s probably strong for the galleries. Make a damned good item for a private collection.”

Mia's heart went out to them. They looked hot and tired and disheveled, they looked as she had often felt. Automatically she pleaded, "Ryan, please, at least let them have both their feet? That must be awful the way you've got them now."

"That's right Mr. Gentry," the youthful voices were in complete unison. "Please give us back our feet, this is awful."

They exchanged maiden glances and added, "If you'll give us back our feet we'll promise to be ever so good, honest we will."

"Couple of little twisters," Gentry observed casually. "Can't believe a word they say, can't trust them an inch. They'd cozen a man out of his pants if he gave them a chance. Want me to cane their bottoms? It's as good a time as any."

"Oh, no!" Mia's instant exclamation was echoed by the pair. They were still taking everything Ryan Gentry said with extreme seriousness. If he had said he was going to slice them up and cook them for dinner, they would have believed him.

"Oh, Mia, we don't want to be whipped; we haven't done anything. Besides we haven't been whipped and I'll bet it hurts something awful."

Mia managed a more gentle, "Please, Ryan, don't be mean. I know you're teasing them but they don't understand.

Please don't whip them. I think whipping a girl is horrible, especially on her bare skin."

Ryan untied the doubled up legs to enable their owners to stand with both feet upon the floor. There was sighs and much profound thanks. But, when the maiden appeals became too ardent with "Mia, darling, please persuade Mr. Gentry to let our hands down too, we're so tired," the big sister was hurried out of the door and out of sight to leave her youthful siblings to a continuing conditioning. Mia was glad when Gentry closed the door to put an end to wailing protests. She said, "I'm afraid they haven't been very well brought up."

"They'll be well brought up now, love." Gentry kissed her forehead before leading her to the kitchen. "I bet you I have to redden those little asses before I get them to take things seriously. They're feeling sorry for themselves right now but not sorry enough. Come on, I'm hungry now and we've got all afternoon of good light yet to use for painting."

Mia knew herself adrift on an uncharted sea. She could control nothing and knew not of what fate she was led. After her experience of the previous night and again this morning she was pleasantly numb to life, nothing hurt, things flowed in an ordered sequence, a sequence ordered by a man she was trying hard not to hold in affection. Ryan Gentry was a Force, a force she could neither control nor

understand. Perhaps this was the way with girls under the dominion of a male, they simply ceased to care, the man could make the decisions and do the work! In a way they had it made.

But Mia's mind retained a vision of her younger sisters, naked, their arms tied up above their heads, their faces pink in shame and dismay. She asked, "Ryan, must you strip them naked? It's not right, you know, they're only fourteen."

"Seems to me they stripped you. I didn't notice you wearing anything the first time I saw you."

"But that was different, it was between girls, you're a man! You shouldn't be seeing any of us naked."

"Too late now," Gentry chuckled. "I suspect the trauma passes in the first five minutes. I haven't noticed you blushing in the last hour."

"And the way your eyes keep dwelling on our… on our… our things. Really…! Do you have to be so crude?"

Gentry had tired of feminine complaint. With an easy sweep of his arms he picked up his hobbled model and carried her to the studio. There he placed her solidly on the dais and told her to behave herself. Since there was little else she could do, Mia struck the pose and held it while allowing her mind to wander. She supposed the twins and

herself might as well resign themselves to two or three weeks captivity and then a return to their normal life. She wondered if Ryan might call one afternoon for tea…! The whole thing was absurd.

On the afternoon of the following day Gentry asked, “Want to look?”

Mia wanted to look badly, she had been consumed by curiosity from the start. She loathed the attempts of amateurs and had secretly prayed that Gentry was as skillful as he said. It had become custom for Ryan to pick her up bodily now rather than to compel her to take the short steps required by the leg irons, he did so now, dumping her erect at the correct distance from the easel and the canvass. Mia’s heart was pounding hard. She did not understand why but knew only a tremendous excitement.

It was pure wonder, a glimpse of the ineffable, the canvass glowed with all the light and color in the world and all the loveliness of a thousand girls. Mia gasped in startled awe and found herself gazing at a picture so compelling as to be beyond reality. She saw herself as she might have been three thousand years ago, sold by auction on the block and staring in dismay at the features of the male who was the highest bidder. Her handcuffs and leg irons had become the shackles of the period but all else was purely and simply “Mia.” Gentry had captured every nuance of what she was or could ever be, every response of muscle and flesh

and limb, to produce a loveliness… The quintessence of man's desire.

Ryan Gentry was touched too, not so much by the picture of his creation but by the model who inspired it. He was studying Mia's enraptured features in a total absence of carnality. What he saw was a beautiful girl whose features had the power to evoke images and cause a man to dream. Quietly he said, "I see you like it."

"Oh, Ryan, it's… it's almost too much. It's terribly beautiful and so wonderfully real. I—I—Oh. Oh, Ryan, thank you, thank you!"

"Bit too real for the Purists, I suspect," Gentry observed. "But piss on them, that picture is worth a fortune and somebody will pay it. That is if I want to part with it. I'm not sure that I do."

The enchanted girl knew it a moment in her life after which nothing would be quite the same again. Ryan's picture of herself had infected her with the magic of beauty and the vision of it few ever knew. She was flattered and breathless and excited, her captivity forgotten. Looking at Ryan's picture Mia Argent was prepared to be a captive all her life in such a cause. As usual, she longed for her hands when she was again picked up and carried to the little platform upon which, by some strange witchery of her own,

she had inspired a man to create a masterpiece to outlive them both.

Mia Argent knew nothing had changed but in her heart everything had changed. The picture had transported her to a pinnacle of ecstasy she might never find again. But she comforted herself with the realization of Gentry's undoubted genius. There would be other pictures, many of them, and she wanted to be in every one. She tugged at her handcuffs now only to reassure herself they held her where a miracle could happen.

There was a day and a half of what Ryan called "finishing off" before he announced his intention of going into town to purchase more restraints, especially for the twins, for who he held great plans. Ryan bemoaned the impossibility of purchasing ancient shackles and irons, but consoled himself with the knowledge that they would not fit such youthful slenderness as he sought to control. He spoke to Mia teasingly of straps and cords as well as chains. The last item on his list was a whip. He watched her features as he spoke of it but softened the impact by teasing, "There's no way we can ever control those young bundles of mischief unless I establish authority. A few marks on their skin will do it. You can watch and see if I'm not right."

"Can't I come to London with you Ryan, I promise I'll behave. I'll give you my parole?"

“You and your parole!” Gentry laughed at her eagerness, “You’ll have to forgive me, but I can’t quite place stock in that parole of yours. There’s too much at stake. You’d forgive yourself for breaking it by saying it was for Fancy and Angel.” Gentry shrugged and gestured indifferently. “You can blame my lack of faith but there’ll be other trips to London and after I know you better…”

Mia refused to prod, she preferred to drift with her euphoric tide. Instead she asked, “What about me while you’ll gone?”

“You can stay as you are, love. I’ve fixed the twins so that you can’t free them. Apart from that you’ve got the run of the house. If you want to walk back to Dovecove in your present condition, you’re welcome to do so. I’m betting you won’t.” He took her in his arms and kissed her fiercely, then patted her bottom with tenderness. “Goodbye. Be a good girl.”

Mia suspected Ryan slammed his front door on purpose to signal a new relationship. Without him the house had a terrible silence. The ironed girl shivered in helplessness, then cast the mood aside realizing she could walk where ever she wished, even if slowly with short, snubbed steps and much clinking. Her first thought was to find and examine the picture of herself. But after the laborious climb up the stairs she found the door locked. Evidently Gentry cherished his privacy, perhaps he didn’t trust her with things

she knew must be dear to his heart. She shrugged and clinked her way in search of her younger sisters. She had no appetite for their importunities but felt responsible. At least it would be amusing to see the manner in which Gentry had them constrained.

She found them still captive in the bleak little room she had seen previously. They sat morosely against opposite walls, nude and disconsolate. They greeted her arrival with cries of joy and instantly leapt erect to show her the circle of chain around their tummies and its trailing length leading to the padlock and ring on the wall. “He’s got us so we can’t even leave the room, darling. Please unfasten us. Hurry!”

It was so typical Mia had to laugh. They were so young, so eager, so concerned only with their own condition. She turned to demonstrate her handcuffed wrists then kicked her own shackled feet and asked, “How do you suppose I’m going to get you free? You’re a lot more free than I am.”

“No you’re not, you can walk around. Has he set you free?”

Their bright eagerness was infectious. “Yes, I’m free if you call having handcuffs locked on my wrists and leg irons locked to my ankles free. It doesn’t seem to me I’m free at all.”

“But, darling, you can go back to Dovecove. You can go home!”

“Can I? Think a bit. I’m naked and I can take only little short steps. Someone’s sure to see me and that means the police. None of us need the police in on this. We’d all be so terribly embarrassed and ashamed. No one would believe a word we said. The News of the World would come out with headlines about sex orgies in the Counties.”

“We don’t mind a bit just so long as we get free. Please, darling, get these chains off us, any way you can.”

It took a little time as Mia explained patiently the dilemma holding all three of them in its grasp. Listening to her counsel of making the best of it for two or three weeks, they viewed her with suspicion. “I’ll bet you’re in love with him, I’ll bet he sleeps with you every night, that’s why you don’t care!”

Mia tried to shrug it off. “Even if that’s true, it’s none of your business. You can start complaining if he takes you to bed.”

The vision invoked obviously interested the moppets. “Oh, darling, will he! I mean, what should we do? We’ve never been fucked. Does it hurt?”

They were impossible. Their emotions vacillated from moment to moment. This was dangerous ground, Mia would gladly skirt the subject. She was genuinely fearful of Gentry’s casual acceptance of feminine favors. His attitude was quite probably a wish not to waste or ignore the three fe-

male bodies he possessed. If he slept with one, why not all three! Cross with herself for having no answer, she retorted, “Don’t talk such nonsense. He’s been painting my picture and will probably paint some of you. If he does I’d advise you to stand still the way he wants.”

“He told us this morning he’s going to London to buy a whip to use especially on us.”

Two pairs of youthful eyes assessed their sister. “Will he really whip us if we don’t do as he says?”

“I don’t know. Honest, I don’t.”

“He hasn’t whipped you.” Suspicion was implicit. “We bet he doesn’t have to. You’re in love with him. You’ll stand any way he wants you to.” There were two youthful giggles. “You probably lay down for him at the drop of a hat. You’re so lucky, he isn’t treating us nicely at all.”

“Does the thought ever enter your selfish little heads that you didn’t treat me very nicely when you had me prisoner and tied to that tree?”

“Oh, that!” The twins dismissed her question as big sister sophistry. “You know you enjoyed it, we did. All three of us had a lot of fun.”

“In that case you’d better look upon your condition now as being a fun thing. I don’t see much difference.”

Fancy and Angel sniffed and looked guilty. “Oh, alright, I suppose we shouldn’t have done it to you. If we’d never chained you up like that this whole adventure would never have happened. Sure you’ve rubbed that in enough but it’s simply horrid of you to tell us we’re getting our just deserts.” There was a lengthy pause. “Mia, darling, will he really whip our bottoms?”

The big sister finally tired of adolescent anguish. The twins were understandably bored, irritated and probably frightened, but their concerns were wholly selfish. Their instant assumption of her sleeping with Ryan Gentry, even though true, irked. It put them one up on her in the matter of virtue. Mia could not help being irritated by their obvious conviction that she could do something to set them free, perform some magic act and the chains would fall away. They saw her chains as mere nothing but their own as being heavy and secured to the point of being cruel. They complained bitterly of being attached to opposite walls. They had the grace to blush when complaining of being able to do no more than reach out and touch hands and being unable to do any more of what they described as “nice things.” Mia promised to return but in the meantime shuffled and clinked her way from the small prison compartment with its chained and vocal nymphets. Their plaints followed her up the passage.

Faced with a day of helpless idleness, Mia toured the premises, stuck her head out the back door to get fresh air, but then retired to lay upon her bed; being chained wasn't half as bad for a girl if she lay face down. She went to sleep.

Mia Argent must have slept a long time, she awoke, bemused, to an amazed feminine declaration, "Well, I'll be damned, he's got them all over the place! Who the hell are you, darling?"

Mia sat erect and startled. But here was hope! Here was a fellow female who would obviously set her free. She felt ashamed in her nakedness which the woman was regarding with obvious relish. Mia was quick to explain, "My name is Mia Argent, I don't think we've met…?"

The woman laughed a short and bitter laugh. "You're damned right we haven't met, sweetheart, I don't know you from Adam or Eve." She continued her interested study of a girl in chains, then dropped her bomb. Staring the captive girl squarely in the eye, she spoke with utmost clarity.

"I'm Mrs. Ryan Gentry."

Chapter 4

Purloined Prisoner

The naked girl and the one still clothed stared at each other in acute interest. Mia swung her bare legs over the side of the bed to the musical accompaniment of the chains joining them. Her visitor's eyes followed the motion with immense satisfaction. She was a girl of perhaps twenty-eight as opposed to Mia's twenty-four, but her assumption from the start had been of senior superiority, laughing down at a girl who should have known better.

Mia Argent's world was shattered. If this female was truly Ryan's wife it meant a complete reassessment. Mia was bitterly resentful of the male deceit. How could Ryan have been so unkind as to deceive her so! But had he deceived her? He had said nothing about his marital status nor did he have to. She had been a silly girl jumping to conclusions, falling far too easily in love. But, from the ashes of her emotional ruin, there arose fresh hope. Thankfully she exclaimed, "Thank heavens you've come. I can't possibly get out of these chains without help. There's probably keys around somewhere, but if there isn't I know for sure there's tools." Her voice trailed away invitingly but impinged without response against the stony regard of the girl who called herself Mrs. Ryan Gentry.

The older girl sneered and said, “You got yourself into the mess, get yourself out. I didn’t know Ryan engaged in such fun and games, but since he does, I’ll leave you to enjoy yourself.”

“But you can’t!” Mia was once more distraught at a vision of shattered hope. “You can’t possibly go away and leave me like this. It would be too, too cruel. Can’t you understand, I’m a prisoner!”

The sneer continued, “And what about those two little quails I found downstairs with a chain around their little tummies. I suppose they’re prisoners too?”

“Of course, they are! You’ve just said yourself they’re chained, they’re as helpless as I am. Please, please get us free, there has to be some way you can get us loose.”

The derisive regard did not abate, but the feminine voice took on fresh sympathy, “Look, honey, be reasonable, you can’t possibly tell me Ryan went out and kidnapped himself three girls, a pair of twins and an older sister. He may be an artist nut but he isn’t that sort of a man. I know him. He simply would not kidnap three girls. That means you’re here by your own wish.” The sneer became more pronounced. “And that means there’s no way I’m going to let you loose, even if I could. I suppose this is what I’ve read about in books. They call it ‘Bondage’, don’t they! You’re welcome to it.”

Mia was almost in tears. She could follow her visitor's logic, it made sense. The truth was too utterly beyond any believing. She had considered unburdening herself of the entire tale of woe, but what was the use, she would not be believed. Impulsively she pleaded, "Look, on compassionate grounds alone, please set me free?"

"You hurting or something? You don't look an object of compassion to me. You look like a silly girl who's got herself in a spot." There was a short, painful pause before the inevitable question, "I suppose Ryan takes you to bed?"

Mia kept silence but the silence itself was admission. The circumstances of that too were inexplicable. She felt as does a convict before the eyes of a hanging jury. In the eyes of Mrs. Ryan Gentry she was already condemned. She tried again, "But if you won't help us what are we going to do? What will become of us?"

"I don't know and I don't care. Give me one good reason why I should?" Mrs. Gentry's eyes narrowed in a sudden thought. She demanded, "Are you really helpless?"

"Of course I am!" Mia retorted indignantly, "I would have thought you could see that. Damned it, a six year old child could handle me!"

"Hmmmmm, that gives me an idea." Mrs. Gentry's eyes were suddenly alight with interest. "If I can handle you that easy, why don't I take you home! It would be worth the

trouble just to think of Ryan's face when he finds he's lost his little floozie."

Mia did a rapid calculation. If this female refused to free her now, she might easily be prevailed to do so at a later time after a more frank discussion. It might be getting out of the frying pan into the fire but to be the prisoner of another girl seemed likely to offer more possibility of freedom than the captivity she was now in. She would have nothing to lose, since being free, she could then approach Gentry on her own terms and secure the release of her captive sisters. She saw it as a case of nothing ventured, nothing gained. But, cloaking her voice in indifference, she said listlessly, "I can't stop you doing anything you want to. I'd be damned before I'll humiliate and humble myself before another girl. Do what you damned please."

"My, my, temper, temper!" For the first time the older girl showed pleasure. "Our mutual friend must have been mean to you, maybe he made you sleep on the floor last night, that's the reason I caught you asleep just now. Yes, I've made up my mind, I'm going to take you home with me."

Mia's heart leaped but her voice remained hostile, "You can't. You can't possibly take me away against my will. What I want is to be set free not led away to another captivity. Besides, do you want to run the risk of kidnapping?"

Mrs. Ryan Gentry became suddenly human. Without warning she leaned down, clasped Mia's face in cupped hands and kissed her passionately. The kiss was a revelation leaving it recipient uneasy. When it was over the older girl stepped back and said, "You really are helpless, aren't you. Stealing you will be so beautifully easy. Gosh, I wish I could be here to see Ryan's face!"

Mia voiced a genuine puzzlement, "I don't see how you can possibly walk me anywhere in this condition and if you certainly free me and give me clothes I won't go. Haven't you thought of that?"

"Of course I have, silly girl. We're not walking anywhere, we're going to ride, you can't imagine I came here without a car. We'll sit in the front seat and I'll cover you with a rug."

"How do you know I won't scream or struggle?"

"That's easy, darling. If you had wanted to scream and struggle and if you had truly wanted to escape as you say you want, you would have used that telephone downstairs. I tested it and it works fine. But you don't do that, you come up here and go to sleep. You couldn't care less. In other words you don't want to be involved with the police or anyone else. I'll take the gamble you'll feel the same way with me. You'll sit in my car and won't say boo to a goose."

Striving for words, Mia could think of none that did not incriminate her more. She made only a brief demand, “What’s your name? I can’t possibly keep calling you Mrs. Gentry.”

Her companion laughed, “My name’s Melody. I’ve always liked my name, do you?”

“Yes, it’s a pretty name, it suits you.” Mia ran the name over her tongue experimentally. It made Mrs. Ryan Gentry more believable. Within her sex she felt the stirrings of a fresh excitement. But duty was still duty. Without much hope she asked, “What about my twin sisters downstairs? What will you do with them? I’d be terribly grateful if you would let them free, our house isn’t far from here, they could easily run home.”

Melody considered the request. Her retort was, “Why should I?”

“Because they’re only fourteen years old, that’s why,” Mia said forcefully. “Do you want your husband up in court because he’s been fooling around with a couple fourteen year old teenagers? He’s just kept them prisoner up to now but that’s not likely to last.”

Melody considered, “No, leave them as they are. I don’t think Ryan’s dumb enough to get himself in that deep. He’ll play this bondage game and he’ll paint a few pictures of

them—I suspect that's his real interest—then he'll let them go. That's the best way out of this little contretemps."

"But you'll have me?" Mia said forcefully. "What are you going to do with me? What's your interest in me anyway? I'd think I'd be nothing but a bore."

It happened quickly. Melody was evidently as decisive as her husband. She grabbed a handful of Mia's hair, gave her another passionate kiss and said casually, "This is it, darling. If it's true you're as helpless as you say, you're on your way to where I live. Isn't it fun?"

With commendable forethought, Mia pleaded, "Look, I can't be released without the proper keys, they have to be around somewhere. Please try to find them or you'll have a girl on your hands that you can't do a thing with. You'll probably get bored with me and want to let me go but you'll be unable to do that."

"If those keys were kicking around you would have found them already, don't kid me."

"Oh, sure, I've tried but he's got them hidden up somewhere I can't reach. I can't do very much the way he's got me fastened, you know." Mia made it sound apologetic.

The keys were found in Ryan's bedroom. They hung tantalizing on a nail driven in the wall above the reach of captive girls. Mia could well imagine he would have taunted

her with them at some later time. She would have gone crazy with longing if she had found them while looking around the house fastened as she was. Within her mind she chalked up one more little item on the credit side. Melody could free her if she wanted to. It was something to remember!

Mia was not allowed to visit the twins. Melody saw them as a disruptive influence in her plans. Instead the captive girl was taken directly to the waiting car, thankful not to be incarcerated in the trunk. She made herself tractable to feminine hands and allowed herself to be positioned besides the steering wheel and with a rug draped across bare shoulders. It was a ride she had taken before, it was nothing new. Facetiously she jibbed, “If you were any good at this job you would gag me and blindfold me so I couldn’t shout for help or see where we’re going.”

“You won’t shout for help and I don’t mind your seeing where you’re going,” Melody assured her cheerfully. “But I’ve decided to institute a system of demerits. If you misbehave they can add up and on the day of reckoning, translate into pain. I want you to remember this.”

Mia could see only benefit in this transfer of possession. She snuggled, helpless, in the front seat beside Melody Gentry and watched the scenery pass. It was familiar scenery but nonetheless welcome. There was an element of freedom in this ride in a car through familiar places. Her big

bonus would come when Melody, tired of her company and the onerous task of tending her, would almost certainly give her back her freedom. By then they might almost be friends. With Melody there would be none of the erotism of the confinement of girls or the carnality of being taken to bed. Mia paused a moment in this thought. Melody's kiss had been more than ardent. If Melody was lesbian, she was out of one frying pan into another fire. But Mia set the thought aside and asked instead, with a trace of mischief, "What are you going to do with me when you get me home?"

"Damned if I know," her new captor admitted laughingly. "I suppose I'll have to lock you up somewhere. I'm damned if I'll ran the risk of letting you walk around the way I found you. Even if you're chained you can still walk, you can still escape. I want that SOB Ryan to sweat a little over you!"

"Look, if I gave you my parole, my promise not to even try to escape but to do exactly what you told me to, would you take off these handcuffs and leg irons?" Mia asked demurely.

"Why, they hurting? Looks like a damned good way to keep a girl against her will. The more I think of the idea of holding you the more I like it."

Mia's heart skipped a beat. She had been banking on Melody's desire to shock and startle her husband. Mia had

hoped her new captor would be satisfied with this. Thus having achieved her purpose of robbing Gentry of his slave girl, she would then return her to freedom. They could share a laugh over male discomfort. Now she was not sure. She knew all too well the manner in which captive girls became addictive to their owners. It was heady stuff in the nature of a drag and best left alone. But Melody was already well along the path. As usual Mia twisted and tugged at her ironed wrists. She did not bother with her steel-clad ankles. She was a prisoner to whoever held the keys and that was an end to it!

Melody's voice was thoughtful, "I grabbed you out of that house before Ryan came home, I didn't want a showdown. But I may have to keep you a long while and I'm wondering…?" She stole a few moments to look sideways at her prisoner, her voice was crisp, "I'm a lesbian, Mia. Are you?"

"No, I'm not. And if you think I'm going to do any of those disgusting things—no way!" Mia relapsed into angry silence.

"Oh, you'll do then, darling, don't ever have a doubt about that." Melody's voice was evenly assured: "I have ways of making unwilling girls very willing indeed."

"Such as…?"

Mia's question had become hostile.

“It’s easy to persuade girls, darling,” Melody assured earnestly. “Since I left dear Ryan I’ve persuaded a good many. Mostly younger but it will work the same with you. I simply whip them until they decide to behave and do whatever they are told. There simply is not a girl who won’t do it if you whip her enough.”

“You said you weren’t kinky, that you weren’t involved in bondage and things like that!” Mia was indignant at what she saw as a betrayal. “I told you the truth, sweetheart. Tying you up doesn’t mean a thing to me except to make sure I keep you in one place, it has no erotic significance at all.”

“And this business where you’re always talking of whipping a girl,” Mia demanded angrily, “That’s sexual isn’t it, the wish to see a girl scream and struggle beneath the power you wield? What’s the difference?”

“Darling, you seem terribly naive. Darling Ryan can’t have had you very long or you would have known more about these things. Didn’t he ever whip you?”

“No, he most certainly did not! You’re being terribly unkind about your husband. Except for keeping me a prisoner the way I still am, he was very kind.”

“I just bet he was,” Melody said disgustedly. “Sweetheart, it’s time I stopped fooling you. Sure, I am Mrs. Ryan Gentry, but it’s a legal title I inherited after the divorce. It was a mutual affair, we simply decided we’d had enough of each

other. The only reason I was in his house today was because I still have a key and there was one or two personal things I wanted to pick up." Melody laughed delightfully. "Instead of gloves and a scarf, I got you!"

Mia's heart once more ascended to the clouds. Ryan was free, whatever his relations with Melody might be they were not legal or compulsive. He was, in short, an available male. Her heart sang gleefully. But that altered nothing, she reminded the prisoner of Ryan's former wife who might easily vent upon her the spleen so common to the lonely. Cautiously Mia inquired, "Are you going to tell Ryan you've got me? I mean sort of rub it in?"

"And have him knocking at my door! No thanks! I'd sooner he thought you've been kidnapped by white slavers and were on your way to the Mid East—that is where all the pretty pussies go, isn't it?"

Melody was shrewd. Ryan would have not the faintest idea of where she was. Mia was uncertain of the place she held in his life but she was very certain indeed of his perturbation over her vanishing. But she realized the twins would give him a clue, they would describe the woman who had viewed them with so little interest or concern. He would put two and two together. That meant he would come knocking at Melody's door… But that was only on the assumption he desired her, that he wanted her back, that he wanted to paint her at least once more.

“Darling, all real lesbians are bitches and I’m for real,” Melody said thoughtfully. “You’ll be hoping I’ll let you loose after a couple of days but I’m not so sure. You’ve become sort of anonymous, Ryan and now me, we sort of dissolved you. No one would know where to look. I think I’ll keep you a while. You haven’t anything to say about it so don’t bother. There’s one thing I cannot stand and that is an impertinent female. If you value your pretty pelt, watch your words.”

Mia’s heart was forever rising and falling. It fell now, her dream of freedom shattered. The woman beside her intended to become her mistress and she would be forced into an obedient service she loathed. There was not a lesbian bone in Mia’s body, so all she had to look forward to was punishment. Melody would be an adamant owner, she would brook no excuses or evasions. Mia had never in her life been whipped but she could feel the searing impacts now.

The journey was long, it took Mia into territory not previously explored. But she paid the scenery little heed, she was too concerned with personal things, wondering unhappily if the girl beside her had any idea how truly awful it was to be handcuffed with your hands behind your back and leg-ironed by chrome. She was positive pity would exist somewhere in Melody’s makeup, her problem now was to divine and to prey upon it. What happened to her now

was dependent upon the rapport she could establish with the girl at her side. Mia sighed, her life had become a series of compromises and faint hopes, the handcuffs laughed at both.

The garage door answered Melody's signal. It opened and then closed behind the car. Melody switched on a light and said cheerfully, "Welcome home, sweetheart, you may as well get used to me and I don't want any fuss and bother. Behave yourself."

Mia behaved. She followed the grip upon her bare arm to an equally bare room. "I'll try and do better than this for you Mia," Melody said apologetically. "For now you'll have to put up with an austere prison. Sorry!"

Mia looked around in askance. The room was indeed bare and without comfort. She hated the thought of being alone in it behind a locked door. Pleadingly she implored, "Melody, please, not this! Look, I'll sleep beside your bed on the floor or any other indignity, but please don't lock me in here. I'm worried enough as it is. I don't want to go crazy."

The captive had struck a cord. Once more her face was enveloped in warm hands and her lips fiercely kissed. Even though this might be no more than a lesbian manifestation, it was nonetheless welcome. Mia found herself crying in relief. Between sobs she managed to get out, "Oh, thank you, thank you. I don't care what you do with me but

please keep me close to you. I can't possibly bare being alone the way things are."

But she still fled from the idea of lesbian sex. She did so in the trembling knowledge of hovering on the brink of a mistress's disapproval, but to perform the lesbian act in her present state of mind seemed impossible. Lamely she said, "I'm terribly sorry, Melody, I really am. Please try and understand. Now, do you want me to lay down on the floor?"

Mia was thrust down upon the rug. A rope encircled her neck and was attached to one leg of the bed. She had no hope of reaching it, she would be held helpless through what was left of the day and then through the night. It was far worse than what she had anticipated. But she had made her choice. Obediently she lent herself to the shameful tethering of her neck. No mention was made of freeing her hands or feet. She was in disgrace and should be grateful for what she got. Once more she wept upon being left alone.

Mia Argent spent the rest of the day and the following night upon the floor. Strive as she would there was no way she could discover freedom. Melody Gentry was evidently well versed in keeping a girl prisoner. By morning the naked captive so securely held was totally compliant to any demand. Mia knew herself defeated and was willing to capitulate. Melody was a beautiful girl. It could have been much worse!

There came from Melody an enveloping aura of possession. Having made her declaration of fealty, the captive tried only to see that which was good and lovable about the girl to whom she now belonged. Mia had no false idea of her own courage. A single thought of the bleak, bare room to which she might be consigned was enough to strike terror in her heart and obedience from her lips. Once more she was truly slave. From time to time Melody tested the handcuffs and leg irons as though in disbelief that they could so truly captivate and hold a naked girl for her delight. She said, “It’s so wonderful I have the keys to these, darling. I’m not sure I’ll ever use them. I could keep you like this forever and that’s what I want. Do you mind?”

Mia said no, she did not mind. She deemed it best to give her owner total possession of every bit of her, she would withhold nothing. She could observe Melody glowing and happy in the prospect of the consummation of the physical act they both understood and now accepted. It had been achieved without a single stroke of the whip. Mia was remarkable and infinitely to be desired.

The time was set for mid afternoon. For Mia it was a sentence, for Melody it was simply fulfillment. Each girl in her own way set the act aside in a niche of their mind. It would come soon enough. In the meantime they had each other and there was much to learn.

It was now, at last, Mia had the opportunity to tell her story. She told it from the beginning, omitting nothing. She could hardly believe Melody could accept its incongruity but Melody did. Melody had met the twins and their behavior had made Mia's story plausible. Casually she said, "I'm going to set a camera for a series of time exposures of the two of us making love. I'm going to send prints to the bastard, Ryan. Do you mind?"

Mia discovered she did not mind. Why should she? Once more there was a single ambition in her mind. It was freedom! Somehow she must achieve freedom despite iron on wrists and ankles. Someway it had to be possible. She said and did everything she could to please her captor.

When a mid afternoon arrived and Melody was emitting vibrations in female waves which Mia could not help but absorb, that was the moment when Ryan Gentry walked back into her life.

"You silly bitch, you might have known I'd guess where you'd taken her," Ryan accused his former wife without either heat or anger. "Really, Melody, you're absolutely impossible." He turned his attention to the quivering Mia and demanded, "Has she forced you between her legs yet? That's her thing, you know. And I want the truth—the truth, remember?"

Mia had never been more thankful for the truth, “No, she has not. You got here just in time. Oh, Ryan, I’m so terribly ashamed.”

Mia’s shame meant little. It was incidental to the scene now developing. Melody was backed against her bed and regarding her one time husband in unfeigned dismay. But her voice was still a sneer, “All the lovely heroics, Ryan, to impress your little love bird? Hell, a good session between my legs would have done her a world of good. A man’s prick does nothing for a girl except force her to take a bath. Why don’t you go away?”

“I will and I’m taking Mia with me.” Ryan grasped his slave-girl and turned her around to examine if she was still fastened as he himself had contrived. His voice was demanding, “Where’s the keys to these things? I know you stole them, tell me.”

“If I tell you, will you go away with her and leave me alone, Ryan?” Melody’s voice was fragile, she was close to tears.

“No, I won’t. You know damned well what I’m going to do to you, you silly bitch. I’m going to cure you once and for all from nosing around in my hole. Along with the keys to Mia’s irons I want the key you used yesterday. Where are they?”

Melody had met her match. She told where the keys were and helped to retrieve them. Then, in response to male demand, she held out her hands.

“There is no way to possibly let you loose. What I mean is I can’t reach anything. I can’t touch any of the knots, I’m as helpless as you are.”

“That son of a bitch is going to whip me, that’s what he’s going to do,” Melody affirmed angrily. “Oh, damned, why the hell did I ever get myself into this!”

Mia supposed it could be called a thrashing, there was no ritual, no gloating over the pain to come, no admonition about past misdeeds. There was only the act of stripping Melody as bare as Mia who watched in keen distress as flimsy stuff was torn asunder and cast aside to reveal a voluptuous female collection of curves and swellings and pubic hair which should have kept any husband attentively concerned. But evidently Melody’s femininity held no magic for Ryan. He scarcely spared it a glance as he brought it into view. Melody herself said nothing. Perhaps she hoped the revelation would awaken his carnality and gain her a reprieve. When the first stroke seared her shoulders, her whole being convulsed in one agony induced reaction. She gasped, but that was all. Mia wondered if she had been thrashed previously in her married life and had

built resources with which to met the ordeal. Certainly the behavior of Mrs. Melody Gentry beneath the whip was something to behold with awe and admiration. The blows fell without pause to streak the lovely skin with striations of scarlet, rapidly turning purple. The gasping breath rapidly became whimpers and the convulsive motions of the body as the lash cut at it were the only concessions Melody made to male anger.

When the punishment was over, Mia estimated it had been of no less than twenty cruel cuts upon the virgin skin of a girl who should have known better. Ryan cast aside the whip and said grimly, “I can do this again, you know, if you do any more of these tricks. Damn it, Melody, you should have more sense.”

“I’m sorry, Ryan, I didn’t mean any harm.” It was a pale, small voice of penitence. “I didn’t think you’d be so angry. I wasn’t going to hurt Mia, just keep her a while.”

“And we all know why you were keeping her a while, don’t we?” Ryan’s voice was heavily sarcastic. “That’s what this thrashing was all about. You can earn yourself another any time you talk about Mia’s mouth and that thing between your thighs.”

The bound wife sniffed unhappily and shifted against the nylon around her wrists. “All right, Ryan, you’ve made your point. You’ve punished me. May I please get untied?”

“Hell, girl, stay as you are. Someone’s bound to come along and free you.”

Melody’s wail of terror surpassed any she made under the whip. “Ryan, no! Don’t leave me like this. I can’t possibly get loose and I’ll stand and stand and stand, maybe for days. Please…?”

“You should have thought of that before you started stealing girls, my pet. Standing there will give you a chance to think about your misdeeds. And you’d best forget your ideas about marrying me again. One time round with you was plenty, you’re impossible. A man can’t possibly be whipping his wife every week the way I’d have to be doing with you.”

“No you wouldn’t, I’d behave properly always, I promise. You’ll never have to whip me again. Oh, Ryan, please don’t leave me like this.”

Gentry turned his attention to Mia who, in her helplessness, had been no more than a spectator throughout. His demand was abrupt, “Did you play games between this idiot’s legs, Mia?”

It was Melody who answered, her denial vehement, “No, she didn’t! Don’t you dare punish her! She’s sweet and doesn’t deserve what you’re doing.”

Ryan Gentry surveyed his captives with calm assurance, he was in complete command. Two pairs of feminine eyes gazed upon him imploringly but neither girl dared speak. After a moment of silent contemplation, Ryan left the room. Mia's feminine response was instant, "I'm so terribly sorry, Melody, that must have hurt something awful. I don't know how you could stand it."

"He used to whip me a lot when we were married," Melody admitted unblushingly. "That's what he means when he talks about once a week, it really was almost that bad. I know I do idiotic things and I'm a scatter brain but I love him, I always did and I still do. When a man whips you it's not half as bad as you think just so long as you're in love with him. If only he'd marry me again I wouldn't mind a bit even if he did whip me once a week when I did something dumb. Mia, I wish I could persuade him to let you loose, but I don't know how. He's so… well, so sort of implacable when he gets an idea in his head. Oh, damn…!"

If Mia had been free she would be amused. This was a different Melody to the imperious female who had invaded Gentry's home and stolen her away. The handcuffed girl could well believe the trashing she had just witnessed could bring about the change in attitude in Melody, it must have hurt shockingly. But she was nonetheless surprised at the frank, uninhibited admission of the whipped girl. Soothingly she suggested, "Don't worry about me and the

twins. He'll let us loose when he's painted our pictures. He's only talked about the whip to us, I don't think he has any intention of using it."

"Don't bet on it, sweetheart," Melody sniffed unhappily. "That beastly thing he's just used on me is the one he bought ages ago. When we got divorced he told me I could keep it as a memento. Darling, do you think there's any way you can persuade him to untie my hands before he takes you away?"

"I'll try." Mia looked around helplessly. "He can't possibility leave you like that, it's too, too cruel. But he never pays much attention to anything I say."

"Darling, would you like me to go to the police if and when I ever get free? I mean, you and those two little fillies don't want to be prisoners the rest of your lives…?"

"No, please don't. I feel sure Ryan will let us loose after a while. We'll become a nuisance and a bore. If the police get in the act it will be damned embarrassing for all of us. I'd rather not have that."

"Well, OK, I can see your point, that was always the way it was with me. In a spot like this a girl has no way to turn. But how would be it if I come and visit in a couple of weeks to make sure about you. If you're still prisoners then I can do something about it?"

“And get yourself whipped again!” Mia exclaimed. “That’s what would happen, you know.”

“Well… yes, I suppose.” Melody was thinking hard, “But there has to be some way!”

“You’d simple end up in chains the same as the twins and me,” Mia pointed out reasonably. “Best leave the thing alone. I couldn’t bear to have you whipped again on our account.”

“Well, there has to be something and I’ll find it,” Melody said slowly. “There isn’t much danger of him making me prisoner along with the rest of you. I irritate him too much and he was glad to get rid of me. I’m sure he wouldn’t want me around again even if I was naked and handcuffed same as you. Oh, shit, I wish I could untie this damned nylon!”

Mia kicked savagely at her chain.

Chapter 5

Helpless

“He’s really frightfully handsome,” Angel said reflectively. “And I bet he’s really wonderful at doing, you know what, to girls,” Fancy added dreamily. “I wonder when he’ll get around to doing it to you and me. I’ll bet he does it to Mia all the time. It really must be something to be grown up! Nobody takes us seriously.”

“It’s quite something the way he ties and chains us, I’d have hot pants all the time if I was wearing any. Have you got a fire burning down there, too?”

“You know I have. But that wouldn’t stop me getting loose if I could. I mean, it’s not that I’m not getting a charge out of what he does to us, but it’s been days and days…!”

The twins were delightfully held. When Mia had been shown them earlier in the day she had likened them to two maids held captive by a wicked witch. It was a fanciful fantasy but not too far from the truth. The basement room held a single post in its center, Fancy was backed against it on one side and Angel on the other. They had been compelled to cross their wrists with those of their sister, left and right, to leave them standing helplessly with one girl’s wrists tight bound to her sister’s on each side. They could shuffle around and around to their hearts content but

could not leave it, nor could they raise their hands to use their teeth upon the nylon knots. It was a mischievous exercise in frustration which had sent Gentry away laughing at their dolor.

“I wonder why he didn’t use handcuffs on us,” Angel reflected, “they’re so simple and so much more comfortable?”

“Because he’s teasing, that’s why,” Fancy retorted irritably. “He’s making us think we’ve got a chance to get loose just because he’s used cord instead of steel. Darling, are you sure you can’t get your teeth at anything?”

“Of course I’m sure and you can’t either. I’ll bet that son of a bitch is laughing his head off. I wish he wasn’t so handsome, he makes me feel all gooey inside. Do you think if we offered to let him do, you know what to us, he’d let us loose?”

“No, why should he! And if we did and Mia found out she’d murder us. Besides I’m not at all sure I want him to do, you know what, to us. We’d look real cute with a couple of babies!”

In spite of the tribulations of captivity, the morale of the twins remained high. Gentry had shrewdly guessed their tolerance for privation and dealt with them accordingly. He took them always to the brink but never beyond. He spoke often of the whip but never used it, they were beginning to doubt he actually had one. But this doubt was now set at

rest by Gentry's reentry and the thing he carried with such nonchalance. The twins eyed the leather thong with acute distaste.

"But we haven't done anything," Fancy affirmed fearfully.

"Don't you use that thing on us, you've absolutely no right," added Angel desperately.

"Time you earned your keep, girls," Gentry assured them. "I'm going to paint your pictures. For a start I'm going to get you both on one canvass. Are you going to behave?"

"No!" The negative came in unison.

"That's what I figured. That's why I brought this little thing along, I'm sure you recognize it. There's no need for you to act silly and get it used on your tight little asses."

"We think you're simply horrid," Angel said as though dismissing the subject.

"And I bet you never whip Mia," Fancy accused reproachfully. "You're just doing it to us because we're so young. We think you're mean."

They were easily handled. Gentry freed one right wrist from one left which left the two of them still joined but free to move as he directed. With his hand grasping one free wrist, he led them to the studio. He could feel them quivering and could sense their tremendous excitement laced

with apprehension. On arrival it appeared they held deeply rooted notions about woman's right.

"Unless you let us all loose we absolutely refuse to pose," said Fancy with resolution. "We don't mind posing a bit, especially with no clothes on and as long as we're together," Angel assured. "So unless you'll untie us and Mia too, you can forget about us posing. We won't!"

Gentry used the whip as sparingly as he could. They were a delightful pair of moppets and he had no wish to be cruel. They were simply undisciplined and he was prepared to supply this lack. Experience had convinced him there was no more certain way of introducing reason and logic to the female mind. Releasing the wrist he had been holding, he backed away and slashed, first one bottom and then the other, as the twins danced with outrage and dismay. Ryan had prudently locked the door to reduce the avenues of girlish retreat. He simply followed the alarmed and still bound pair around in their choice of flight, cutting at them neatly where ever a suitable target was presented for his attention. That the presentation was unintentional in no way lessened the pain of the impact of his whip on maiden flesh. After a couple circuits of the room and much girlish protests, the startled and palpating pair mounted the waiting platform and declared, "All right! All right! We'll pose! Stop it! We've had enough, we'll do what you want. You

needn't whip us any more, you can put that horrid thing away."

Gentry nodded confirmingly. Fancy and Angel were conforming true to previous experience. Their features were flushed and angry and their one free hand was feverishly seeking to assuage the angry strips upon their skin. They gazed upon him with an infinite reproach.

It is not every artist who has an unrestricted opportunity to paint the slave-girls of ancient times. Gentry was prepared to use the opportunity to the fullest possible. He had completed a second picture of Mia and now grimly moved on to portray the twins in a preconceived pose which would probably entail a further application of the whip before his models understood what was expected. He made his explanation brief, "Angel, I want you standing, you are shamed, you are striving to cover two breasts with one hand, your head is bowed. Fancy, you are reclining at your sister's feet, you are clutching her thigh with your one free arm, your hand clasps her wrist in whatever manner the bindings allow. Let's try it for size."

It was a minor miracle. Gentry never knew if it was the whip or some innate gift. But the twins, almost without volition, fell into exactly the pose he had envisioned. It was, after all, a natural enough posture for two young girls to embrace in their circumstance of enslavement. The enforced joining of their tied wrists produced precisely the

desired effect. The combination of holding tight while desiring release. In astonishment he backed away and said only, “Hold it. You’ve got it perfect.”

Two naked nymphets kept strangely quiet in immobility. It was as though they were mesmerized in awe.

Gentry painted fiercely.

Mia was grateful for the comfort but was doubtful about its implication of something permanent. Gentry had mutilated an expensive and exquisitely comfortable armchair especially for its present purpose. With considerable skill and care he had contrived upon each of its arms a strap which fastened out of sight below and which could neither be seen nor reached. With these straps conveniently loose, she had inserted her hands and watched as the straps were drawn tighter and tighter until she squealed in protest. Gentry had then done something out of sight beyond to leave her captive with a tight, wide band around each wrist, a band without visible fastening. It was exquisitely neat and wickedly effective. Seated in comfort, Mia was nonetheless as much a prisoner as if tightly bound with hundreds of feet of rope. Her first experience evoked the plaint, “That’s far too tight, Ryan, it’s hurting.”

Her captor laughed, she was a delightful subject and always good for a chuckle. His voice was calm as he reassured, “By the time you’ve done your wiggling act, sweet-

heart, it will be loose enough. Once I've left you alone, you'll really go to town in an effort to get loose, by the time you've finished your pulling and your tugging and your twisting, you'll be completely comfortable."

He kissed her and left her fuming in the embrace of his new toy. Mia hated to admit it but it worked exactly as promised. She could never resist the chance to test any bond placed on her. In spite of his laughing jibe she did so now in a small frenzy of irritation plus the futile hope that she might actually get free. But when she stopped, panting with exertion, she found herself securely but comfortably fastened in the chair. Her feet were still joined by leg irons but that chain restraint mattered little in her present condition. The leg irons had become a part of her by constant usage but her wrists were frequently involved in a variety of bondages, in none of which she found a hint of freedom. Almost affectionately and entirely without rancor she gazed down at her captive hands in admiration. The leather was so perfectly snug and the absence of visible fastenings added a touch of mystery to her constraint. With her arms resting thus an onlooker would have seen no trace of the mutilation of expensive furniture—Ryan Gentry was not an artist for nothing. Mia Argent smiled, relaxing back into the softness of the chain in a snuggling comfort. She was remembering the time she was first forced to sit as she was now in order for the measurements to be taken that resulted in her present condition. She had been

indignant, sure of something far worse, but was now grateful for her master's forethought. If the owner of a slave wanted her comfortable, he could not do better. She flexed her fingers and shifted her elbows but her wrists failed to respond, they were held tight and snug by leather straps. She sighed again and dreamed.

Mia had been shocked and indignant by Gentry's whipping of his former wife, she had supposed it would happen to herself, but as time passed without further reference to or even the sight of the hated instrument with its leather thong her fears receded into a puzzled wonderment as to why Melody so offended this man who could do as he pleased with them. By Mia's standards Melody Gentry had not deserved the strips upon her skin. But obviously Ryan had seen it in a different light. Mia realized that in this business of enslavement she still had far to go.

There was no denying she was in love, or at least in the grip of a fascination born of the vivid erotism and sexual reality of her union with Ryan Gentry. The mere condition of being his prisoner and constantly being held in restraint was sufficient to inflame her female lust. Mia had abandoned her pleas for release or even for an easement of her chains or ropes. Ryan paid no attention, she found it preferable to keep silent. She made one more tentative struggle against the straps around her wrists in simulated rebellion. There was always a strange thrill in finding her-

self foiled and tight held. It was so now. Heat flared within her loins as she turned her thoughts to speculation about the twins. Ryan had told her of his intention to start painting them this afternoon. Wryly, Mia supposed his success would depend upon his cruelty but then Fancy and Angel would get only what they asked for, it was up to them. Drowsily she slept, her forearms neat upon the chair at each side, her wrists encased in leather. All was well in the home of Ryan Gentry.

The days of imprisonment drifted by with remarkable speed. Two weeks passed and then a third. Towards the end there was an anxious call from Melody which Ryan tolerantly allowed Mia to answer and tell the girl at the other end of the line not to worry but give them a little more time. Mia ruefully compared it to a convict before a parole board pleading, not for release, but for an extended sentence behind bars. If she was crazy... well, so what! Never once in the whole time had her hands been free.

Their visits to Dovecove were almost absurd, certainly laughable. Sometimes she went with Ryan, sometimes he went alone. She was allowed to deal with her mail and make what phone calls were required. Mia wrote checks and mailed them to cover bills. Everything in her home remained normal except her presence or, rather her absence. That she made the journey back and forth totally nude and handcuffed and leg-ironed, concealed beneath a blanket

while she sat besides Ryan in the front seat, was a matter unworthy of comment.

Mia supposed her mental processes must be as evident to Ryan as to the twins, he read her mind with the greatest of ease, “You’ve fallen in love with me, haven’t you, sweetheart. And you’re thinking how nice it would be if we got married. That’s right, isn’t it?”

His naked captive wished he had voiced it differently, but agreed it was true indeed. She almost made an apology for the aberration.

“It’s simply because we sleep together and because of the pictures and also because you’ve got addicted to those handcuffs. You think I can’t tell!” Ryan tweaked her nipples and kissed her. “I’m your big brother, sweetheart, leave it at that.”

“I can’t see anything wrong in falling in love with you,” Mia protested, “you’re nice and you’re everything a girl wants. Almost everything.”

“Ok, what’s the almost?”

“The way you whipped Melody. That was terribly unkind. I still don’t understand it.”

“You’d understand it alright if you were Melody, but you’re not Melody so there’s no need for you to worry about it.” Ryan paused as though thinking ahead. “As for this being in

love business, I'm fond of you, I really am. You're a sweetheart. But I'm fond of you as a chained captive, my pretty prisoner."

Mia had no wish to be set aside without protest. "You're not my big brother and you're more than fond of me. I'm not going to apologize for being in love with you. I don't care if you keep me handcuffed all the rest of my life, I still want to marry you, so how does that grab you?"

Ryan repeated his kiss then said, "It grabs me all right. But your blood is overheated, my pet and there's a way I know to cool it off."

It was all he would say. Mia teased and tormented, but to no avail. Finally she let the subject dropped. There was always time for a woman's wiles to work and for male intransigence to fade. Like a million daughters of Eve before her, she smiled a quiet inward smile and assured herself something nice was certain to happen.

Something happened. It was not nice. It took place in the bleak little room in which Gentry had once imprisoned the twins. It was done with utmost simplicity and fell upon the unsuspecting girl like an avalanche. One single cuff was unlocked from behind her back and joined again in front, her arms were raised above her head by a conveniently waiting rope. While Ryan was still insuring her stretched nakedness she guessed his purpose but said no word.

When he departed to return with the whip, she did no more than stare at him levelly and change her weight from foot to foot in an already fevered vision of what Ryan would do to her. She made her voice toneless, “Why are you going to whip me, Ryan?”

“You know why, I told you about your overheated blood. This will cool you off. You’ll stop loving me. It’s the best cure I know of.”

“I won’t stop loving you. Ryan, this is crazy.”

“Aren’t you going to ask me to stop, not to do it, tell me how girls should never be whipped?”

“No, why should I! You’ll do it anyway.” Mia bestowed a steadfast stare. “I wish I could promise I’ll be as stoic as Melody, but I can’t. She was miraculous, she must love you very much.”

There was no more to be said. The two of them were in the grip of a current which pride forbid either of them to stem. Mia was desperately afraid. She had never in her whole life been whipped. She remembered how hard her stomach had tied itself in knots as she watched Melody’s nakedness get streaked with red. The whole thing seemed impossible. She eased up her strained bare arms where the handcuffs bit at her wrists to hold them as high as possible. When she struggled, as she knew she would, they would hurt. The im-

personal steel would bite her wrists and she would know agony from that alone. She closed her eyes in anticipation.

It was worse than Mia had dreamed. It was a wicked sear, scorch and impact against which she had no defense. But she was remembering Melody and from some unknown reserve of resistance, contrived to brace herself against the shock and bite back the screams of anguish and anger she longed to utter. In her mind, chaotic with emotion, it seemed incredible she should stand thus and meekly await the second and then the third strokes and on and on. It was asking too much of any girl. Despite her resolve, the cut of steel on wrists warned her of worse to come. She was panting in gasps, merging into moans. For the first time, Mia Argent understood what it was like for a girl to be whipped upon her naked skin.

Mia held herself tense for the second blow. She could always scream, but at least she would try to match Melody's courage. The weal burned hot upon her skin, sending its tentacles of pain into every part of her body. She closed her mind to Gentry's theories of the subjection of girls, they did not matter, men were ridiculous anyway except at those times when their arms were a refuge to be sought. Ryan stood back, watching his work flower on her flesh and giving it time to impose its maximum agony before striking again. It took almost a minute for the whipped maiden to realize she was alone.

It was a bitter refinement of cruelty, this delaying of the inevitable, to leave the naked girl, distraught and fearful, having given her the single awful stroke so she would know what to expect upon the return of her master. Distastefully Mia stepped from foot to foot and rose upon her toes to ease the stress on metal circled wrists. This time of waiting was as bitter as the thong itself. But as time passed without relief the scorch and burn of the single stroke changed in its nature to leave her in a quivering, sensitive of expectation, and this in turn changed to a flaring lust. The fire gathered itself within her crotch and burned with a terrible intensity of longing until Mia could believe it possible to be whipped anew yet feel no pain but only a transcendent ecstasy. She realized this was Melody's secret. Melody must have been whipped often enough to come to terms with the leather upon her flesh and to master it by her flesh's own response. She had always understood the whipping of a naked girl to be a carnal indulgence on the part of he or she who held the whip. It was Freudian stuff she had never bothered to analyze. There was no need to analyze it now, she was living it out in an highly sexual way. Her wrists had ceased to hurt.

Mia's loneliness lasted fifteen minutes. At its end, Ryan returned to stand facing her so close she could feel his breath. Between them was an intangible something without a name. They bombarded each other with vibrations and gazed steadily in wordless searching until the nude,

stretched girl said, almost mockingly, “Go on, Ryan, finish what you started.” Sarcastically Mia asked, “How many strokes do I have to have for loving you?”

Gentry allowed his slave-girl’s mockery to trail away into silence, making her wait breathlessly for an answer, Mia’s hate burned fiercely. Before Ryan’s voice mocked hers, “How many, sweetheart?” Ryan pinched her nipple playfully. “Just one.”

“But I’ve had one already?”

“That’s right, love, you’ve been whipped.”

Mia stared, at first in disbelief, until the amusement in Ryan’s eyes told her the truth. Even then she could not grasp the enormity of his compassion, or was it merely a reprieve? Breathlessly she exclaimed, “Ryan, I love you terribly, but I don’t understand any of this. Please free my arms so I can hug you.”

“You don’t have to understand anything, my pet. Leave that to me. You needed a whipping and you’ve been whipped. Aren’t you the lucky girl!”

“Ryan Gentry, I adore you!”

“As well you should, my love. And now let me tend the fire.” Ryan came close and while he kissed her lips and embraced her nudity with a single arm, his other hand sought her sex, palming and kneading it with male omniscience.

“My, my, did we ever get results!” He held up an open palm glistening with secretions. “Here, sweetheart, you’d better dry it off for me.” He thrust it against her lips.

Mia licked avidly in pure animal hunger. She went on and on, using her lips, until her master laughing called a halt. “There’s only one thing to do with you, Mia Argent,” he said forcefully, “and that’s take you to bed. How would it be I whip your rump until it glows. I’m told the effect is the best aphrodisiac in the world.”

“Yes! Oh, yes!” Mia was lost to shame and to all else except the fire which consumed her fiercely. “Ryan, do it to me. Do it to me quick!”

Ryan laughed. He lowered the tractioned arms and replaced the steel-clad wrists behind the maiden’s back. He picked Mia up and carried her to his room.

At the end of one more week of Ryan’s almost feverish painting of his prisoners, Mia asked a question knowing herself little concerned with the answer. “Ryan, you’ve had us a month now, when are you going to turn us loose? Are you going to turn us loose?”

“Do you want me to, sweetheart?”

“Oh, Ryan, that isn’t what I asked? When are you going to give the twins and me our freedom?”

“You don’t want to be free, you know you don’t. You’re a bit of a hypocrite about that freedom, Mia Argent. You’re simply hoping I’ll tell you, ‘No, I’ll never set you free,’ so how about I do exactly that? I’ll never set you free, you and I can go over to Dovecove as needed and you can wear my handcuffs for life.”

“Ryan, don’t tease. It’s my life you’re talking about. Not to mention Fancy and Angel.”

“Don’t worry about Fancy and Angel, those two sex pots are enjoying every moment. Right now I’ve got the two of them against a wall, their arms stretched wide out and their waists strapped to the wall. They can wiggle and kick all they like and you ought to hear their complaints. But when I put my hand on what they call their ‘pussy’ I discovered they were secreting like crazy. I suspect they wanted to put their hands there too.” Ryan laughed in memory. “They’re damned cute about these things. Before I left they absolutely implored me to do what they call ‘You Know What’ to them. The only reason I don’t do it is because of you. You’re about all I can handle, you lascivious witch!”

Mia knew he spoke truth about the twins. True, they sometimes complained bitterly of what he did to them, but mostly they were a pair of concupiscent kittens finding erotic pleasure in their punishments which were not truly punishments at all but rather an overemphasized facet of

captivity. With her own feminine logic, Mia pointed out, “Ryan, the point we’ve reached… you know I won’t run away, you know I won’t leave you. I’d marry you tomorrow if you weren’t so stubborn and so cheesed off with Melody. So why do you have to keep me chained? I hardly ever get out of handcuffs and leg irons. I’d feel naked without them.”

“I keep you chained because I want to, Mia Argent. It pleases me, I damned near get an erection every time I look at you. You were made for captivity and constraints. You glow, there’s a sort of radiance…”

He kissed and patted her bottom gently. “Forget it.”

“Oh, all right, but how about a day off once in a while? And for the twins, too?”

“I’ve given it thought but it’s not a good idea. Freedom is habit forming and all three of you are happily in a captive rut. Leave it alone.”

Mia left it alone. Strangely she could understand Ryan’s reactions. He was savoring a power and an authority denied most men. Everyday upon his canvass he depicted some feature of a slave-girl in a series of works Mia was positive would make him rich. Under the inspiration of rope and chain upon the flesh of girls, he was creating masterpiece after masterpiece with a fierce absorption which denied his assertion of permanent captivity. It was more as though

he possessed her for only a very limited time and intended to make the most of it. Mia gave up worrying. In a shameful knowledge of great happiness, if Gentry sometimes performed small cruelties, it was perhaps no more than the icing on her cake or the addition of a touch of spice to counter boredom. At the end of their painting one day there was a case in point.

“Sweetheart, take a break, we’ll call it a day. Look, there’s something I want you to do. In exactly thirty minutes come to my office.” He grinned broadly, “I’ll be amused, maybe you’ll be amused, too.”

The freedom of the house had become commonplace to the chained girl. Without hands, she could do little, but she could take as many short, hobbled steps as she pleased. Gentry had long since realized her reluctance to go out into the fields or roadways naked and chained as he kept her. It was understood between them Mia was as safely prisoner as within a cage. Without thought of anything untoward, she snoozed for thirty minutes before presenting herself at The Master’s office. Before she reached the open door, she heard Angel’s plaintive wail, “Please, Sir, I don’t want my hands caned. It hurts something fierce. I had it done to me once. It’s awful!”

It was hard not to gasp in amazement or to laugh. Ryan had carefully arranged his small tableau for Mia’s benefit. She was now a witness to a play in which the first lines had

already been uttered. Angel was, as usual, naked, her feet impeded by leg irons, but all the rest of her free. Angel seemed to not know what to do with her hands in their unexpected freedom. There was no sign of Fancy.

But the showpiece of the Play was The Master himself. Ryan Gentry was attired in an academic mortarboard and gown. He was seated behind his desk, a desk which had been cleared of all clutter save one single exhibit. The exhibit was a long length of slender yellow cane which riveted Angel's attention as though mesmerized, her eyes leaving it only long enough to endeavor to enlist her elder sister in defense. "Mia, darling, make him stop, make him not do this to me. Look at the awful thing on the desk. I just couldn't bear it, I know I couldn't. He wants to cane my hands!"

Despite big sister sympathy, Mia could not fail to remember the many times she herself had desired to do exactly what Gentry now proposed. But, without doubt, Gentry's inflection would be two or three times as severe as anything she would have done. But her voice was soft, "It's no use looking to me, Angel, I'm helpless as I usually am. If Mr. Gentry wishes to punish you, I'm sure he has a reason. It might be best not to argue too much."

"Well said!" Gentry approved in a fine academic baritone. "I suggest, Angel, you now hold out your right hand and keep it still."

“I can’t! I can’t possibly! Oh, please, sir, don’t cane my hands.” The naked nymphet gazed around the office in desperation, her tone urgent, “I haven’t done a thing to deserve being punished. Couldn’t you whip my bottom instead?”

“I intend to cane the palms of your hands, Angel,” Gentry explained as though he had just caught the delinquent damsel in some misdemeanor. “It is a child’s punishment, nothing to make so much fuss over.”

“But I’m not a child!” Angel said defensively. “And you shouldn’t cane me if I haven’t done anything and anyway I don’t want to be caned, it hurts terribly.” She stood, quaintly clutching to two cheeks of her bottom as though it was there she was to receive the inflection of the dreaded thing upon the desk. “Please, Mia, darling, do something.”

The elder sister knew she fought a lost cause. Gentry was enjoying the entire scene including her own distress for her younger sibling. She said what she must, “Please, Ryan, do you have to punish her like this, isn’t there something less painful you can do? I mean, tie her up or something like that.”

“Good girl, you’ve done your duty and now your dear little sister will hold our her hand for the first of four cuts. I’m really being very lenient to give her only two on each

hand." Gentry rose in all his academic majesty, picked up the cane and said, "Come now, Angel, hold out your hand."

Angel held out her hand.

Chapter 6

The Mark of the Cane

If the contrived tableau had been erotic before it was doubly so now. Angel was exuding emanations of apprehension in waves. Her facial expression was deserving of a canvass of its own. The slender nudity made small, ineffectual tugs against chained feet, the arm she tentatively extended was visibly trembling. The palm to be punished was by no means taut. Mia's heart went out to her younger sister. She was sure the teenager was unconcerned with her appearance but she was delivering to The Master such a vision of innocence in distress as to touch the heart. Whether Angel was guilty or innocent mattered not at all. She was simply the epitome of every maiden whose shrinking hand had ever been caned by a headmaster or mistress. What Ryan was doing was plucking an erotic moment from the past.

It had a predestined quality. The master's cane rapped sharply against the reluctant hand. "Open up, stretch it taut, Angel." The swift slash which followed Angel's obedience caused Mia to wince and cringe and Angel to emit a startled cry of shock and pain. Her punished hand flew to the refuge of a maiden armpit and was hugged desperately in an effort to assuage agony and to protect the injured member from another stroke. Angel doubled up, clutching

herself, oblivious to all else. Mia was familiar with the world of pain in which whipped girls find strange solace. She looked, hopefully, at Ryan. Perhaps he was playing the same trick upon Angel as he had with her; one single stroke after the promise of far, far more. But evidently she was privileged, Angel was not. The pseudo school master rapped the bare, bent shoulder of the make-believe delinquent maiden in admonition, “Come, Angel, my dear, that was number one. Now I want you to stand up and hold out your hand for number two. If you behave sensibly it will still be over after only four strokes.”

Mia gave him points. Gentry was putting on a superb act, partly for her benefit, mostly for his own. The now-sobbing nudity received no benefit at all other than the character building quality of punishment. Gentry’s voice was affectionate, “Come, come now, Angel, don’t delay. I can advance your punishment, you know. You will be a sensible girl to keep it at two strokes for each hand instead of more.”

Quite evidently Angel agreed with him. Angel, for all her tears and facial expression proclaiming an impossible to bear situation, was no fool. Slowly and with reproachful glances at all present, she stood erect and extended her, as yet, uninjured hand. Tears streaked her cheeks and touched her elder sister’s heart. But tears were implicit in what was being done and you can never be sure just how real tears might be with the twins. A moment later came

the whine, the swishing yellow arc, then the impact on the offered hand. Angel's yelp of dismay crinkled Mia's spine, she winced as though the blow had been upon the palm of her own hand. Impatiently she watched the punished nymphet bend forward, this time with a hand under each armpit, making hurt-animal sounds. Clinking her shackled way backward, Angel retreated until she came against her sister. Falling to her knees, she clasped Mia's legs with wounded, throbbing hands and proclaimed, "Mia, don't let him hit me anymore. I can't stand the pain. I just can't." The plea ended in a wail of anguish.

Mia met the master's gaze. She could tell Ryan realized he had gone far enough. As though the two adults had read each other's thoughts, Mia said, "Don't worry, Angel, Mr. Gentry is very kind. I'm sure if I ask him to cane me instead of you, he will do that for us. Come now, darling, does that make you feel better?"

From the sobbing nymphet, whose face was buried between Mia's thighs, came the almost inarticulate response, "You mustn't, I won't let you. It hurts too much. You haven't got any idea how much it hurt."

Once again Mia exchanged a questioning glance with the man who had now replaced the cane upon the desk. This time it was Ryan who came forward with a face-saving compromise, "Come on now, Angel, I won't cane your hand

any more if you prefer Fancy to have the other two strokes instead of you. Do you want to run down and ask her?"

Mia felt the tensing of the nudity between her legs. She waited breathlessly for Angel's response. When it came it was a weak and sniffling, "Oh, all right then! I'll get up and hold my hands out again but I don't think you're being a bit nice. I'm not sure I like you anymore."

Gentry shrugged and tossed Mia a square of white cambric with which she tenderly dried Angel's tears and cheeks. Angel then used it to blow her nose as though venting injured feelings. The youngster got slowly to her feet, handed the wet wad back to its owner, then took her position once again, her arm extended pathetically, its small palm wide open for the cane.

Mia knew the twins unpredictable. She could scarecely believe what happened now. True, the cane cut with lesser severity, but after the impact Angel's arm fell limply at her side and failed to move. Without any additional signs of distress the youngster extended her other arm to receive the last of the four strokes. When Ryan's cane impacted for the last time, Angel ran her shackled course back to her sister who longed most ardently for arms with which to comfort the punished girl. By twisting and contorting she had contrived to use the handkerchief to dry Angel's tears but an embrace was impossible. All she could do was bend and kiss the sobbing girl, believing she could actually feel the

throbbing pulse in injured palms as Angel held them hard against her skin as though sharing a pain too great to bare alone. Ryan shook his head and shrugged. He and Mia would discuss this alone later. He waited for girlish grief to run its course then said, “You may rejoin Fancy now, Angel. I want you to fasten yourself the same as Fancy. You know the drill, run along.”

Angel ran along but, half way to the door, turned, hesitant and shamed-faced. “Thank you for caning my hands, Sir.” In a swirl of chain she continued her retreat.

Mia half suspected that Ryan must have previously instructed the girl to make the last unnatural gesture of thanks, but she did not ask. Absurd as it might be she could not fail to see the cane upon the desk. There had been no mention of it being used upon her but it was very much THERE. So long as it was convenient to the master’s hand, it would be best to be circumspect in her behavior. Ryan laughed, perhaps reading her thought, then picked her up and carried her away.

A couple of days later, while Mia posed and Ryan painted, he chose to revive the question of her imprisonment. “I’m holding on to you, Mia, for a reason you don’t suspect,” he said slowly while preoccupied with his brush. “I’m using you and the twins as bait to see how long it is before Melody makes her appearance.”

Mia almost broke pose. Surprised she asked, “But what has Melody got to do with me being your prisoner? In fact, why would Melody come here at all?”

“To be whipped, of course, I thought you knew.” Ryan assured cheerfully, “The poor girl gets bothered if she isn’t whipped regularly and it’s been some time.”

Mia was startled. She retained a vivid mental picture of seeing Melody whipped. She was certain it was something she could never forget. But Ryan had to be facetious in what he had just said, it surely was not possible. Uncomprehending, she said, “You’re joking, Ryan, she couldn’t possibly!”

The artist at his easel spared his puzzled model a sympathetic grin. “My fault, really,” he admitted cheerfully. “I laced into her quite a bit when we were married, she’s the most irritating female there is. I used to whip her then take her to bed. The results was always fireworks. Being whipped made what you call ‘her ravishment’ twice as good for her as it had ever been. It became habit forming.” He shrugged depreciatingly and dabbed at his palette. “Took me quite a while to catch on. You saw the marvelous way she accepts being whipped? Well, she wasn’t that way at the start. She used to kick and yell as much as any girl would. But something took hold, something I can’t explain and I don’t suppose it matters anyway. After a couple of years I discovered she was provoking me on purpose. The

longer I kept the whip away from her the harder she prodded. After I'd been testing her two or three weeks, she got pretty desperate. She withdrew quite a bit of money from our account and bought herself a mink coat, flaunting it at me like a red flag to a bull. It was then I realized what had happened to Melody and what it was she wanted. Not so much wanting but needed. Melody had got herself into such a state, or maybe it was my fault, but if she didn't get whipped often she was unhappy and impossible to live with. So I simply bought a whip that didn't mark her too badly and simply thrashed her regularly. I never let on that I'd figured out her little game, that would have spoiled it for her. I'll be very surprised if she doesn't show up soon and do something stupid enough to put her in the wrong and make me angry enough to give her another thrashing."

Mia's mind raced. Supposing her impossible dream came true and she became Mrs. Ryan Gentry, how was she going to feel if her husband thrashed another woman regularly, a woman who had been his wife! It was too utterly bizarre. To gain time she retorted, "I don't believe a word of it. A girl couldn't possibly…"

"Take it or leave it, sweetheart," Ryan said offhandedly. "If I knew some fellow I didn't like, I'd introduce him to Melody and get her off my hands, she's a real pain in the ass and a lousy model."

The conversation drifted to other topics. Mia was finding herself more and more concerned, not so much with her imprisonment, but about what Ryan's intentions towards her could truly be. She wanted him fiercely. If the way to his heart was to be whipped, she would accept, even welcome, such an end to indecision. She could not help seeing Melody as a menace. Ryan professed nothing but disgust for his former wife, but if Melody was as persistent as he said, then she would indeed be a formidable adversary. She could not bear the thought of she and the twins being sent packing across the fields to Dovecove and Melody once more reigning as Ryan's queen or Ryan's prisoner. With Ryan Gentry the terms appeared synonymous. In the meantime she was shamed and guilty in a constant condition of lustful longing for the man who held her prisoner. In her rational moments she freely admitted to herself the whole thing was nuts!

But frank admission and wry reflections changed nothing. Mia Argent remained with her hands cuffed behind her back and her feet bearing the clinking of leg irons. She sometimes wondered what it would be like to be free. She suspected it would be a disappointing let down, an anticlimax to a situation still to flower and blossom into full bloom. She was sure that Ryan would not be satisfied with the painting of sufficient slave-girl pictures for a gallery showing. He would want more from her. The handcuffs told her this. But what he would want was still an un-

known quantity. Whenever Mia, in her bondage, felt bored, she allowed her mind to dwell upon this imponderable and was rejuvenated with a surge of lust.

Melody made her play almost exactly as Ryan had predicted. The master had hurriedly departed for the village to replenish a couple of colors he had allowed to run short and in an absent minded sort of way, tethered Mia's neck with the old, familiar rope to a ring well up on the studio wall. They both knew it a piece of whimsy which would discomfort her for no more than an hour. In parting Mia stuck her tongue out at him and received a carnal wink in return. Resignedly she lent her pinioned arms against the wall and allowed her mind to dwell upon the things she and Ryan did together in his bed. He was a highly skillful lover, allowing her no initiative, but forcing her to every compliance, a condition which simply increased her desire for him.

Within ten minutes Melody walked through the door.

"I simply had to come, Mia, I couldn't stay away any longer. Ryan's kept you and the twins twice as long as he said. I hope you don't mind me butting in?"

Mia straightened up and was well aware of limiting helplessness in the face of visitors. "It's nice of you to be concerned about us, Melody," she said as heartily as she could.

“But aren’t you taking an awful risk, coming here like this?”

“Don’t worry, Mia, I’ve just watched him dash off to the village, he won’t be back for a while. Look, I’ve got to get you free whether you want to be or not. And the twins, too. I looked in on them on the way up. He’s got them chained as usual.” The ex-wife sighed, “He always makes things so difficult for a girl.”

“But, Melody, you can’t possibly get us free, you don’t have the keys.”

“Yes, I can. Look, I went to the store and bought this on the way here.” Melody opened her bag and in triumph, held up a flat file, about ten inches long. “See! And he thinks he’s so smart.”

Mia wanted to laugh, it was hard to repress the giggle the file evoked. She suspected it would not even scratch the chrome by which she was secured and kept captive. It was easy to understand why a female this dense could irritate a man like Ryan Gentry. Quietly she suggested, “I’m not sure it will work, Melody, but go ahead anyway. What are you going to start on?”

With a fine flourish Melody undid the rope tether and threw it aside. With an air of having accomplished half her mission, she led Mia to a chair, seated her and then arranged her handcuffed wrists to give some stability while

she worked. The girl in the handcuffs was thankful she was not aching to escape. Had her life depended upon this filing away of her bonds, the moment would have been tense indeed. Instead she waited quietly while Melody got to work.

“I think that man in the store swindled me,” Melody said indignantly. “Here I’ve been working away like a horse and I haven’t made a mark. Do you know how to use a file, Mia?”

“I’m afraid a file like that won’t touch the metal handcuffs are made of, Melody,” Mia said gently. “I think you need some things called bolt cutters.”

“What’s a bolt cutter?” Melody asked irritably. “Are you telling me I’ve got the wrong thing?”

Melody was furious, she flung the offending file against the far wall but announced, “Very well then, I’ll have to find the keys. I’m determined to get you loose. You can’t stay here any longer.”

The safely chained Mia looked assessingly at this girl who was a competitor for Ryan Gentry’s affections. She saw only a quite lovely but stupid girl fighting frustration. Once more she said, “Melody, I’m scared for you. If he comes back, you know what will happen and I really don’t know where he keeps the keys, they are probably in his pocket. You might search for hours.”

“Well, I’m going to look anyway,” Melody affirmed defiantly. “If we can’t find them, I’ll have to take you just as you are. You’ve sat in cars often enough in that condition, once more won’t make any difference.”

Mia sighed. She had no wish to be kidnapped by this girl again. It had happened once disastrously, a second try would fare no better. “There’s still the twins,” she pointed out reasonably, “I can’t possibly leave them behind. If they stay, I stay.”

“We’ll see about that,” Melody said. She looked at her watch. “I can spare five minutes for a search. That’s much the best thing. If I can unlock you all, we can go laughing. Gosh, I’d love to see Ryan’s face!”

Chained feet prevented Mia from keeping pace with her would-be rescuer. It was hard to believe Ryan’s theory that Melody was doing this in a subconscious wish to be whipped. But, of course, getting she and her sisters out of the way would indeed leave a clear pathway to the man she desired. Mia sighed again. Instead of following her rescuer she went to visit the captive twins. She found them painlessly but frustratingly constrained. Each of them had a single wrist handcuffed to the wall. As usual, when she came into view, their response was vociferous.

“Oh, Mia darling, look what he’s done to us now. Please get us loose.”

Their demands were always engagingly absurd. It should have been obvious that, if she could not free herself, she could not free them. But, in the eyes of Angel and Fancy, she was the big sister, omnipotent and knowing all things. Their barrage continued.

“You’ll have to hurry, Mia. I’m sure you can find a key if you look. That silly Melody woman was in her a minute ago. Gosh, she’s dumb!”

“But I don’t have the keys and I can’t get them. That means we’re, all of us, still prisoners,” Mia chided severely. “You two really have the quaintest ideas.”

The twins rattled their chained wrists. “But look, darling, it’s only one hand. See, we can jiggle them up and down but, for some reason, they won’t come loose. Come and look, we’re sure you can think of something.”

“Don’t be silly, I’m as helpless as you two are. In fact, you’ve got a lot more freedom than I have. Except I can walk around.”

“Mia, darling, do you think Mr. Gentry will whip Melody again if he catches her here again?”

“Yes, I think he will. If she’s any sense at all she’ll get going while she can.”

The trio was interrupted by the lady in question. Melody was hot, breathing heavily and unquestionably bothered.

“I can’t find a damned thing,” she said angrily. “The son a bitch, I’ve looked in all the places he used to hide things he didn’t want me to find and there’s absolutely zilch!”

“Melody, we’re terribly grateful for what you’re doing for us but you really should get going. It’s lovely to see you and if there’s some way you can keep an eye on Ryan, we’d be grateful for that, too,” Mia said urgently. “You’ve spent all the time that’s safe, now run along.”

Melody surveyed the trio she had come to save with faint hostility. She felt they were not cooperating in the way escapees should. Forcefully she tugged at the handcuffs on each of the twins to assure herself nothing would come free then turned back to Mia, “All right, sweetheart, I can’t free the twins but you are free to move around so I’m going to take you. I’m going to rescue you. We’ll figure out how to get those handcuffs and leg irons off you when we get home.”

“Oh, Melody, please! You know what happened last time you kidnapped me, it will be the same again.”

“This time I’m going to put you somewhere where Ryan can’t find you. You don’t seem a bit grateful for what I’m trying to do, rescue you and all, so I might as well keep you and have a bit of fun.”

“I’m not going, Melody. I simply refuse to leave this house naked and handcuffed and leg-ironed. The idea is absurd.”

“So I’m absurd, am I?” Melody gazed around in exasperation. “You wait a minute, I’ll go and find a riding crop or a whip or something. If you’re going to be difficult, I can be difficult, too.”

Mia was dismayed. The twins felt they had nothing to lose, so they leaned back against their walls and jingled their chained wrists suggestively and with deep feeling. She realized she faced a dilemma in which she must decide if she should go willingly or be forced by the cuts of an unfriendly whip. She considered avenues of escape or places she might hide but that was futile. Melody was a threat best met head on. Mia had never longed for free hands more than now, but the handcuffs on her wrists mocked her tugs and twistings. For this moment Mia was as angry with her chains as Melody in her bafflement over finding a way to free her from them. Mia’s dilemma reentered the room carrying a single-thonged whip. The chained girl remembered all too well but resolutely she affirmed, “It’s no good, Melody. Don’t be silly about this. I’m not going with you.”

“Why not?” Melody was running the slender leather through almost loving fingers. “It’s you that’s crazy.” Mia turned around and wiggled her joined hands and fingers demonstratively then turned again and kicked hard at the shackles on her ankles. “Look, you idiot, I’m in no condition to go anywhere! If you’d take me some place you think

is safe you still won't be able to get these things off my wrists and ankles, you'll simply have a bundle of girl who can't do anything."

"You're doing plenty with Ryan right now," Melody's voice was one hundred percent sneer. "Think I don't know! What you need is a week alone with me."

"And what you need is an hour alone with Ryan!"

Mia bit the words off short, wishing she had not uttered them. In some ways this girl was pitiful. If Ryan's analysis was correct and if Melody understood it, she would be bitterly ashamed of her most urgent need, resenting it but helpless to bring it to an end other than by one more terrible punishment. What else the two of them may have said or thought came to an abrupt end by Ryan Gentry walking briskly into the room. He wasted no words, but took the whip from Melody's nerveless fingers, turned her around and handcuffed her wrists behind her back in the same helplessness as he kept Mia. His voice was, as ever, calm, "Well, well, Melody, my sweet. Thinking of whipping somebody?"

The question needed no answer so the master continued in the same vein, "Saw your car as I was leaving. Guessed what you'd be up to, so I came back and hung around. I take it you haven't had much luck." He fixed Melody with a stern look. "I gather you were about to whip poor Mia into

some sort of agreement. I suspect you were going to kidnap her again, weren't you?"

It was obviously difficult for Melody to make up her mind; to remain mute in stubborn anger or to protest and promise. Tugging and straining at the unaccustomed handcuffs on her wrist, she made a compromise, "Take these things off me, Ryan and I'll go home. I'm sorry I came. I apologize. I can see I was foolish. You've got this collection of palpating bitches so hot they don't even want their freedom. Congratulations."

"They are not bitches."

"OK, I'm sorry. Let's call them three charming girls. Now will you unlock these things you've put on me?"

Mia realized Gentry had prepared his scenario. His voice was without anger. "I will not unlock them. In a minute I will strip you naked. I will then fasten you in an uncomfortable situation and keep you like that for a week before I send you home. You will not be whipped."

Melody paused in her twisting to gaze at her former husband. Mia could sense the message they exchanged. She saw Melody wilt. Ryan's voice dominated the four females in his power. "I know why you're here. You know why you're here. You want me to whip you because it satisfies some hunger you've generated within yourself. You've come here in the hope of being whipped and fucked and

sent home replete. The only way I know to cure this nonsense is to refuse to do the thing you want most. You can think about it in the erotic situations I place you, but it is not going to happen. When I set you free at the end of the week, I hope you'll realize the game is over."

Melody wept. It was the obvious female thing to do. Mia could imagine herself doing exactly the same thing. With hard male hands Ryan stripped the girl who had once married him. There was about him an air of purpose. He produced another set of leg irons, locked one about Melody's ankle and the other upon the already fettered ankle of Angel Argent. It was as though he had disposed of a distasteful task, he gathered up the ruined and discarded clothing his hands had torn from female nakedness and turned to Mia, "Come along, sweetheart, we've done all the damage we can do here. The three of them won't be lonely, they might even get to like each other."

Mia clinked her way obediently at her master's side. She wished Melody anywhere but where she was. As long as Melody was anywhere within Gentry's house she would be very much a force neither she nor Ryan would forget nor could ignore. But there was also now a nagging second thought. She voiced it unhappily, "But, Ryan, don't you realize Melody has got lesbian tendencies? If you leave her alone with two naked girls, she'll get bored and go to work on them. Please, I don't want that."

“They can kick, can’t they?” Gentry retorted. “Besides they’ve got one free hand each, they can handle her easily.”

“I’m not so sure. Remember you’ve got leg irons on both of them.”

“OK, OK. I’ll drop in later and issue a warning. You may be right. I’ll tell ’em, ‘No tongue-and-groove jobs-or else!’”

Mia had to be satisfied. How could she tell any man of male weakness and susceptibility to female wiles. Gentry was secure in his conviction he had no affection for the woman he had just chained to one of the twins but Mia was not so sure and a week was a long, long time. Dejectedly she said, “Well, if you’re not going to whip Melody maybe you’d better whip me. I’m all hot and bothered by her being downstairs. I wish she was back where she came from.”

“You don’t want to be whipped any more than I do, you idiot girl,” Ryan chided tenderly. “One more wicked stroke across you somewhere, just to remind you what it’s like?”

“Well, no! I suppose I don’t, I’m being silly. What about your paints?”

“Oh, damned, that silly bitch put them out of my mind.” He looked at his watch. “There’s still time. I won’t bother to fix you in any cute way, you’re helpless enough. And if you wanted to go you would have gone with Melody.”

It was nice to be trusted. Or could she call herself trusted when she bore a weight of confining irons! Instead, she directed her snubbed steps to where her sisters entertained a foreign force. The two of them had already exhausted their repertory of complaint, Melody had not.

“I could kick myself for letting this happen. Mia, you absolutely must know where he keeps his keys. I don’t want to be chained with these dumb kids for seven days.”

“You shouldn’t have come here then. You might have known Ryan would do something you wouldn’t like. I wouldn’t want to be chained the way you are either. It looks silly.”

Melody devoted a few moments to twists and ineffectual tugs. Angel squealed and told her to stop hurting. Melody snorted in disgust and continued, “He doesn’t really mean that, does he? I mean about not whipping me? He’s bound to whip me sooner or later, isn’t he?”

“I don’t think so, not this time. Ryan believes you’ve become addicted to it. He thinks you come here on purpose to trick him into giving you one more thrashing.” Mia stared her adversary in the eye, “Is he right?”

“You’re both mean, saying a thing like that about me—even if it’s true!” Melody kicked at the chain. “I’ll admit I’d a lot sooner be whipped than chained to one of these adolescents. They don’t talk my language.”

Mia pondered Melody's plight. Whatever she did about Melody would be in the cause of self interest. Tentatively she asked, "If I managed to persuade Ryan to whip you, would you be grateful? Is it what you want?"

Melody tossed her hair defiantly. "How should I know! You two have done all the Freudian figuring, you wouldn't believe a word I say. But I'll make you a promise, if you can get me free, I'll go and never come back."

Mia sighed. Handcuffs and leg irons made everything hopeless, there wasn't a thing a girl could do. It was not even possible to embrace the disturbed Melody and give her comfort. She would have done this if she could, but unhappily made her retreat from what she thought of, humorously, as the "damsels dungeon." She returned to the studio to be ready for Ryan's return.

It took a couple of days before Mia generated the courage to broach the subject on her mind. Ryan was painting with his usual absorption when she inquired in a tone deliberately listless, "Ryan, I've been thinking about Melody. We both told her about her fault and she's well aware of it herself. She's had a couple of days to stare this whipping business in the face. Why not do it to her one more time and tell her that's the end of it and then send her home?"

"Want to get rid of her, eh?" Ryan's tone was sardonic. "Look, I don't want you two silly females vying for my af-

fections. I'll dispose of my affections myself. In five days she'll be gone, so stop worrying."

"If you don't do something dramatic with her, she'll simply come back again." Mia blushed and shifted within the limits of her pose upon the dais. "I know this must sound horrid, but I'm putting myself in her place and knowing what I'd hate. Why don't you stop whipping her in the conventional way you've used up to now and whip her in a shameful way and in demeaning places to rob her of dignity."

"Like up her crotch?" Ryan sounded more sardonic than ever. "Across her tits? How sadistic can you get!"

"Well, I didn't mean it to sound sadistic, but I guess it does," Mia admitted with shame. "But I didn't mean for you to do it all that hard. You don't have to leave scars and welts. Just make her ashamed and glad to go home."

"And that would work with you?"

"I… I think so."

"Then maybe I should do it to you?"

Mia suddenly felt herself on dangerous ground and beat a hasty retreat. "Oh, never mind. That's the last thing I want you to do to me. But, Ryan, darling, there is something…"

"Like what?"

“Well, I was thinking… I was wondering… Oh, damn it, Ryan, what I’m trying to say is will you give me some freedom. I mean, will you take off my handcuffs and leg irons for a while. A day or two?”

“Give me a good reason.”

“Well… it’s been so long. And sometimes that gets so frustrating. I’m not sure they haven’t grown in and become a part of me. Pretty please?”

Gentry spared her a glance that had nothing to do with planes or dimensions. “Actually not a bad idea,” he admitted cheerfully, “I’ve been thinking along the same lines myself, not so much with a view to letting you loose but the change in your bondage might do no harm, give us both a lift. How about I change your hands from back to front but use another chain to attach them to your leg irons about the level of your furry little pussy? You’d look real cute with another chain dangling between your knees and you’d have a lot more freedom than you do now. Of course, I’d have to take it off you at night. Can’t have too many impediments.”

“Well, I suppose if that’s what you want… “

“But not quite what you had in mind, sweetheart?”

“Well, it would be sort of nice to be able to stretch my arms and be able to leap around, even if it was only for a little

while. I promise I'll behave. I'll let you fasten me again anytime you say."

"I'll think about the freedom bit, sweetheart. We have to be careful about these changes of mood. To switch from the way I've got you now to complete freedom…! Well, I'm not too sure. Fact is I like you as you are. You're damned near perfect. No hands and only half your feet. Proper way to have a girl."

"Oh, Ryan, you're teasing me. Please be serious."

"OK, but hold that pose, you're a working girl, remember?" Ryan applied himself earnestly before speaking again. "But you do have a thought, I like the idea of a bit of a change for you. We'll try the one I described and we'll think of a few more. Maybe I'll give you that day of freedom as a reward."

The reward, when it came, was a shock!

Chapter 7

Whipped Wife

Jealousy, suspicion, disappointment—all these emotions swept Mia into a storm of resentment. Why did Ryan have to do this to her! Why did he spoil something so wonderful! As though to emphasize her question she stretched her bare, free arms as high as they would go and then to either side, she twirled around in a belly dancers pose upon her bare, but unchained feet. Mia Argent was free! She had been beautifully and gloriously free for an hour. And now this! It was too, too cruel.

Glory had been vouchsafed her before dinner. Without warning Gentry had unlocked the handcuffs from her wrists and the leg irons from her ankles. He had patted her bottom and kissed her lips. His voice was mocking as he said, “There you are, that’s what you wanted, now enjoy it. We’ll have a dinner together with you as a free girl. You can play hostess.”

Mia had forgotten how many weeks it was since she had enjoyed such freedom. Her first act was to throw her arms around her amused master and hug and hug and hug in a way she had often longed to do but had been foiled. She also kissed and kissed and kissed and then, as though to totally emphasise her gratitude, she melted at his feet and grasped his leg in the pose of total adoration. She knew it

would please him, it pleased her too. Having expressed this gratitude, she then performed the gymnastics she had promised. Her arms and legs flashed in every direction she could contrive, giving them every chance to stretch and reach the fulfillment of her young strength. It was glorious, it was wonderful, she adored Ryan without reservations.

Breathlessly she said, “Remember, I promised, whenever you say the word…”

She saw the adoration in his eyes and knew she had struck the proper cord. He was a man and Melody was somewhere in the house. It behooved her to move and speak with caution. She sat down to dinner with her master in a state of exaltation. She repeatedly reached for the salt and pepper just to prove she could do so. Ryan laughed at her happiness, it was infectious.

They had brandy in the lounge. Mia once more felt delightfully civilized as she went to and from the bar bearing her master’s choice. That she knelt at her master’s feet to serve, or to herself sip the potent spirits, in no way affected her freedom. She used both arms and legs continually and often unnecessarily in an exuberance of liberty. In a pleasant state of euphoria, Gentry gave and Mia received his order.

“Sweetheart, tonight is going to be special for you and me in bed, real special. I want you prisoner but it will be with

the slenderest of bonds. Run upstairs now, you'll find a chain and a shackle attached to the foot of the bed. Snap the shackle on whichever of your ankles you prefer. Then sit and wait for me."

The slave-girl had not the faintest thought of refusal. Once more the hug and the tender kiss, the hungry breasts against a man's shirt, not daring to prolong the ecstasy beyond prudence. It was not until she sped into their bedroom that the hatchet fell upon her hope. Half way to the bed she stood and stared aghast.

"Well, don't just stand there staring, ninny. I don't know how you got loose but you can untie me and we can both run for it." Melody's voice rose in a crescendo of excitement.

Mia did nothing. She stood and stared. All she saw was betrayal of a dream. What was Melody doing here, stark naked, her arms raised and her wrists bound to the two posts at the foot of the bed she and Ryan shared! Worst of all Melody was facing the bed itself and would have a bird's eye view of whatever took place upon it. But she was well bound and very helpless.

"Mia, wake up, what's the matter with you! I'm not a ghost, I'm Melody Gentry, or have you forgotten? I don't know what's happening but let's make the most of it."

It was a chaotic congestion of emotions. Mia shook her head in a daze of indecision. This sudden intrusion of her rival into euphoria left her chagrined enough to follow Melody's demand. But she knew Ryan would be sitting on the bottom step awaiting whatever response she made or did not make. What a wonderful chance it would be to get rid of Melody once and for all. But Ryan would intercept her on the stairway and bring her back. Mia knew her freedom was only of her limbs, it was not true liberty. Her gaze fell to the chain and shackle resting on the coverlet. Melody saw it too.

"Don't tell me, Mia, you're going to be dumb enough to put that thing on your own ankle!" she demanded in amazement. "He told me that's what you had to do, but I didn't believe it possible?"

It was not much use embracing a girl from the rear. Mia knelt upon the bed and drew the bound wife as close to herself as free arms could contrive, their breasts touched and frictioned pleasantly. But her intent was not erotic arousal. She kissed the fevered and angry lips and whispered, "I'm sorry Melody, I truly am but I can't let you loose. I belong to Ryan, I belong to him in ways you may not understand. I won't go counter to his wishes. For an hour or so he's trusting me and I won't let him down. Please forgive."

Between the two naked girls there was no mystery, nothing hidden, each understood the other and this situation their master had contrived. As though fearful she might change her own mind, Mia determinedly picked up the shackle and fixed it around her right ankle. She pushed hard and the satisfying click told both girls that she was prisoner. She stood back and kicked the trail of links testingly and laughed. There was no use being gloomy or putting on a fit of sulks. Mia began to glimpse some possibilities in what Ryan had contrived. If anything could shame or humiliate Melody, it must surely be the enforced stand in bound helplessness to watch the antics of her former husband and her successor in the making of their love. Had Melody been less of a nuisance it might have been called cruel, but it held elements of humor not to be ignored.

The shackle was heavy as the chain was long. Ryan must have been shopping. Mia made a limited tour of their bedroom, Melody's eyes following this small freedom hungrily. She did not fail to remind, "There's still time to untie me, Mia. If you don't want to escape, that's your affair. But I want to escape and you must be the meanest girl ever if you won't untie me. You could, real easy."

"It wouldn't do any good, Melody, Ryan would be waiting for you downstairs. You might get into something much worse than watching what he's going to do to me on the bed. Don't let's pretend to be shocked, we're both adults."

No matter how she tried, Mia found it impossible to counter Melody's bitter hostility. It was easy enough to understand, she was being subjected to a bitter humiliation. Mia was thankful when Ryan came, he took her in his arms in a manner oblivious to the woman bound to the bed posts, he laid her upon the bed, arranging the heavy metal of her chain, then mounted her with tenderness. When she felt herself pierced Mia forgot all else.

Ryan gave his slave-girl a day and night of unexpected total freedom before inquiring, "Well, sweetheart, ready to be a chained prisoner again?"

Mia was more than ready. She felt that gratitude quite out of proportion to the benefit she had received but she could not help this, the gratitude was there and sufficiently glowing to enable her to offer her hands and watch as handcuffs bit her wrists in a now familiar constraint, the leg irons were old friends. The new chain from the center of the span between her legs and locked to the link between her wrists might drive her crazy with frustration but was, at least, a pleasant change from having her hands and arms behind her back. She said a demure thank you and went with her master to the studio for their day's work. She felt her inability to raise her bound hands above the level of her pubic bush well justified by Ryan's obvious inspiration. He worked like a man possessed. Perhaps he was possessed by a dream of beauty most men never saw.

On the following day Mrs. Melody Gentry was whipped.

“Been thinking about what you said, sweetheart,” Ryan Gentry informed as he plied his brush, “I mean, that idea about whipping little Melody’s dothingie and tits. I think you’ve got something.”

Mia realized there was something more on Ryan’s mind, she waited patiently. “Not a bit sure it would do much good if it comes from me,” Ryan mused thoughtfully. “It would bother her a lot more if she got it from a girl.”

“I refuse. I couldn’t possibly. Please, Ryan…”

“You can and you will, darling. Don’t be silly. After you’ve given her a couple you’ll enjoy the rest, take my word for it.”

“I couldn’t possibly be that cruel.”

“Well, it was your idea, sweetheart, don’t be such a little hypocrite.”

Mia knew herself trapped. But still assured her master, “I’ll make a mess of it. I’ll try it if you want. I know Melody’s a pain in the ass and this might be a way to get rid of her, but I’ve never whipped anyone, not ever. And it’s a bit late to start.”

“If I use the whip, it will be on you, Mia. Don’t make me do that.”

She was trapped indeed, but her acceptance was ungracious. “Well, all right, I’ll do it if I have to. But I wish you wouldn’t make me.”

They left it at that. Both realized Mia was sailing into an uncharted sea, an ocean in which there were discoveries she did not wish to make. Gentry put away his paints and brushes in sudden determination. His mouth slanting in amusement, he approached the small platform on which his naked model stood, he unlocked first her hands and then her feet. Mia stepped down a totally free young woman. She made no further protests but walked by her master’s side to where he led.

Melody Gentry was in the basement, the basement with the familiar pole which had once played anchorage to a couple of indignant twins. Melody’s hands were bound, one on each side at the level of her breasts. But this was not all. Each of her ankles had been roped and each foot drawn out to the side sufficiently to cause her to strain away from the post. And to expose her crotch in its totality. The twins cheeks of her bottom were also placed in view. Mia wondered if she must whip them too. Melody’s breasts, swelling beneath each bared armpit in her stress, might not offer a frontal view but where nonetheless available to bear whatever inflection Gentry chose. Mia devotedly wished she were somewhere else. This was not her cup of tea.

“I think you’re both horrid,” Melody vowed unequivocally. In her stained posture she glanced from side to side at the man and woman who would give her pain. In faint hope she added, “Where are you going to whip me?”

“On your bits and pieces, Melody dear,” Ryan assured brightly. “It was Mia’s idea, she thought you’d enjoy it.”

“Ryan, you’re a bastard, I bet you put her up to it. Look, I’ve had enough of being whipped. You can untie me and send me home. I’ll never bother you again.”

“I seem to have heard that before, Melody, my dear. Let’s see if a change in parts will help you stay away.”

“You’re tearing me apart tying me like this, the way my legs are dragged off in each direction is something wicked. Please loosen the ropes, I can’t possibly stand this.”

Nothing was loosened, nothing changed. The bound and stretched ex-wife looked around in desperation before offering an ineffectual absurdity, “If you do this to me I’ll never speak to either one of you again!”

“Good, we had something like that in mind,” Gentry assured her warmly. With the whip he held he made an experimental snap up between the wide-spread legs that elicited an angry yelp of protest. “That’s good, my pet, you actually felt it, didn’t you? Here Mia, your turn.”

Mia took the offered instrument, remembering how she had once longed to use such an object upon the bottoms of her twin sisters. The urge was gone, captivity had killed it. She looked at Melody's exposed and helpless delights awaiting but knew this would not be the same. However Melody was a rival in woman's oldest war, she was, moreover, intensely irritating. In response to Ryan's urgent suggestion of "getting along with it," she measured distance up between the wide spread thighs. Melody's previous stoicism under the whip was slightly impaired. Her eyes widened in shock as the single thong cut into a girlish crevasse. She squealed but the protest was pure Melody, "You shouldn't do that, you shouldn't whip me in there. That's quite enough. Please whip my back or my bottom instead."

"We know about your back and your bottom, Melody," Gentry assured her. "They both like it so what's the use! We thought we would try a few fresh places. I'm sure you'll keep us posted."

"You son of a bitch!" The wifely admonition was further added to with, "Stop doing this to me or I'll call the police."

"May we offer you the phone? I'll hold the receiver for you and do the dialing."

"You bastard. Make Mia stop. Make her whip me in the proper places."

Mia Argent was in the grip of strange new sensations. Much as she would have loved to whip the tight round bottoms of her sisters, she realized it would have been child's play compared with the privilege now before her, all of Melody was hers. And the things Melody had to say were endlessly diverting. She struck hard again between the soft, pink thighs.

But by now Melody had gathered her forces. None could know the extent of her reservoir of fortitude or the emotions that supported it. True, as each cut of the thong explored her most female places she moaned and made brief but sincere protests, but most of her responses consisted of no more than a grunt, a gasp and the continuous undulations of her nakedness. Rebellion against cords on wrists and ankles was continuous also, a mute reprimand for what she saw as cruelty, or perhaps enjoyment...! Melody might be an idiot in everyday life but while beneath the whip became a truly superb example of female fortitude.

Mia struck with vigor. Ryan had been correct, after the first two her inhibitions had fallen away and the hunk of thong on female flesh had become something much to be desired. She resolved to persuade Ryan to allow her to whip the twins for their treatment of her in tethering her to the tree so long ago. It seemed a long, long time but had been the source of all her troubles. She stepped to one side, measuring her stroke, then brought the leather sharply up to bite

Melody's right breast. She was rewarded by Melody's sudden squeal of alarm and the protest, "You mustn't whip me there! You absolutely must not! Ryan, stop her before she goes too far, I don't want my breasts whipped."

Pay dirt had been reached. Mia salved her conscience by knowing that she was not applying the thong anywhere as hard as she might have. She was whipping female parts and doing so with a female hesitation. She could not rid herself of the feeling that it was she who was bound as Melody was bound and it was her breasts and pussy that were receiving the bite of leather. It might be silly, but there it was! For all Mia knew she might be the next on Ryan's list. She was positive that bound and whipped thus she would provide responses that would give him an outrageous erection. She went to Melody's other flank and struck another upward cut.

In her absorption with the task, Mia lost count of strokes, after an energetic fifteen minutes Ryan's voice gently warned, "That's thirty strokes, my pet, think it's enough?"

"Of course it's enough!" Melody said indignantly. "I think you're both behaving outrageously. You're a couple of brutes. Ryan, take the whip away from this creature, she's killing me."

"You would prefer I use it?" Ryan's voice was suave.

“Of course, not! Stop whipping me all together. My tits and cunt have had all they can take.”

Mia stopped. She was truly somewhat ashamed, yet there had been a warm conviction of doing the right thing. Melody needed to be dealt with in whatever way was practical. Mia knelt and inspected the scarlet breasts and striated crotch. There were no weals, she had used the whip almost with kindness. She suggested, “I think she can use more, Ryan. Please let me give her five more on each tit. And five more on what she calls her twat.”

“Don’t you dare! I absolutely forbid. Mia, have some sense. And you, Ryan, put a stop to this.”

“It’s only fifteen more, Melody,” Ryan’s voice was cheerfully reassuring. “Five on each of your tender spots. You’re in great shape, you’ll take them like they were nothing.”

Mia delivered number one of the fresh inflections. She could sense with feminine intuition her subject’s responses; Melody’s main objections were just meaningless sounds. The bound girl was contorting exquisitely and uttering the most satisfying sounds interspersed with sentences of coherence. “I’ll never forgive you.” and “You shouldn’t make Mia do this to me, Ryan, you should do it yourself. What I mean is, you shouldn’t do it at all.”

Mia whipped slowly but steadily. She was in the grip of something beyond control, something she had heard of but

never truly believed. She was enjoying whipping Melody Gentry, it was that simple. There was nothing of vindictiveness in her pleasure, it was a purely sensual gratification. The splat, splat, splat of thong on flesh, especially such intimate and gorgeous flesh, fed the fire within her loins and generated fresh purpose with which to continue her inflections. Dimly she recalled having read how women were far more cruel to women than men. She could now understand. In an abandonment to joy she swung her arms and brought the wet leather thong squarely up into the helpless feminine loins to make its tip splat resoundingly upon a female belly. Melody screamed. The whipping stopped.

“Very well,” said Melody in total defeat. “I’ll go home and I won’t come back.”

They left her there to contemplate her fate. Gentry took his slave-girl by the arm and led her back to the lounge. “A brandy apiece, my love,” he suggested. “Gosh, that was quite something. I am still hearing those impacts. Mia, my darling, I’m proud of you. I bet it wasn’t easy at the start, but you came through with flying colors. I bet Melody means what she says about going home.”

Ryan had forgotten she was free. Mia glowed in happiness, going back and forth to the bar at his demand and kneeling at his feet to serve and to sip. Mia Argent knew herself the most fortunate of girls. If she had thoughts or memories of the girl she had whipped in the basement, the girl still

there in stressful straining at her bonds, she said no word of it. Melody was Ryan's problem, but she prayed most earnestly that he would send his former wife away. It was early for bed. But, seemingly oblivious to the freedom of her limbs, Ryan picked Mia up and took her to their bed. Again and again in the erotism of their couplings she lived again the thrashings of her rival, the glorious splat of thong on female flesh. When, sometime in the night, Ryan got up to free the punished girl Mia paid small heed, but half asleep and happily listening she heard the starting of a car and the crunch of its wheels receding into distance. When Ryan returned to her she knew she had won a victory.

Ryan and his slave-girl slept heavily but it was Mia who awoke first of all to a realization of something different, something strangely wrong. A little while for her to drift into the awareness that this feeling was simply the freedom of her hands and feet. They were totally free and the man beside her deep in sleep. She tensed awake to sudden realization that she could slip out of bed and naked or not, make her way back to Dovecove and resume her life. She had no belief she could free the twins, Ryan would have them safely chained but their release would be open to negotiation. With her free Ryan would have no power to bargain.

That was one side of the coin but on the other was her undoubtable love for the man who had held her captive, the

man who she had inspired to works of greatness, the man with whom she had an extraordinary rapport, even when he kept her chained. She loved Ryan Gentry unreservedly. So why avail herself of this opportunity to escape. She thought about it and repeated why, why, why!

It was simple, it was easy. She wanted her freedom as she had always wanted it, to leave her a whole person, a girl not subject to bondage, a girl who could make up her own mind to give herself to Gentry but on equal terms so her giving would be truly that and not a thing contrived or dictated by expediency. If she slipped from the bed, made her way downstairs and out across the fields to where her home awaited she could phone Gentry in the morning and tell him that she was no longer a slave but a girl willing to be his wife, not only willing but also anxious. Cautious and in disbelief, Mia Argent slid from Gentry's bed and tiptoed to the door. Every moment her palpating heart expected a male demand, but it did not come. With each step her freedom became more complete and more assured. At the back door she paused with hand upon the knob to consider if she truly wished to leave the strange and loving thralldom with which Ryan held her. Cautiously she turned the knob and stepped out into the last grayness of night. Never had any girl sped more swiftly or more surely towards a goal. When she reached her home she took the key from its hiding place outside the door, locked it from inside, then dived within the welcome of her own bed and slept gloriously.

Nothing is as we plan. Mia's momentous phone call in the light of day fell short of expectation. Gentry was neither angry or contrite. His demand was slightly touched with humor. "You might just as well walk back over here, sweetheart, it's where you belong, you can't kid yourself. You ought to remember I still have the twins. They are still securely chained and don't even know about your little escapade. If you hurry back you can make my breakfast before I chain you."

In anger, Mia slammed the receiver home in bitter disappointment. But she might have known. Gentry was running true to form. He always would regard anything a female did as slightly absurd and for the amusement of the male. There had been a touch of accusation in his voice and Mia suddenly realized he had, knowingly or otherwise, given her freedom, the very freedom she had asked for and promised not to abuse. She had forgotten how many times she had asked to be forgiven her chains in exchange for her parole, her promise to stay exactly as Gentry desired. But at the first chance she had run away. What was he secretly thinking! Had she, hastily, blown something good?

But the mistress of Dovecove comforted herself with thoughts of woman's liberty and a hope of Gentry's walking across the fields to visit in a civilized fashion. It was not until noon that she realized she was still naked. Testily she dressed but found the clutch of clothes almost

claustrophobic and she took them off again and did what she must around the house in stark nudity. But the magic had gone, there was no point in being naked and alone. It was the lustful gaze of men or the appraising eye of the artist which gave nakedness its potency. Irritably she once more dressed and despite discomfort, remained clothed the rest of the day. The hoped for call from Gentry did not come, only the postman knocked at her door. It was all very anti-climactic and unsatisfactory.

The twins arrived in the dark of night. They explained they had been denied covering and therefore must walk bare in the night to avoid being seen. They arrived breathlessly amused but highly critical.

“You were so silly, Mia, to run away like that. We were having such a wonderful time.”

“He said he was going to hang us up by our thumbs until you came back and said you were sorry. But he didn’t do it. He was ever so nice.”

“I bet you, if we had stayed there long enough, he would have gotten around to whipping our bottoms and our tops, too.” The accusation in the young voice-was patent.

“You’re both impossible,” Mia told them crossly. “If you were so happy being chained like a couple of puppy dogs, why don’t you go back and ask him to make you prisoners again?”

“Oh, we did that!” the twins assured in unison. “But Mr. Gentry said the only way he would consider that would be if you did too—and there was something about you kneeling down and being humble, I’ve forgotten exactly what.”

“I wish we were grown-up like you are and could be a real slave-girl and sleep with Mr. Gentry.” The words were still loaded with reproach. “Mia, I don’t see why you ran away, you had it so good.”

“We don’t see why Mr. Gentry didn’t whip you more. I bet it was because you were a fraidy-cat. That one stroke he gave you that one time looked so cute across your bare skin. Mia, you sure are dumb!”

It was a battle Mia could not win. She sent the vociferous pair to their beds but throughout the following day their complaints were constant, their substance was the stupid stupidity of a grown-up girl running away from a great guy like Ryan Gentry who only wanted to paint her picture and keep her chained and sleeping with her every night. They almost succeeded in making their elder sister feel utterly ashamed with her actions, avowing their ardor at the idea of leaping into Mr. Gentry’s bed had they been compelled or even just given half the chance. As far as Fancy and Angel were concerned, Mia had put an end to a fun thing and would never be forgiven unless she walked back across the fields and humbly asked for a return to imprisonment.

For Mia Argent it was an unsatisfactory day. Whatever she did went wrong and the twins were a burden. She realized the gulf between herself and her younger sisters in a way she had not done before, but then she asked herself if a gulf did indeed exist. The twins were wanting nothing more than she herself did. They were simply more honest and open about expressing it. And they had not gotten themselves into a position where face could not be saved. Since she could not go back to Gentry save on her knees, she would not go.

The hoped for phone call from her former master never came nor did Gentry himself knock at her door. Mia and her two sisters took up their former lives but did so without zest. In desperation Mia finally picked up the phone.

“You want me to come for tea!” Gentry sounded truly astonished. “What the hell would I come for tea for!”

“Well, I thought we could have a pleasant, civilized talk. I mean on equal terms.”

“I don’t want any equal terms. Females are not equal to the male, forget it.”

“But, Ryan, please do come! It won’t hurt you to walk across this afternoon. I’ll make cucumber and watercress sandwiches, you said you liked them.”

“Damn it, girl, don’t you realize that if I walk into that house, I can tie all three of you up and do what I want to you. Where’s your equality thing then?”

“Well, the twins and I will serve your Highness your tea on our bent knees. Is that what you want?”

“It’s your best try yet,” Ryan conceded. “Would you like to invite me to bring handcuffs and leg irons?”

Once more Mia slammed the receiver home in anger. Ryan was overplaying his masculinity and she would have no part of it. If she gave him an inch he would take a mile. If she allowed him to handcuff her, she knew for certain she would walk back to his house with him, or ride in his car, as a prisoner. Her fire burned bright at the thought of what he might then do.

For an hour, Mia fumed and reviewed her prospects. She felt sure she was doing everything wrong but was not certain what was right. Once more she picked up the receiver knowing she must be conciliatory. She was trembling when she heard Gentry’s voice. “Oh, Ryan, don’t hang up. I’m sorry I did that to you. I’m phoning now to ask, if you won’t come to have tea here, can I go and have tea with you? I do so need to talk, there’s so much to say. Please…?”

“If you come over here, Mia and you’re most welcome, the first thing I’ll do is whip you then take you to bed. I’ll give you tea afterwards unless it’s dinner time. If it’s that late I

might take you out to dine." She heard him chuckle. "Sore ass and all!"

"Ryan, please! Don't make things so difficult."

"I'm teaching you a lesson, Mia. If you want to sweat it out in that feminine place of yours, go ahead. I'm offering you an alternative but on my terms."

"But your terms leave me nothing. Ryan, please, just a cup of tea and a civilized exchange?"

Once more Ryan's chuckle came to the baffled girl across the line. His voice, as usual, left her no defense. "I'm getting a certain amount of kick out of this, you know, Mia," Ryan assured her. "I'm curious to see what you end up doing. I'll make things as hard for you as I can. I've been giving a little thought to inviting Melody back over. The house is empty without you and the twins. I imagine she'd be only too happy to come on the terms I've just given. The poor girl hasn't been fucked for ages."

It was too much! It was the last straw. Mia replaced the receiver with utmost gentleness but grim determination.

Ryan was being deliberately cruel. He would know the dilemma forced on her by the threat of Melody. To picture Melody's return to Gentry's home, even as a humble prisoner, was unthinkable. Yet how could she prevent it by other than utterly demeaning herself and falling in her

own estimation and his. By introducing Melody into their separation he had made face-saving on either side difficult. The gap was widening. Mia wondered if it now could ever heal.

It was then the unforeseen occurred.

Chapter 8

The Tether

It happened on the fourth night. Mia awoke in early morning to a vague sense of uneasy. There was a bad taste in her mouth and a definite feeling that something was wrong. She was laying uncomfortably upon a hard surface and upon her stomach. When she sought to move she discovered that her hands were tied behind her back. She guessed instantly! Sitting up against dizziness, she confirmed her worse suspicion. She was back beside the tree in the woods. The birds were chirping brightly in the early sunlight. The blanket with which her nakedness had been covered slid away from bare shoulders. The rope tether from her neck to the tree was as inevitable as all the rest. She should have guessed and taken precautions. The twins had been constantly bad tempered and at odds with life. Since taking her captive and keeping her upon the tether appeared to give them immense pleasure, it was natural they should turn in that direction in the aftermath of Gentry's rigid controls. Mia cursed her folly, the twins had been difficult to deal with on the previous occasion, they would be doubly so now.

Wryly Mia knew herself an experienced and hardened prisoner. She wasted no time in shouts or lamentations. The twins had certainly put something in her evening

drink in order to have her sufficiently inert to transport her to this place and so bind her. Furiously she went to work upon the rope. True, she had not managed to free herself on the previous occasion, but she must free herself now. This was no time in her life to be sitting down beneath a woodland tree.

But it was just the same. The knots in the cords upon her wrists had been cleverly and securely wired, the tether mocked her with a similar wiring around the tree trunk. After discovering helplessness and hopelessness, the naked girl gave way to fury and rolled and kicked a bit savagely at what she could. At the end of it she was as securely fastened as before. Her wrists and neck were chafed, that was the only difference. Mia Argent relapsed upon the rug so thoughtfully provided and wept in a storm of frustration.

The twins appeared with breakfast. Fancy and Angel were happier that she had seen them since their return. They chose to ignore the few pointed remarks she made and fed her happily while expressing sentiments of their own.

“You’re so silly, Mia, we had to do something.”

“What is tying me up like this and tethering me to the tree going to do?”

“Well, it’s better than nothing. We can spend a little time with you and we have to feed you and check your ropes

and tease you a bit. It's nowhere as good as Mr. Gentry but it's all we've got."

"Don't you dare tell Mr. Gentry what you've done to me!" Mia said heatedly. "Don't even think of telling him, I'd die!"

"Well, darling, we haven't told him yet, we're debating about if we should. But if he were to come and take you away we would have lost our fun."

"How on earth did you get me out here while I was unconscious?"

The twins giggled. "That was fun, too. We sort of dragged you through the house and then brought you the rest of the way in a wheelbarrow. We really had fun doing it."

It was a giggle Mia did not share. But she knew if she was to gain release she would have to treat Angel and Fancy with kid gloves. She had no hope of it coming quickly, her problem was to make sure that it came at all. She stood dejectedly viewing her exuberant sisters and tugging and twisting at the cord they had tied around her wrists. Whatever she could say sounded trite and threadbare.

"Can't you two get it into your young heads this is a sort of cruelty," she asked plaintively. "I know I'm not hurting but would either of you like to be tied this way and tethered to a tree indefinitely? It's no way to treat a sister."

“If we were as dumb as you, we wouldn’t mind,” Fancy volunteered brightly.

“We’re doing it for your own good, darling. Maybe Mr. Gentry will find you again and we’ll all have fun,” Angel suggested slyly.

Gentry was exactly what Mia feared. She knew the twins would wish it to come about and for the three of them to resume their strange relationship with the artist she adored. But Mia dared make no admission. Instead she said, “You make me so helpless. I don’t see why you have to tie my hands as well as put the tether on my neck. Even if I had my hands I couldn’t get loose, you must know that.”

“Mia, you’re a big sister who’s too dumb to manage her own affairs. We’re going to manage them for you. We’re sure you’re going to be sensible, but if you’re not we’ll get a cane and whip your bottom. It will be such fun!”

“What does being sensible mean?” Mia inquired suspiciously.

“Oh, that’s easy, darling. You’ll have to answer some mail and sign some checks to pay bills and maybe make some phone calls. We’ll make sure you don’t have a chance to get away while you’re doing these things, but they do have to be done, you know that, you used to come over and do them with Mr. Gentry.”

They had it all figured. They were not really children but their age was dangerous. Mia tried again, “Can’t you understand how bored and unhappy I get sitting tied here this way?” she asked unhappily. “You don’t come and visit me all that often and when you do you just make fun of anything I ask.”

“We have the loveliest idea, darling, we’re thinking about it a bit before we do it. But it would be so easy to phone Mr. Gentry and tell him where you are and suggest he simply pick you up. Having your hands tied the way you are would be so convenient for him, you couldn’t do a thing.”

“I’d kick him in the—well, never mind! If you’re so damned anxious for his chains and ropes, why don’t you go knock on his door?”

“But, darling, someone has to look after you. We couldn’t possibly leave you without attention.”

“Very well then. But move me somewhere else, to some other tree where he’s less likely to find me. I don’t suppose he’d guess you’d fasten me here twice running, but just in case… please?”

The twins would not be persuaded. They knew what they wanted and were pleased with their elder sister exactly as she was. But they’d matured somewhat since Mia’s original captivity to that tree, they had caught glimpses of previously unguessed delights. Ryan Gentry had, unconsciously,

tutored them in erotic paths. Bright eyed, they assured, “We’ll do things to you this time, darling. We found a place where we can buy things. We’re going there this afternoon.”

Since the first moment she had come awake that morning Mia had been resigned, the twins were playing for keeps and would find endless amusement in doing things to her. Mia realized there was a high probability of their keeping their promise about the cane and her bottom. She might be lucky if that was the only inflection she received. One thing was apt to lead to another and there was no telling what Gentry had acquainted Fancy and Angel with while they were in his chains. The very things he had done to them might now be done to her.

The forlorn and captive maiden spent a listless day surveying her familiar tree and tugging at her tied wrists. It was more impossible than before to do anything with them. She slept a little and wept a little. And made a solemn vow that if she ever got free the twins would pay for this temerity. She had supposed their captivity to Gentry had been punishment enough for the previous occasion, but that was evidently wrong. If only she could get free and get her hands on them!

The following morning Angel and Fancy arrived breathless carrying a box. Their sister could guess its contents and prepared herself to talk the exuberant pair out of anything

too outrageous. But the first object disclosed to view drew a gasp of admiration even from the girl who was destined to wear it. The object was a collar. Not an ordinary collar by any means or even by the standards of girls. It was implacable but also beautiful. The twins must have spent a lot of money to get a piece of craftsmanship that lovely. They also bought a yellow cane and advised her, with youthful wisdom, “If you don’t allow us to do what we want with you, Mia, we’ll use this cane on your bottom and we’ve a whip, too. That’s for your back. If you make us use it, it’s your own fault.”

Mia made no demur. She was determined to play the placid and plaint elder sister until they drove her to revolt. Quietly she said, “It’s beautiful. Thank you for buying it for me.”

They made a ritual out of locking it upon her neck. Mia was forced to kneel and bow forward. One twin clasped her hair to draw it from her neck, the other fitted the collar in all its snug compulsion and clicked shut the padlock.

“It’s a lovely padlock, darling, it’s so cute the way it hangs down besides you neck. If you’d rather wear it like a pendent in front, just tell us,” Fancy said happily. “But you’re going to wear it either way, whether you like it or not.”

There was a belt which appeared to have no useful purpose other than to constrict a girl’s belly. It was as beauti-

fully constructed as the collar and had its own padlock. Viewing it, Mia could think of no excuse for complaint. Perhaps if the twins locked enough stuff upon her, she would no longer be naked. She stood still while it was fitted and drawn tight. The happy pair paid no attention to her suggestion that it might be a trifle snug, they fitted it firmly and clicked the padlock shut with a tremendous flourish.

“We don’t really know what its purpose is, sweetheart,” they admitted cheerfully, “but there’s a ring in it and I suppose we could tether you by it. Wouldn’t that frustrate you to bits being compelled to stand with nothing but a belt around your tummy!”

Everything was of leather, had buckles and therefore needed no locks. Not that it mattered, there was no way Mia could possibly free herself of any of it. In fact the padlocks were an additional ornamentation. The twins declared them much the same as costume jewelry. They fitted cuffs around their captives’ ankles and clicked padlocks shut with much gusto. Mia supposed that wearing them she would be not worse off than before. The padlocks would make a noise when she walked, but what did that matter? Nothing seemed to matter very much anymore.

“We’ve got chains for your wrists, darling, but your wrists are already attended to and we like the way we’ve got them and they won’t be changed. We’re sure you’ll simply adore these.”

Mia stared in horror. “These” were two ordinary wooden clothespins—she guessed their purpose. “There’s one for each of your nipples, darling, you’ll simply love wearing them,” said Fancy.

“We picked the ones with extra strong springs, Mia darling,” added Angel with a most delighted smile on her face. “We didn’t choose anything but the best.”

“Look, darlings, you don’t have to be unkind.”

Mia’s heart was thudding painfully. This was the beginning of what the twins would see only as “new things.” But the prospect of wearing these small domestic trifles upon her breasts was something she could not contemplate, it was just too awful and too demeaning. They would probably bob around as she moved and the twins would laugh delightedly. In sudden urgency, she demanded, “Please, put them back in the box. I haven’t done anything to deserve them. It’s just too unfair.”

“Yes, you have, darling. You’ve been sulky and disapproving all the while. You haven’t given us a kind word at all. We think that wearing these little things will do you a world of good.”

She could run and fight and kick but in the end they would catch her, pull her down and their combined weight would control her.

“You’d be wiser to let us put them on you without a fight, darling. If you make a fuss, we’ll have to put them on you any way we can and they’ll probably hurt more.”

Mia knew they were probably right. But the idea of standing still and allowing domestic clothespins to be clipped on her tender nipples was simply too incongruous to consider. Defiantly she said, “Every well, if you want to be cruel, whip me. I refuse to submit to those horrid little things on my breasts.”

Angel and Fancy looked to each other, quietly smiling. They had their big sister well in hand. Angel picked up the length of yellow cane and said smartly, “Bend over, darling, or do you want to be tied?”

Maturity triumphed over shame. Mia knew defeat. “Never mind,” she conceded sadly, “I’ll stand still if that’s what you want to do to me.”

They assured her that indeed they wished to embellish her nakedness with these two final inflections. For her to see, they were busily open and closing the small wooden jaws. “Don’t they make you cringe, darling.” they inquired as though it mattered. “If you stand quite still, we’ll try and clip them on you so they stick right straight up. We think that would be cute.”

Big sister thought of a dozen things to say but uttered none of them. Shamed and angry she stood firm while Fancy de-

voted herself to one breast and Angel to the other. Their task was first to enlarge the mature nipples to their utmost rigidity. It did not take long. The owner of the nipples was as angry with her own possessions as with the two girls. It seemed outrageous that parts of herself should so blatantly offer themselves to pain. She had often thought of her nipples as having a life of their own and she was tempted now to admonish them verbally. But that was too absurd, instead she clenched her teeth and stood, feet firmly apart, to bear what it appeared she must. Suddenly she was silent. She had no more to say.

The younger sisters were totally absorbed, all that existed for them was their older sister's breasts. Carefully and with deliberation, each twin approached a nipple with the small, open wooden jaws. They positioned the domestic contraptions to their satisfaction then allowed the wooden jaws to close.

The pain was many times what Mia had expected. After all these were only trifles to be obtained in any hardware store and used daily by any number of people. That they could be used as instruments of torture was out of the question. It was impossible. But Mia looked down now and saw the little wooden demons dancing at the point of each breast. As the twins had predicted, they stuck straight out as though a part of the curved structure of each breast, an elongated nipple. Mia moaned in genuine distress and im-

ploringly demanded, “Take them off, oh, take them off. They’re killing me! You’ve no idea!”

“They’re simply gorgeous, darling, better than we ever expected.”

“You’ll have to put up with them, Mia, there’s no way we’re going to spoil something so beautiful.”

“But this is torture!”

“Oh, darling, you exaggerate. You’ll get used to them after a while. We think they’re sweet. Why don’t you give them names, like Nancy or Eva or something?”

“They’re so delightfully intimate, Mia. Enjoy them. We wouldn’t take them off for all the money you’ve got.”

“It’s not as though we don’t know what they feel like,” Fancy giggled, “we tried them on ourselves. Angel clipped one on me and I put one on her. It did sort of hurt and it was just a couple we took out of the box, not these lovely special ones, but just the same…” The youngsters teased until they became bored. Their favorite trick was to flick one of the firmly attached pins with a forefinger to make it jump and bounce and be twice as painful. In the end Mia made her way to the tree and leaning against it, wept in solitary misery. If her sisters had truly experimented with this agony, it must have been with pins much less potent

than those which bit her now. The nymphets petted her bottom and left her to her tears.

When the captive girl realized she was alone and without help she was horrified, for a moment panic-stricken. She had instant visions of the constrictions of blood flow and the killing of flesh now alive. Suppose the twins knew nothing of what they were doing and had cheerfully consigned her breasts to a lifetime deformity. They were so young and inexperienced and nothing in their lives until now had been like this, they were playing with fire.

Mia could not dry her tears but forgot them in a frenzy of activity. She rubbed her nipples against the tree but nothing happened. The clothespins appeared infinitely adaptable and hurt her all the more in ruthless reprimand for her attempts to dislodge them. They were there to stay. If she was to take them off, she would need her hands.

The captive girl's second thought was to lay down and use the friendly soil to open the wooden jaws. She was not sure how this might be accomplished but she wanted to try. But the idea was useless. The wooden pins, still firmly clutching her nipples, slid this way and that in an infinite adaptability. To make matters worse, the softness of her breasts offered no support, the harder she pushed or squirmed the more the wooden devils implanted themselves in her flesh. It all hurt bitterly until she surrendered her efforts and accepted what she could not dislodge. Even then the pain was

atrocious. Ardently she longed to clip one of these small horrors on each of Fancy's and Angel's young breasts. There was also the question of what they would think up next.

By the time the twins came to end her torment, Mia was close to hysterics, the pins were so close and so much within her visual range they could not be ignored. The twins about summed it up, "Well, darling, you didn't find a way to take them off."

"If you hadn't minded hurting yourself, you quite likely would have managed it, Mia."

The captive girl was softly crying from her isolation with pain, the pins bobbed gaily at the ends of her breasts just as they had when first clipped on. For all her efforts she had achieved nothing, the clips were still a part of her.

"We know you can get them off, Mia, if you try in the right way. It's sure to hurt, but surely you want to get rid of them," Fancy suggested slyly.

"We know that's true because we tried it. We think we should leave you to find out for yourself."

In disbelief Mia watched them go. Her breasts burned with double intensity. In a fury of anger, she strained every nerve and muscle to follow the twin's advice. A moment later one of the clips lay harmless on the grass. It had hurt

horribly but she had achieved it. She was bewildered that she had not managed it before. She could only suppose that fear of the pain involved held back her best effort. Without another thought she twisted and strained to free her other breast. It was not long before two wooden clothespins lay side by side upon the ground. Mia, her breasts throbbing painfully, stood in thankfulness and hoped the twins would not hurry back.

Angel and Fancy hurried back. They had been watching from behind a bush. With solemn faces they now played a little game they had rehearsed. That Mia recognized it for what it was would help her not at all.

“Ohhhh, Fancy, look at the naughty, naughty girl!” Angel’s voice was vivid with implication. “Look at the wicked woman, she’s taken off those lovely clothespins. What shall we do to her?”

Mia moaned inwardly. It was a trick, an unkind piece of mischief, typical of her siblings. If she fell back on excuses they would enjoy it all the more. She kept a stoic silence.

“Yes, isn’t she awful!” Angel agreed. “We could easily pin the clips back on her nipples, but she’d only take them off again. What can you do with a girl like that?”

“We could whip her bottom?”

“Or we could hogtie her for the night, she wouldn’t like that.”

“Mia, darling, you name something. What should we do to you?”

“Let me loose. This isn’t doing any of us any good. Darlings, you’re my sisters. Don’t give way to sadism.”

“Ohhhh! Did you hear what she said, that awful word!”

“Do you think we should tie her to the tree again for the night, the way we did before?”

“That’s nowhere bad enough. But I suppose if we tied her to it with her breasts against the bark it would be easy to whip her bottom.”

Mia knew the youngsters had no inkling of the coin in which they dealt. Gentry had been reasonably kind to them. She, herself, had never used the whip. They intended to punish her from memories of fiction, the realities of which were too painful to contemplate. Striving to cut her loose, the older girl suggested abjectly, “All right, you’re going to punishment me. If I stand still for you to cane me, will you let me off being tied to the tree all night? That was awful last time, I don’t want it again.”

“My, my, did you hear that Angel? She’s going to let us cane her bottom.”

“Will you really, truly bend over for the cane?” Angel inquired blissfully. “You’ll promise to keep still?”

“I promise.”

It was hard to believe it was happening but Mia kept her promise. Still tethered to her tree, she bent forward as low as she could. She hated herself and the twins, but what could she do?

“Darling, that looks silly,” the young voices were suddenly much concerned with appearances. “What we would like you to do is kneel down on the grass then lean forward until your forehead is touching the ground. That way your bottom will be actually up in the air and we can cane it properly.”

Mia moaned inwardly. The twins had certainly been learning things from somewhere. She voiced the obvious, “But, darlings, don’t you realize it will hurt two or three times as much like that, I’ll be stretched taut as a drum.”

“That’s right, Mia, dear. We can cane you beautifully. It’s no good if it doesn’t hurt you a lot.” They paused as though in innocence before adding, “Doesn’t it?”

It was no use. Fancy and Angel had her and would use her as they wished. No doubt they would stop short of actual injury, but until then…! Mia knelt, she leaned forward as directed. By the time her forehead was on the grass her

bottom was indecently reared in an exposure the twins exclaimed over in jubilation.

“Gee, look! Her pussy’s sticking out behind.”

“It’s supposed to, we can whip it along with her bottom! Gee, this is going to be fun!”

The first blow was more than Mia could stand. She yelped and fell over sideways in agony. Between gasps and moans, she told them, “It’s no use, it hurts far too much, far more than I can endure. If only you wouldn’t hit me so hard…?”

They rearranged their older sister with competent young hands, patting her this way and that and adjusting her torso to please their erotic dream. Their promises were fervent.

“All right, Mia, darling, we won’t hit you so hard. We’re very sorry.”

“We still like this position, we’ll try and be ever so kind, darling. All you have to do is keep still. You can scream all you want.”

Mia screamed. The woods resounded with screams that lost themselves among the trees. The blows were far kindlier now, but they were still blows. When, delightedly, Angel and Fancy discovered the vulnerability and tenderness of her thighs, their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

“That’s gorgeous, darling, you’re ever so responsive down there.”

“We should have thought of this before, Mia, darling, aren’t you simply loving it? We are!”

At the end of it the older girl was sobbing. Gaspingly she tried to tell them what they did not know. “Darlings, you don’t understand. You’ve no concept of pain. You’ve been hurting me outrageously in a way I think you’d be ashamed of if you knew. Look, don’t hurt me like this again. I’ll obey whatever it is you want of me.”

The quiet humility of Mia’s voice had an effect. The twins lost some of their zeal and felt a touch of shame. Perhaps Mia was right. Perhaps they did not understand the measure of the pain they so happily inflected. They said, soberly, “Oh, very well then, we hurt you too much. But anyway you come out of it on top, you don’t get tied to the tree. You stay just as you are and we brought your blanket. Here it is.”

They tossed it to her as a bone to a dog. Mia was still kneeling and sobbing. Both of them kissed her with unusual tenderness as though to rescue something from a bad scene. They felt the weals they had planted on her round cheeks and tender thighs. They went away. It took the whipped girl a long time to entwine herself inside the rug, but when

she had managed it she went to sleep. It had been a bad, bad day.

It happened the following afternoon. In bound loneliness Mia was leaning back against her tree and trying to think of something good in her immediate future. Her negative thoughts were interrupted by a male voice.

“Hi.”

The tied girl came alive with a start. What she feared most had come to pass and found her without defense. She and Ryan confronted each other in silence until his ever-cheerful voice exclaimed, “Well, well, what have we here! If I’m not mistaken it’s Miss Mia Argent and very nicely tied and collared. Where did you get that belt so snug around your middle?”

Mia had nothing to say. Whatever she thought of would be wrong. A minute passed. And another. Ryan just stood there and smiled at the bound and naked beauty. Mia squirmed under his stare.

“All right, Ryan, you’ve got the best of it, there’s nothing I can do or say,” she finally said. “Did the twins put you up to this?”

“Actually, no. Thought it up myself. Those mischievous nymphets of yours were bound to think up something. This seemed the most obvious.”

“All right, take me away, I can’t fight. They’ve got me too tightly tied.”

“Take you away?” Ryan sounded puzzled. “Why would I do that?”

Mia wanted to scream. Instead she said, “Oh, well, have your fun, tease me all you want. But here I am, a package ready for delivery.”

“Yes, indeed. You are that,” Ryan conceded. “But I’m not the pickup. You’ll have to wait for the next passerby.”

Mia stared in disbelief. Surely he would not be so cruel. Urgently she repeated, “There won’t be anyone else. If you don’t untie me I’ll just go on standing here like this. Ryan darling, please untie me?”

“Couldn’t possibly, love, I’d be interfering in someone else’s business. You obviously belong to someone else the way you’re fastened. It’s not for me to let you loose.”

Mia stamped an angry bare foot. The effect was marred by a pebble which caused her to yelp and hop on one foot. She glared at the grinning Gentry and retorted, “It’s all your fault. See what you’ve done!”

“I seem to be distressing you love. Perhaps I should go?”

“No, don’t! Ryan, please stay, don’t leave me like this.”

They stood and stared, he in amused attention, she fuming and angry. Mia knew herself wickedly vulnerable to being teased. In fact she was vulnerable on all fronts. She weaved her bare shoulders against bound hands and asked, “I thought you loved me.”

“I do, I do indeed!” Gentry assured earnestly. “But that’s got nothing to do with your present condition, has it? I didn’t tie you here, it was your own sisters.”

Mia stamped her foot again, this time missing the pebble but the effect was scarcely more dramatic. A girl’s bare foot is not a formidable weapon. “If you really love me, Ryan, you won’t leave me here.” She took a deep breath before saying, “My hands are tied, leave them tied. You can take me home at the end of the tether on my neck, the same as you did that time before.” She stared fixedly at Ryan’s eyes. “Please.”

Ryan shrugged. He shook his head. “Sorry love, but I’ve got a visitor. Melody just happened to drop by.”

It was like a physical blow. Mia’s heart plummeted. She would have stamped her foot again but no action seemed appropriate to this devastating news. Ryan could, of course, be teasing but she was sure he was not. In the same pathetic tone she asked, “You mean she’s moved back in with you? You mean you’re living together?”

“Well, not exactly. The dear girl sort of dropped by and I sort of detained her. I’m sure you know what I mean. Right now I have her chained to the wall downstairs. I thrashed her this morning and I intend to thrash her again this evening. She is very happy.”

“I bet she is, the bitch!” Mia could not contain her distress. Melody’s having Ryan Gentry all to herself, with Mia sitting uselessly on the grass with her hands tied behind her back and her neck rope to a tree, was bitter gall indeed. “Very well, then,” she said from the depths of misery, “there’s nothing more to say, is there? Sorry I’ve been a nuisance.”

Ryan Gentry bestowed a brotherly kiss and went away. Evidently he had nothing to add.

Mia stood, forlorn and desolate, without hope. Her heart ached, her wrists hurt, her neck was chafed. She had been standing at half the length of her tether but now returned to the tree to lean against it and examine her life. She decided she had no life without the man she loved. What remained for her was exactly her present plight. She could see no reason why the twins would ever release her. If keeping her prisoner amused them they could carry it on and on and on. She wept bitterly and could not dry her tears, nor did they bring relief. Mia Argent was the unhappiest of girls.

“They said I’d find you here. My, My, what a charming arrangement.”

The feminine exclamation jolted the captive girl out of her reverie. She stared at Melody in disbelief. The enemy was most obviously amused at finding a naked girl so quaintly restrained, she was viewing the tethered Mia with pure enjoyment. Mia’s response was bewildered, “You’re not supposed to be here, Melody, you’re back with Ryan. You’re supposed to be chained downstairs in the basement room?”

Melody laughed, “I’ll bet Ryan’s been by and fed you a line. I haven’t been by his place, I wouldn’t dare. You know what he said he would do if I want knocking at his door.”

“I don’t know who to believe, everybody tells me something different,” Mia moaned. “If you’re not with Ryan, then what are you doing here?”

“I like to keep up with the times, darling. I dropped in to Dovecove for tea. I haven’t been anywhere near Gentry’s place. The twins were terribly sweet. They gave me the nicest tea and all the latest news. They told me where to look for you. They said I could take you away for a vacation, if I wished. They told me you’d be quite helpless and they were certainly right about that.”

The bound girl wished her flood of hope was not so strong. Melody could free her and this whole incident be over, but

she seemed no more likely to do this than Ryan. However, it would be best to act as though Melody's untying her hands would be the most natural of acts.

"Well anyway, I'm sure glad you came," Mia said. "Those little monsters have had me tied like this for a long time and I'll be glad to be free." As though taking it for granted, Mia turned her back and wiggled her bound wrists in invitation to release. "Would you mind?"

"Untying you was not really what I had in mind, darling," Melody explained patiently. "If I untie you I can't handle you so your hands will have to stay as they are. I rather like that neck arrangement so we might as well use that, too."

"I'm afraid it's wired. The knots, I mean. The twins are clever about that."

"The twins told me. They're really a delightful couple, they lent me a pair of pliers."

Mia wanted to scream. She was foiled at every turn. Silently she measured the possibility of kicking Melody in a sufficiently vulnerable place to deter, but that would only be asking for trouble. It would be best to keep Melody in her present good humor. With forced cheerfulness she continued, "You don't have to worry about me, Melody. I'll come with you. No one seems to want me around here. I could use a vacation. Now, if you'll just untie my hands…?"

“Stop talking about being untied,” Melody said with a touch of irritation. “You know I can’t possibly untie you. You’d be off like a shot. You’ll be back in darling Ryan’s arms inside three minutes.”

Melody considered the situation and said in a pleased voice, “Now all I have to do is untie your neck rope. The rest of you stays as is.”

“So, OK, you untie me from the tree. What then?”

“I’ll take you home, darling, so you can say goodbye to the twins. When I get you to my home I’ll only whip you enough to make you service me. It’s going to be simply lovely having you.”

It was a sulky, resentful maiden who was led by the tether on her neck back to Dovecove. Mia had never felt less of a person than now. She was reduced to responding to tugs upon the collar around her neck like a well trained dog. Melody’s happiness overflowed but it failed to infect the captive girl.

No one had ever possessed a less willing captive. Confronted by her ebullient sisters, Mia demanded, “Are you going to allow me to be kidnapped in this barefaced fashion?”

“You’re not really being kidnapped, we’re sort of making a gift of you to dear Melody. She says she’ll take every such

good care of you and return you to us after a while. Then you can go back to your tree. Aren't you lucky?"

She could have murdered them! In fact, Mia could have murdered everybody, she appeared to have no friends. "But I'm your sister!" she explained heatedly. "I don't deserve any of this you're doing to me."

"What, sending you on a lovely vacation with an old friend!" Fancy and Angel affected disbelief at such ingratitude. "Well, if that's the way she feels about it, Melody, perhaps you should whip her a little harder. She's in a really bitchy mood."

"Well, at least phone Mr. Gentry and tell him what you've done with me," Mia said.

"Needn't bother with that," Melody interjected sharply. "Don't want him knocking at my door. Darling Mia and I will be very happy to be left alone."

It had all been said. Mia was led to the car and helped up into the front seat. Her ankles were tightly tied and the rope from the collar on her neck was draped over the back of the seat in the manner of a long pigtail. The twins, generously, loaned Melody the prisoner's extra leather cuffs and locks.

Mia sat, stiff and helpless and hoped they would have an accident. It seemed incredible that no one would free her

hands. But no one had and it seemed that no one would. Angrily, Mia demanded, “Melody, do you realize that I’ve been tied pretty much like this for weeks and weeks?”

“Of course, I do, dear. Isn’t it lovely?”

“No, it isn’t lovely and I’m sick to death of it. I hope you realize I’ll make you a damned poor slave-girl. I won’t do a thing you want.”

“Oh, yes you will, darling, you know you will. You won’t enjoy me whipping you the way you do with darling Ryan. Do be sensible and let’s enjoy ourselves.”

The police car drew level and edged them towards the side of the road when they were no more than half way to their destination. Melody said a tremulous, “Oh, damn, I’ve been over the limit,” while Mia felt ten times more naked than before.

There was the usual inane exchange.

“In a bit of a hurry, Miss? You were well above the limit.”

“I’m terribly sorry officer, I suspect there’s something wrong with my speedometer. I guess you’ll want to look at these.” Melody handed over an envelope well stuffed with papers.

The policeman wrote busily. While he was doing so, Mia was cringingly aware of his cocked eyebrow which from

time to time rested upon her unconventional condition. He was equally aware of her. When he was finished with Melody's ticket, he retained her envelope while walking around the car to open Mia's door and disclose the full enormity of her condition.

"Doing a bit of kidnapping, Miss?"

Mia took a deep breath. It was going to be embarrassing as hell but would at least leave her in freedom. It would be worth the snickering of the policeman and his snide remarks to get her hands untied.

"No, officer, this is a joke in poor taste," Mia said. "I'd be grateful if you would untie me and give me a lift. Mrs. Gentry doesn't need me, she can go home alone."

"Ahhh." The officer looked from the one to the other of this unexpectedly rich haul. He fixed Melody with a stern eye as he intoned, "Holding a person against their will. Restraint of freedom. Indecent exposure. What do you say about that, Miss?"

"It's just as Miss Argent has told you, it's a joke among friends. I'm sorry you've been troubled."

"Naked in a public place, Miss. That is not a joke."

The voice of Law was heavily disapproving.

“That’s part of the joke, too, officer,” Mia interjected hastily. “I know I shouldn’t have allowed it to happen. I’m terribly sorry. May we go now?”

“No, you may not.” The officer, no doubt in the line of duty, was giving a detailed, careful scrutiny to every part of Mia Argent visible to the eye. “If you are not being kidnapped then would you be good enough to tell me why you are tied up so securely? You appear to me to be a prisoner.”

Both girls were heartfelt in explanation. The officer listened. When they paused for breath, he inquired, “Do I understand you do not wish to press charges, Miss Argent?”

“That’s right, officer, I wouldn’t dream of such a thing. Besides, it wouldn’t be true, I’m not being kidnapped.”

The Law sighed ponderously. Using a pocket knife he slashed away the cords indenting her ankles then did the same with the ropes about her arms. He viewed her tied hands in disfavor. “I’ll leave them hands of yours just as they are, Miss, they’ll want to have a look at them at the station.”

Mia’s heart sank once more. She was not going to get her hands untied, but instead was going to be a laughing stock at some police station where the best covering she could hope for was a policeman’s jacket. Miserably she said, “I wish you’d let Mrs. Gentry and me continue on our way.

We really haven't done anything wrong. Please…?" She put every ounce of feeling she possessed into the plea.

"Section Forty-nine, subsection Eight-two of Code Seven-six-four expressly states as follows—" The officer knew himself on firm ground, "—no person or persons shall, under any circumstances, exhibit themselves in public without clothes. The offense is a misdemeanor, punishable under the Law of 1846, Archive Seven, Volume Three." The policeman brought his rhetoric to an end with a fine flourish of justification and undeniable logic, "And, now Miss Argent, if you will be kind enough to step from the car."

Mia had never known such shame. Passing cars slowed to watch as she was led to the official vehicle. She was covered with a regulation overcoat and seated primly in the front seat besides the wheel. Melody was told to continue on her journey but be available for a court hearing in due course. Settled comfortably behind the wheel, the officer intoned, "You are under arrest, Miss Argent, for indecent exposure. I must warn that anything you say may be used against you in a court of law." Having delivered that speech, he mellowed somewhat to say, "You mustn't take on too much about this, Miss Argent. It is an offense and you will be punished, but your sentence is not likely to be a long one. A token of disapproval, perhaps. I would think ten days would be about right."

“Ten days! Me in prison!” Mia was aghast. “You’re making a terrible mistake.”

“I’m afraid not, Miss, it is you who have made the error. May I suggest you do not indulge in histrionics in the station.”

It was horrible. It was outrageous. It was impossible. But it happened in a methodically procession, beginning with the exhibition of her bound hands, her recital of her story to an unbelieving Sergeant, then being delivered to a matron’s untender hands. Miss Mia Argent was stripped, hosed down, disinfected and then ill-clad in a female prison tunic. Then, respectable to public gaze, she was led before a Magistrate who took the opportunity to deliver a discourse on modern morals and immorality before sentencing her to ten days penal servitude. She was then allowed to make the one regulation phone call.

Gentry was amused. “What! You’re in prison! Oh, come off it, Mia, you’re pulling my leg.” The new prisoner handed the receiver to the guardian by her side who spoke a few official words to assure Ryan Gentry of her condition. But when she again listened he was his usual self, “I’ll be right there, Mia, darling. Will they let me feed you through the bars?”

“Ryan, please, don’t joke. This isn’t anything to joke about. I’m going to prison. I’m in prison right now!”

“I’m sure the effect will be beneficial, love.”

Mia longed to scream and act irrationally. She would have love to hit her stern companion with the receiver or, better still, hit Gentry. Everything was desperately unfair. Everyone was free and going about their affairs except herself. She, the most innocent of all, was incarcerated behind bars and what was far worse, forced to wear an austere little tunic and a pair of clod-hopper shoes.

Urgently she implored, “Ryan, do hurry. And bring a lawyer and get me out of this horrid place.”

An official voice consoled, “I’m sure the gentleman will do everything possible for you, Miss. Now, if you will come this way.”

Mia was propelled from the phone and into a bleak passage. It was the most awful passage she had ever seen. On each side of it was doors.

“We’ll make you comfortable here, Miss. For a short sentence such as yours, you’ll be able to serve it here with us. I’ll be bringing you a cup of tea.”

Prison was not what Mia had supposed, in some ways it was far worse. Instead of acres of iron bars there was no bars at all but a claustrophobic cubical with a wash basin, toilet, a bed and four walls of brick. The door was a solid panel without a handle but it did have a small grating

through which she could be viewed. When the door closed and the key turned she had never felt more abandoned or lonely in her life.

There was one, single saving grace, perhaps two; she was clothed and had her hands. Forgetting her locked up condition for a moment, she viewed her reddened wrists with satisfaction. They had been bound for so long and if it took a prison sentence to free them, perhaps it was worth it. But a glance around the austere little compartment in which she was confined killed optimism. In her heart, Mia Argent knew she would have been far, far happier bound beside Melody in the car. The ten days that she must spend stretched out before her as an endless vista of frustration, boredom and anxiety.

Gentry arrived. It appeared her interview with him was a privilege by special permission. It took place in a tiny room with only three hard chairs and a table. The wardress sat disapprovingly in one corner to listen and to watch.

“Look, sweetheart, I went to a lawyer chap I’m friends with. He tells me there nothing to be done—you’ve been sentenced.”

They had been warned that the table must stay between them. They must not kiss or even exchange a handkerchief. Across its sterile surface the prisoner complained, “But, Ryan, there has to be something. What’s all this about ap-

peals and being out on bail and stuff like that?" Mia looked around desperately as though for escape. "Nobody's done anything for me. I've just been popped into prison and told I have to stay her for ten days. It's just not fair!"

"You're right about that, love," Ryan admitted regretfully. "Look, I'll keep on plugging, I'll find some way, if there's a way to find. But with a Magistrate's Court and for a ten day sentence, I don't think there's anything that can be done."

It was born upon the prisoner at that moment—she would stay in this vile place the full ten days. For her there would be no escape. Her plight was certainly not Gentry's fault, she would trust him to do what was possible. In a minute he would leave by one door and she by another and that would be the end of the interview. And the limit of such help as she might expect. Bitterly she asked, "Ryan, darling, if I'm here for the ten days—what then?"

Ryan looked, pointedly, at the Law seated with ears alert. He turned back to his former slave-girl and gave her a broad wink. "I'm going to see the twins now, I'll brief them. On the way out I'll ask if they could come and visit you. If this is permitted, they can give you a message."

"Time's up," said the Law with stern finality, rising to its feet.

Miss Mia Argent's first interview as a convict girl in prison was at an end.

The little cell looked worse the second time around. Without Ryan, Mia felt lost. The twins, if allowed to visit, would be an amusing relief, a break in boredom, but that was all. Mia was on her own within a small brick cubical which, no doubt, had housed a thousand others such as she. It was a desolate little place, devoid of hope.

The cup of tea arrived as promised. It was accompanied by a small biscuit. Both were brought by a hardy police warden who slapped her back and promised that time would go by fast. What she had to do was count each day as it passed. She made Mia feel better, as though she belonged somewhere if only in prison. He was kind and Mia missed him when he took the metal cup and left.

In bed at night she cried herself to sleep.

The twins were as good as Gentry's word. Being her only relatives, they too were privileged to visit and entered the station house and its cells beyond like two rays of sunshine. They even imparted life to the austere visiting room with its stern table.

"Darling, isn't this fun! We can hardly wait for you to tell us all about it when they let you go. Will they whip you and things, Mia, dear? They don't just have you sit around all day, do they?"

They might be absurd but the twins were a delight for the period the Law allowed. Quickly Mia asked, “Did Ryan leave you a message?”

“Oh, of course, we nearly forgot. We’re going to pick you up when they let you out with a ticket of leave, or whatever it is. And then…” They both turned and most pointedly glared at the listening law. “And then we’re going to take you to him. We’re sure you can guess how.”

Mia could guess. Mia did not mind. Mia would have crawled naked on all four to Gentry’s house had she been given permission to do so. She listened to the twins’ assurances of undying affection. Just before leaving they added, archly, “The tree’s still there, darling and we’ve bought some more, you-know-what.”

Her sisters’ visit repelled morbidity for nearly an hour.

It was the next day Mia’s fondest hope came true.

Ryan Gentry and his companion of legal talent descended upon the small police station like a fury. Writs were flashed. Legal terms were thrown around mercilessly. Sundry laws and precedence’s were provided beyond question. Under this onslaught the local Magistrate was ill prepared to cope. He salved his dignity by nodding at each presentation and then signing the document which returned Miss Mia Argent back to life. Since she had entered the police station with nothing, she was to be returned to

the world in the same condition. It was necessary for Ryan Gentry and his legal help to purchase the tunic and shoes that had been hers for so very short a time. The payment and legal forms took longer than the hearing before the Magistrate. They emerged into sunlight with the young woman, hoping no one they knew would see her shame.

The lawyer departed in one direction while Ryan and Miss Argent went in another.

“I’m taking you to Dovecove, sweetheart,” Gentry told her in the car. “The twins are dying to see you and hear what it’s like to be in prison.”

“It’s just plain horrible, that’s all there is to tell.” Doubtfully she asked, “I thought you were taking me to your place?”

“Well, I’m considering it,” Ryan assured in seeming seriousness. “Certain conditions of course, I’m sure you understand.”

“All I understand is that I’ve had a bad time of it and was scared out of my wits. Please don’t make fun of me, I want to be loved.”

“And so you shall be. Not much of a chance up to now. Want me to stop the car?”

“Oh, Ryan…!”

“Very well, just be patient.”

Mia sensed something waiting. No doubt Dovecove would provide the answer. Euphoria took possession of her in waves as the car made its way through the countryside without a uniform in sight. She was free, free, free! If it pleased the man beside her to delay the telling of her fate, she would not demur.

Dovecove provided a magnificent tea. The twins provided a hundred eager questions. They delighted in referring to her as the "ex-convict." If Mia felt like asserting herself, she failed to do so. She was in the grip of a strange lassitude, but along with it was an equally strange suppressed excitement. She was certain something was going to happen and she would get no answers to any questions about it.

When Gentry rose to leave the twins inquired politely, "Aren't you taking the ex-convict along with you?"

"I suppose I could. Have to do something with the poor girl." Gentry was his usual noncommittal self. "But if I were you two girls, I'd put her back with the tree, her natural state, you know."

The ex-convict stood with three pairs of eyes examining her in acute expectation. She defeated their curiosity by unconcern. Holding out a cool hand, she said, "Thanks a million, Ryan. I don't know what I'd have done without you."

She included her younger sisters in her generalization, “I don’t know what I’d have done without any of you. You all came through like Trojans.”

But the twins would have none of it. “But, darling, if you’re going out into the open air, aren’t you terribly overdressed? Those horrible shoes?”

“After Mr. Gentry’s gone, I’ll go upstairs and dress properly.” Mia’s heart was thudding painfully in awful suspense.

“But, Mia, darling, Mr. Gentry won’t be leaving until we’ve got you properly undressed and fixed. We haven’t drugged you this time because he’s going to help us. You won’t want to fight, not after just being in prison and all?”

They were enjoying themselves. Strangely, Mia was in agreement. She had no wish to fight. If the tree and the tether was what she must expect, she supposed there was no evading it. But, with the twins, she could never be sure. “You expect me to take my clothes off?” she asked as though shocked. “You don’t really mean that.”

“Oh, but darling, we do! If you won’t undress yourself, the three of us will do it for you.” They surveyed her with bright, shining eyes.

Big sister undressed. The act was not without its feeling of shame, the prison had returned her to false modesty. Say-

ing nothing, but playing their own game, she stood nude and waiting.

Ryan produced a paper bag he had carried from the station house. “Oh, by the way, I had to sign for these.” He handed it to the ex-prisoner.

Mia took it woodenly and upended it upon the table. From it fell the expensive leather of the twins’ investment. Mia recalled with a burning shame the indignity of being relieved of these mementos of the twins’ captivity by the policeman, who it had appeared, was an expert locksmith with a collection of tools not normally possessed by the public. The padlocks and the lovely leather bands had fallen free under his skilled hands. Mia had forgotten. Without complaint she stood passively while they were fastened back on her nakedness. The room was throbbing with vibrations from all four as her loveliness was thus enhanced by these symbols of her bondage. When it was done she said a cynical, “Thank you, you’re very kind.”

A rope appeared as if my magic. Three pairs of eyes searched each other then focused upon the waiting girl. Mia shrugged and said, without feeling, “Very well, if that’s what you all want.”

She turned and crossed her wrists behind her back.

Mia Argent knew her breathing quickened as the cords were looped around her wrists, her flame, which had been

dormant within prison walls, now flared almost to incandescence. Whoever was doing the binding of her wrists took the usual trouble and produced the usual pair of pliers and wire.

“Can’t have you escaping, now can we?” Gentry politely suggested. “I must say these two girls of yours know how to look after you. You’re in good hands.”

Mia still said nothing, but her spirits were dampened by the wire. The wire was a thing of the twins, it was all their doing. If Gentry allowed them to use it on her bonds, it meant she belonged to them and not to him. But it was now too late, her hands were tied behind her back in the old, familiar way. She did not hate the sensation of helplessness as she had thought she would. It was like coming home.

The leash to the collar on her neck followed as the night the day. When she was taken to the tree she would be back to square one.

Leashed, Mia Argent was led from her own home back into the sunlight. If it had been the twins alone she would have fought. But the twins could not have overpowered and bound her in the first place. Ryan Gentry was the kingpin in this new captivity. As she was being led she contrived to say, without sounding either plaintive or accusing, “Please don’t tie me to the tree again. I don’t want to spend my life tied to a tree, it’s such a waste.”

The twins giggled. They handed her leash to a smiling man who, in turn, led the captive maiden to his car. The twins waved goodbye but Mia could not wave back. When she was lifted into the front seat of Gentry's car the dam broke. The bound ex-convict burst into a flood of tears which she was allowed to expend upon a male shoulder while a male arm held her comfortingly close. The world was suddenly a very wonderful place.

Ryan carried the bound and naked girl across his front step with a flourish. Mia did not ask if the act was symbolic of something she desired. Since she was now helpless she abandoned herself to a pleasant passivity, she would contest nothing but obey everything.

When she knelt before her master in the lounge, he forcefully demanded, "I hope you have had enough of this woman's liberty nonsense?"

"Yes."

"This equality affair you placed so much stock in, this meeting me on your terms and as an equal, what about that?"

"That's gone, too."

"Anything else to say, any terms to demand?"

Mia looked her master frankly in the eye. "No, none at all. I belong to you."

“Sorry you behaved like an idiot?”

“Yes, I apologize.”

Laughter possessed them. The question and answer session had been amusing. A game as it were. But after the laughter died down, neither the girl nor the man would ever be quite sure how serious the exchange had really been in the demanding or giving of those vows. It did not matter. They were together.

Ryan Gentry picked up his slave-girl and carried her to bed.

“Fancy didn’t come. She stayed back at Dovecove just to be safe,” Angel explained. The titter she now bestowed on Ryan Gentry was both arched and coy. “I bet Mia would murder both of us if she knew you’ve given me a drink. It’s lovely, it makes me feel all nice inside.”

“I didn’t quite catch your reference to Fancy,” Ryan said, even though he understood her absence all too well. “Perhaps you’ll explain?”

Angel shivered delightfully and sipped the crème de menthe. “Well, it’s sort of like insurance in case you dump me into a dungeon or something like that. Of course, we know you wouldn’t but just in case.

“That’s not a bad idea, the putting you in a dungeon, I mean,” Gentry observed thoughtfully. “Now, suppose I do just that? What would be Fancy’s next move?”

“We arranged that if I didn’t get back for supper she’d call the police. May I have another of these, they’re nice?”

Ryan went to the bar and returned with a well diluted glass of the liqueur. “Dinner’s a long way off. Didn’t it occur to either of you that I could bind you up, whip your bottom, cane the soles of your feet and hang you up by your thumbs and still get you back in time.”

“Oh, would you do that?!” Angel was suddenly agog with excitement. “I think Mia been longing for you to do things like that to her but she’s been too polite to ask.” Angel took a deep swallow. “Which one of those things you said would you like to start on?”

Gentry gazed on his youthful visitor paternally. The twins, single or together, were a delight. Angel’s enthusiastic reaction in the face of a horrible fate was hard to believe. He shrewdly guessed that either twin would be less inhibited in the absence of the other. Quietly he said, “You don’t really want me to do any of those things to you, do you?”

“Well, it would be sort of fun.” Angel was definitely beginning to show the effect of the drink. “I mean, you wouldn’t have to do it to me too hard. And you’re so nice.”

“Would Fancy talk like this or is it just you?”

“Well, we’re a little embarrassed. Fancy thought it would be better if I came and said what I said. But don’t worry about Fancy, she’s all for it.

“Do you know what I think, Angel? I think that green stuff has got the best of you. If you’re both such gluttons for punishment, I don’t see why Fancy stayed at home. I could do it to both of you and make you both very happy. Isn’t that right?”

“We never thought of that,” Angel said as though surprised. “I must say this nice drink you’ve given me helps a lot. But I’ve only said what the two of us have been thinking for a long time. Don’t you want the two of us as prisoners anymore?”

Gentry sighed. There was no accounting for the twins. They were outrageously carnal and could only be controlled by a stern hand. “I’ll do those things to you if you’ll phone Fancy and tell her to come over and get them too,” he suggested blandly. “This business of one of you staying at home implies a lack of trust.”

“Yes, it does,” Angel admitted with equal unconcern. “I say, this stuff is awfully nice, sort of minty. But I’m sorry about Fancy, we both agreed that we’d only come one at a time until after you’ve married darling Mia. After you’ve mar-

ried Mia, then we can both come as often as you like because we'll all be one family and it won't matter too much."

Ryan did not bother to elucidate Angel's feminine logic. He made his rejoinder deliberately sharp, "No, you may not see your sister. This is not a police station where you can drop in and get visiting privileges anytime. If you want to see her you can phone for an appointment."

"That means you've got the poor dear up in some awful way you don't want me to see," Angel nodded sagely. "Either that or she's covered with whip marks or something. You do keep her naked, don't you?"

Angel made the question sound like an inquire over someone's health.

Ryan was smitten by sudden inspiration. "I'll let you visit your big sister if you demonstrate a bit more confidence. An act of faith? You will let me tie your hands behind your back."

Angel's eyes sparkled, she was concerned with an immediate delight. "Oh, all right, I'll let you do that. But if you tie my hands behind my back I won't be able to hold this wonderful glass. If you'll let me finish this one and have another, I'll let you tie me all you like."

Gentry did not fail to discount the drinks. They were very weak but Angel was very young. What he intended to do to

her was innocent enough but what he planned would be facilitated by her being mildly tipsy. He had heard it described as “getting the giggles.” It was an apt description. He watched her swallow then refilled her glass with a stern warning, “That’s the last one, sweetheart, I won’t have you drunk, especially if you’re going to visit Mia.”

Angel was in her glory. She was managing things and lovely things would happen. She accepted her last drink with a small pout but realized adults might know best about these things. While she sipped she did not allow the conversation to languish. “We both hope you punish Mia every day, Mr. Gentry,” she said hopefully. “She’s so stupid. I think big sisters always are. She hasn’t the least idea what’s good for her and gosh, all the fuss she made about being tethered out to the tree! She sure did beef.”

“What do you two think I operate here?” Ryan asked in genuine curiosity. “Do you really believe I do something awful to your sister every day? All this talk about whipping.”

“Well, you do, don’t you! You kept Fancy and me chained or tied or something. Sometimes you were real mean and won’t let us get close.” Quickly she added, “But that doesn’t mean we don’t think you’re ever so nice.”

By the time her drink was finished, Angel was quivering with excitement. It was though she delayed the binding of

her hands as an additional thrill. When she stood up and announced her readiness to be bound she added, “Do you want me naked, Mr. Gentry?”

“Might be an idea, I hadn’t thought of it. Yes, it’s decidedly a good idea. Strip.”

Never had a maiden divested herself of covering with such alacrity. But she folded her garments with precise neatness and asked politely, “May I fetch the rope, Mr. Gentry. Just tell me where it is.”

It was a ball of heavy twine. Gentry wound it around the willing wrists in a wry determination to teach the moppet a lesson. The twine would not deter circulation but would impose a discipline of its own. When the moppets wrists were tightly tied he produced a collar for her neck and a leash. In a big-brotherly way he asked, “There, how does it feel?”

“Mmmmmmm, I’m all gooey, Mr. Gentry. Gee, you’ve tied me so tight and the cord is so thin!” The enraptured maiden twisted and tugged in experimental joy. “I can’t ever get loose, I just know I can’t. And you’re going to make me follow you with the leash and that collar around my neck. Gee, you’re wonderful.”

“I am not going to admit I’ve played a trick on you, Angel,” Gentry said in cool honesty. “Sure, you can say hello to Mia. Then I take you out into the woods and I tether you with a

long rope in the same way you tied your big sister. You understand?"

"Oh, Mr. Gentry!" Angel was aflame in excitation and more than a little tipsy. "Will you really? Oh, jeepers!"

"But first you're going to phone Fancy and you're going to tell her what we're going to do. If she can find where it is we're going to tether you, you're home free. If she can't find you, she's in a bit of a bind."

"She'll go straight to the police."

"I don't think she will, Angel, not after you've had this talk on the phone. If you want, you can tell her that if she can't find you, she can come to me and yield herself as a prisoner. How's that?"

"Oh, I can't possibly tell her that." Angel's voice was anxious. "Don't you see, Mr. Gentry, if I tell her that she won't bother to play this lovely little game you've thought of. She'll come right over and take her clothes off. The game is so much nicer."

It was like playing with animated Barbie dolls, the twins were enchanting. Whatever they did was always erotically delightful to the male view. Gentry led his young prisoner to the nearest phone. He dialed and held the receiver to Angel's mouth. It was a bubbling conversation he was forced to listen to, full of exclamations and admonitions.

But when he was satisfied the message had got across to the girl at the other end of the line, he interposed his own male voice.

“That’s it, Fancy. The rest is up to you. Angel will not be hurt.”

Angel’s visit to her big sister was not a success. Mia was inside a cage, she stood within the cage because of a collar and chain about her neck. She could neither sit nor kneel. She was far from pleased at being viewed thusly by a babbling adolescent. Crossly she demanded, “What on earth are you doing here, Angel and like that! Haven’t you enough sense to stay at Dovecove where you’re safe?”

Angel was taken back. A different greeting might have evoked a different response, but as it was she said a story book line, “My, what big tits you’ve got, Mia, dear and my, my, what a wonderful pubic bush. All that hair!”

“Don’t be disgusting, you little whore. I’m tired of both of you. I hope Mr. Gentry canes your bottoms before he sends you home.”

Mia turned towards her Master. “You are going to send them home, aren’t you? After teaching them a lesson, I hope.”

Then Angel told her story. “It’s sort of a paper chase without the paper,” she ended rather lamely. “Fancy has to find me, that’s all.”

Ryan did not prolong the visit between the two sisters, they were unlikely to agree about anything and it did not matter. A certain amount of friction added spice to the attraction the trio had for him. He led the trembling and radiant teenager from the house and out into the trees. Finding a not-too obvious location, he chose his tree and tethered the girl to it. Pliers and a piece of wire insured captivity. He patted Angel’s bare bottom, gave her a big-brother kiss on her forehead and left her alone. There had been no promise of release, no information about anything, Angel was precisely as Mia had once been.

The effect of the green liqueur lasted longer than might have been the case with an adult. Angel reveled in its euphoria. She fought her bonds with every muscle of her being. She jerked and twisted and fought to her content. She was positive Mr. Gentry would not let her down, she would not be able to free herself and in that conviction, she was upheld. By the time sobriety had its influence, Angel had proved beyond doubt the inescapability of her captivity. Following euphoria came the delicious shivers of apprehension. If Fancy failed to find her then night would fall and with it would come the ghosts and the strange noises to make the flesh of maidens creep. In the meantime she

was not unaware of the hazards of being discovered by the wrong person. The woods available to Gentry was not as isolated as the one in which she and Fancy had tethered their elder sister. Angel did not really expect to be discovered by anyone other than her sister or the man who had bound her here. But she could not be sure. The doubt sent fresh quivers of sensation up and down her spine and started something with which she was becoming increasingly acquainted, a fire within her loins.

She amused herself by walking around the tree at the end of her tether. She got an added thrill out of imagining it was Gentry who held the far end of the rope instead of the tree, he would be able to tug at her neck as he pleased, but the tree was a second best, she used it to the full. Angel's next experiment within captivity was to seek for a rough piece of bark or an exposed root against which to rub the bonds on her wrists. She was not too disappointed to fail in this search. She rose on tiptoe to see if she could reach the rope around her tree and its bit of wire. But that was awkward and far too high. It was while she was thus engaged her visitor arrived.

It was a sad anticlimax in as much as it was neither man nor woman but a ragged and soiled boy smaller than herself. He carried a basket and had been hunting for mushrooms. He stood transfixed and uttered an emphatic, "Well, I never!"

The bound maiden eyed the new arrival with disfavor. She knew his kind, they nearly always spelled trouble. Coldly she directed, “Go away, little boy, if you stay around here you’ll get into trouble.”

“You ain’t got no clothes on!” The uneducated young voice was filled with the pleasure of discovery. “I ain’t never seen no girl with no clothes on, not your age, only ‘uns. Turn around so I can see you better.”

“I told you to go away,” Angel repeated sternly. “It doesn’t matter about my clothes, I simple forgot to put them on. It’s no business of yours. Go away.”

The boy did not go. Instead, he came closer and remarked, in genuine astonishment, “You’ve got tits and things. Crykey, look at that there hair you got beneath your belly. I ain’t got nowhere so much.”

“You’re a boy,” Angel informed from her superior age. “Boys don’t have as much as girls.” Her mind was in the turmoil of seeking some way to banish this unwelcome guest. “My father will be coming any minute now, if he finds you here!”

“I bet you ain’t got no father. You just saying that to frighten me,” the boy said with youthful wisdom. “I bet there ain’t nobody gonna come. Some body’s tied you like that for a long time.” In sudden discovery he added, “I got

yous all to myself! I all's wanted a naked girl all just for me. Gosh, what I could do to you!"

"You can't do anything to me. If you come near I shall kick you in that thing you've got where it hurts. And if you don't believe about my father, you just wait."

"You ain't got no father, I can tell the way you say it. Look, you stands still while I feel you all up. You willing to do that?"

"No, I'm not, you horrible little animal. This is private property, you've got no business here."

"No, it ain't. I've been comin' here since I was a little 'un. You want to cock your leg up so I can see your hole?"

"I'm not going to do anything so disgusting," Angel affirmed valiantly. But her heart was sinking. Tied as she was this youngster could handle her, he could get her down, he could probably hurt her terribly if he wanted to. She hoped he was too young to think about rape.

"You know what that hole is for," he stated with an air of imparting grave knowledge. He unzipped his pants. "Here, look at this! You see what I got? It's made so it can be shoved up your hole and way inside. Want to try?"

The bound and naked teenager was busily computing odds. She doubted if her voice could be heard and if no one answered her scream for help, the boy would be doubly en-

couraged. The father and brother threat was one which her visitor obviously did not believe. Angel felt painfully on her own and fell back upon the only defenses she could think of. “If you come near me, I’ll kick and I’ll bite and I’ll hurt you bad. Go away.”

The boy nodded as though she was speaking of the weather. He continued a train of thought. “Anybody ever whip your bottom? They don’t cane girl’s bottoms in school anymore, I ain’t never seen it done. I sure would like to. ‘ow ‘bout I cuts a switch and uses it on your little buns?”

Angel flamed angrily, “Don’t you ever dare! You could go to prison for a long time if you do a thing like that to me.”

“Worse than stickin’ my thing in you?”

“No, that’s every bit as bad. You mustn’t whip me and you mustn’t do that horrible thing to me, either.” Bluffing, she added, “I won’t let you. Don’t get big ideas just because my hands are tied behind my back.”

“They’re tied real good, ain’t they? Mind if I look?”

“You can see well enough, you don’t need to come any closer.”

The urchin leapt. Angel ran for her life but forgot the tether, before she had got started it jerked her neck back in a painful reminder of how helpless she was before this soiled young man. A moment later a smelly arm was

around her neck, she was tripped and thrust to the ground and a young male knee planted triumphantly in the small of her back.

“See, I gotta. You’d better choose real quick. What do you want, your ass switched or to get fucked?”

The hateful question held an undoubtable authority. The naked girl could not even dislodge him from her back, her hands were useless. It was worse when he turned her to lay upon those bound arms and give him a full frontal view of everything she possessed. For almost a minute he was entranced with this discoveries and revelations while the girl beneath his knee panted from exhaustion and desperation. In a forlorn hope she promised, “If you don’t do things to me, if you just go away and leave me alone, I’ll give you money, a lot of money. Honest, I will.”

“You ain’t got no money,” her captor mocked. “All you got is a cute little pussy. Here, I’m going to feel it.”

He changed position and proceeded to finger and massage that part of Angel she most desired to keep inviolate. “Gosh, you’re nice down there,” he ejaculated. “You and me gonna have fun. If you don’t stay still the way I tell you, I’ll cut that switch. You’ll do what I tell you then!”

With a male knee in her stomach and a male finger and thumb grasping her right nipple, Angel was aware of male superiority. Everything was hurting including the thin

twine around her wrists, even that was against her. And she was certain that, had it not been for the rope around her neck, she would have gotten clean away. She was ready to cry in humiliation and defeat. She had no curiosity about rape. She was certain it would be horrible and vile.

“Look, before I starts in on you I’d better cut that switch,” her captor said sagely. “I don’t trust you yet. If I don’t whip you real good first you ain’t going to do nothin.’ You’ll fight first. I’ll be right back.”

She watched him go then looked around in desperation but there was nothing and no one. Miserably the teenaged girl watched him search and find a couple of limber withes with which she would be whipped. Sure, she could run again, but to what avail! When he returned she said, in total surrender, “You don’t need to use them on me. I’ll do what you want.”

“You mean you’ll lay back and open your legs for me?” He demand was almost in disbelief that any girl her age could be thus easily coerced. His tone became derisive, “Naaah, I ain’t trusting you. I’m gonna whip you first. You wanta turn over so’s I can whip your rump or you wants it on your tits?”

Angel rolled over. All she could hope was for this young lout to find his sexual gratification in the streaking of her skin. She was not without wisdom in such matters and was

playing her last card. She would take a whipping for a rape. If a rape came later she would at least have tried!

Knowing the target, she lifted her bound hands above her two curves about to receive the switch.

The pain was atrocious. Within her agony Angel realized this urchin knew no more of corporal punishment than she herself. In his ignorance he could cut her to bits. She tried to leap erect was but thrust down with an unkind foot and a second stroke cut her skin. She screamed in pain and anger and all the frustration of any female conquered by The Male.

It was then salvation came.

The knee was gone, the foot was gone, there was no third stroke. Angel rose in disbelief and a great thankfulness. Like the boy, she stared at the interruption. It was Fancy staring back at them in disbelief in what she saw. When comprehension dawned, she snatched at a broken branch and leapt into the fray, beating the would-be rapist so savagely about the head and shoulders that he turned and ran, leaving his basket of mushrooms as spoils of war. Panting, Fancy came back to her thankful sister and said, irritably, “I told you so. I told you you would get into trouble. Did Mr. Gentry make you do that phone call with a gun at your head or something?”

Angel was abject. She told her story and ended it with, “It would have been OK, Fancy, if this little so and so hadn’t shown up. Mr. Gentry was real sweet.”

Angel was untied. Angel was kissed and hugged, Angel was consoled. Leaving the rope and the thin twine on the grass and for good measure the basket of mushroom, the now free naked girl and her twin sister walked back home. By the time they arrived at Dovecove, Angel was feeling proud of her wounds, her fingers sought them constantly and she kept requesting of Fancy a report on their changing condition.

They were back at square one.

Chapter 9

Triple Travail

Mia Argent gazed at the ceiling. It was a familiar view in which she took no shame. In his iovemaking, Gentry tended to be more conventional than she would have supposed. True, they experimented outrageously, but generally they ended up with her on her back and her legs wide apart or over his back and clutching hard. In this making of their love she was no longer bound. She had no idea if she was a prisoner or not. But, so far, Gentry had remembered on each occasion to snap the shackle tight upon her ankle before going to sleep. She had been back in his possession ten days without a single opportunity to escape. It was now the bright sunlight of morning after a lust filled night. The two of them were drowsily content to stay in bed and talk.

“Ryan, darling, why do you have to punish me every day, I don’t do things to deserve it? Are you a sadist?”

“Hmmmm, I suppose so. I suspect most men are. All it amounts to is we love to make girls squeal the same way they do in successful orgasms. We can’t screw them all night so we do the next best thing. We hang them up by their thumbs and whip their bottoms. The effect is pretty much the same. Haven’t you noticed?”

“But, Ryan darling, if we had a never-ending orgasm you’d never paint any pictures. And what about eating?”

They enjoyed this exchange, an endless sparring neither wished to win. It was icing on their cake and their cake was good! Each day since her repossession, Mia had been subjected to what others might see as punishment. She supposed it was but did not care. Through the hours when she was left chained or bound in some form of discomfort her heat flared in a reassuring comfort which never failed and her mind seethed with conjecture of days to come. Neither of them believed they could ever tire of this erotic play. They often talked of it.

“It’s just that we’re lucky, sweetheart,” Ryan always assured her. “Lots of people would do things the way we do if they had the chance. When you think of it, almost no one has freedom or privacy. We have both. We shouldn’t ask too many questions, analysis strips things bare and leaves you nothing.”

Drowsily Mia asked a now familiar question, “What are you going to do to me today, Ryan?

He took pleasure in telling her, it added spice. Often they talked of her impending punishment over breakfast, speaking of it in the abstract as though it would not happen or that it was happening to someone else. They tried to outdo each other in being outrageous.

“I’m thinking of whipping you up between your legs, Mia. Will that keep you content for today?”

“Oh, darling, thank you! Of course, it will. You’ll whip me especially hard, won’t you?”

It was carnality, lust and endless erotic by-play, it was so outrageous that neither believed in it or felt guilt. It was a fun thing between a man and his girl. That the girl was a possession made them luckier than most.

“I absolutely must hang you up by your thumbs one of these days, Mia,” Ryan mused thoughtfully. “It’s such classic thing. It’s referred to so often, it sounds so ultimate. Think you could handle it?”

“I can handle anything you truly want me to,” Mia assured him without concern. “You shouldn’t tell me things, just do them.”

“But are we going to go on like this all our lives?” Ryan asked argumentatively. “I mean, do you want to?”

“I have nothing to say about it, Master. I’ve supposed you’d go on punishing me like this until you get bored and then you’ll marry me. Don’t tell me you won’t, I don’t wish to know.”

“But supposing I say I will? Suppose I said I’d marry you tomorrow? What then?”

Mia's heart leaped the way it always did when marriage was mentioned. She felt certain she would get Ryan sooner or later. Melody had receded beyond this fresh flood of sexuality submerging her and the man she loved. Truthfully she retorted, "I simply don't know about after being married. I suppose I belong to you just as much after as before. Even the church sort of condones that, doesn't it? I know they've removed the word "obey" from the service but it's still implied."

"Bit difficult to have a dinner party and explain your wife is in suspension in the basement, love. What would you suggest?"

"You're giving me bits of time off now. You could still do it after we're married. I'd be your hostess at the dinner party. No one need know you'll whip me afterwards or put me in a cage."

"Be cute if they did. Give them the thrill of their lives. But I suppose we're a mile ahead of them in things like this. Poor old, porky Evans told me the other day he'd never seen his wife without a nightgown. It's hard to believe."

Mia was standing naked in a specially constructed pillory when Ryan asked the inevitable, "What about your sisters, Mia. It's been a long time?"

"You phoned when you found the ropes without Angel, didn't you?"

“Yes, they were OK then but a bit jolted by Angel’s adventure. Guess I shouldn’t have subjected her to it, but the temptation was just too much.”

“But, Ryan, the poor dears will be bored silly alone at Dovecove. I’d bet they’ll be thinking of us every minute. There’ll be things to sign and bills to pay by now. Shouldn’t you take me over?”

“You’re right, sweetheart, but you know what it will be, don’t you. One demand after another. They’ll climb all over us and want me to do the most horrible acts of sadism upon their innocent little pelts. Of course, you’re a pretty good submissive yourself. I’m very pleased with you.”

The twins were enraptured. “There’s all sorts of mail for you, darling, in your box, you can deal with it while Mr. Gentry does nice things to us.”

“You do not mean nice things at all,” big sister said severely. “Instead of coming here to deal with the mail, I should give you both a good orgasm to keep you on the straight and narrow. Stop bothering Ryan, he’s got plenty to do with me.”

“But, darling, if one girl is good surely three is better. Besides, we’re nice and young, it will be a pleasant change for Mr. Gentry after an elderly lady.”

Mia swallowed the insult. Big sisters were accustomed to such things. Matter-of-factly she asked of Ryan, “Please dear, untie my hands so I can look after things. I promise I’ll be good and let you tie them again.”

“Gee, isn’t she submissive?” the twins chanted in unison. “Oh, Mr. Gentry, you must be so proud of her. And we bet you did the most awful things to get her in such an obedient state of mind?”

“Never you mind what I do to your big sister,” Gentry laughed at their eagerness. “When your sister asks me to I’ll take you both home and thrash you as hard as I’ve ever thrashed a girl. How’s that?”

“Do you have to ask Mia? She’s so difficult!” Two pairs of young eyes surveyed him in hungry desire. “Mia doesn’t give us a break at all. We’ve never been what you call fucked and we’ve never been whipped in our lives,” they sighed longingly. “We’re deprived, that’s what we are. Deprived!”

Fancy and Angel were an endless source of pleasure. Ryan and Mia both knew there was far more delight in them by keeping them in suspenseful desire than to concede to their desires. That might mean a well whipped bottom and a lot of marks on their tender, young skins but also might take away some of the fun in their relationships. But the older couple understood that to inflict the punishment would be-

ing something to an end, it would be the death of mystery and allure. They would rob the twins of nothing. When the time came Angel and Fancy would be punished to the utmost of their hearts desire and beyond. In the meantime they were a source of laughter.

“You’re mean to us. Mia gets all the fun.”

“It’s not a bit fair. Even if we’re only fourteen, we do have our rights, you know. We don’t see why you couldn’t whip us just a little sometimes.”

“You used to keep us in chains when you had us over at your place. Couldn’t we do that once a week. You’ve no idea what it does to our pussies to be naked and have a man look at us. Do you, Mr. Gentry?”

They were precocious enough to make Mia consider the idea of giving them a whipping and of making certain it went far beyond their expectations. Their tolerance of pain was probably no greater than her own. After half a dozen strokes they would be longing for release.

Mischievously, she broached an idea.

They discussed Mia’s inspiration over dinner. Ryan could find but a single fault. “It’s wonderful, sweetheart, but I’m nervous about this Melody idea. Couldn’t we use someone else?”

“I don’t know anyone who wouldn’t be frightfully shocked. Do you?”

“So far as the twins are concerned I’m wondering if I couldn’t hunt up that horrible little boy Fancy told us about. They’d positively hate him!”

“Have you forgotten me, Ryan?”

“No, I haven’t. With you Melody has some validity. I can see your point. But I don’t see why you would want to subject yourself to that much pain and in those particular parts of yourself.”

“You’re a little bored with me, that’s why. You’re being kind,” Mia explained. “This will be a bit of spice to reawaken your interest. Quite probably I need to be gingered up myself. I think it’s a wonderful idea all way round.”

A pair of shining eyed teenagers arrived on the appointed day. They lost no time. “We think you’re wonderful and so kind and we can hardly wait,” they assured their host breathlessly. “Is darling Mia fastened up some way?”

Ryan assured them that indeed their sister had been well looked after. Without warning they threw aside their scanty garments and their shoes to stand starkly but alluringly nude and coyly asked, “How do you want us, Mr. Gentry? Please don’t be shy. Are you going to whip us?”

Ryan laughed at their exuberance, wondering how long it would last beneath the lash. He was determined not to be cruel but perhaps a lesson would be good for them, they were getting out of hand. He said, “Come along, I’m going to look after all three of you in the same room. You’ll be able to watch.”

“Oh, yummy! We won’t mind a bit how much you whip us, Mr. Gentry. We won’t mind anything you do.”

They gazed upon him soulfully like young does at a buck. “We’d hate to be punished by anyone else, but just so long as it’s you!”

They conveyed an impression of total adoration of the man to whom they made their assurances. Ryan chuckled inwardly.

The big basement room had ample space. The naked twins had memories of its constraints. They glowed in nude anticipation while Ryan strapped them tight upon two benches he had specially contrived. The leather bands circled teenage wrists, ankles, waists and necks. By the time he was finished each girl was breathless and flushed with erotic anxiety, their bottoms reared indecently imploring no mercy. Mia felt sorry for them both.

Mia was already in place where Melody once had been. Her wrists were on each side of the post, tight bound, her feet were pulled apart by tethers upon her ankles. She was

awaiting punishment in a naked condition. It was a punishment she herself had asked for but nevertheless she was nervous, fearful she had bitten off more than she could chew. It was easy to speak of something like this when in bed with Ryan or sipping with him in the lounge, but now it was actually about to happen. The cords upon her wrists and the ropes upon her ankles seemed fearful beyond expectation. Mutely she hoped Melody might be long delayed or perhaps in bed with the flu.

Melody was not in bed nor did she have the flu. She arrived bubbling over with good spirits and when taken to the room downstairs, surveyed the trio with immense satisfaction. Her immediate concern was with Mia. “Isn’t it sweet of Ryan to give me my revenge. Do you remember when you had me like this and what you did then?”

“Yes, I remember.” Mia’s voice did not betray her thudding heart.

“And Fancy and darling Angel, aren’t they sweet. What lovely benches, Ryan, did you make them specially?”

Assured of the origin of everything present, Melody continued to effervesce. “And I may whip all three of them, Ryan?” she asked in disbelief. “Why are you being so kind? I don’t understand?”

“You will, Melody, leave it be for now. Enjoy yourself.”

“Which one do you want me to whip first, darling?”

“Take your pick. It will hurt each one of them just as much whether they’re first or last. Here use this strap flagellum on the twins. You can use the whip on Mia, the same one she used on you.”

For Melody this unexpected plethora of goodies was almost more than she could bear. She had supposed herself banished to utter darkness but now, all of a sudden, here were three delicious nudities fastened tight for her discipline. That something might happen to herself when the three were properly punished was something she was not prepared to deal with now. But it was something to look forward to!

Melody took the offered flagellum from Ryan. It was an unfamiliar weapon but deeply satisfying in the hand. It was limber like a dead snake and of a length to give total control. It could be lapped into any crevasse or over any curve desired by whoever held it. Instinctively Melody knew it would provide the most satisfying yet shocking sounds of impact. Her breathing was getting out of hand. All eyes were upon her in an utterly fearful anticipation by the female occupants of the room and an amused regard from the man who held them all in thrall. Tentatively she walked to the bench to which Angel was tightly strapped.

Mia was awaiting pain to be delivered by a woman who was her rival for a man's affections. Her posture was strained and cruelly vulnerable. But she forgot her own concerns in watching the vividly erotic scene Melody was creating. Angel was breathing hard and made the expected protests.

"But, Mr. Gentry, it's you who's supposed to whip us, not Melody. I don't want to be whipped by Melody. Neither does Fancy. If Melody whips us it will spoil everything!"

The flagellum contacted Angel's helpless bottom with a resounding splat. Its supple dimensions were perfect for a girl's divided cheeks. Having selected one and contacted with most satisfying sound of her life, Melody moved her attention to its twin. Again there was the solid and resounding "Thwack." The first blow was visibly ripening and deepening in color across Angel's virgin skin. The girl herself appeared to be in shock. Her eyes were wide in disbelief and she was surging with every ounce of her young strength against the straps. But she could not move, her ass remained upended and inviting for the limber leather in Melody's hand. In the vibrating silence following the second blow, Angel's voice was pathetical small, "I don't think I can stand this. I'm terribly sorry Mr. Gentry but she's hitting me too hard and I never knew it was like this anyway. Please, Mr. Gentry, Fancy and I want you to whip us, not Melody or any other girl."

It was Angel's last coherent sentence. After it had died away the sounds she made under the flagellum's frightful attentions were inarticulate and interspersed with striving to catch up upon her breath. Mia guessed the supple leather must be horribly painful but was by no means lethal. Angel was simply getting what she said she wanted, but not from the desired source or with the desired instrument. Beholding Fancy's fascinated gaze, she could envision the twins comparing scorched rumps after it was all over, each delighted and proud of their wounds. In the meantime the twins would have a bad, bad thirty minutes.

Gentry's hand upon her arm cautioned Melody after the fifteenth splat had spread its scarlet across Angel's seat. Gently he said, "That will do for this one. Take your pick of the others."

Mia had thought she would be last but Melody decided otherwise. Setting aside the flagellum she grandly accepted the single-thonged instrument by which she herself had been punished and by which she would now punish her rival. Mia looked back at the master, hoping he might intervene but his countenance was that of an interested spectator, obviously amused by what he watched.

Melody's voice was vibrant with something beyond pleasure, "Hello, darling, it's lovely to see you like this. I'm going to hurt you."

Mia felt there was nothing to say so kept silent. Fancy's fascination was now transferred to her and Angel, who was taking a fresh interest. It was easy to see Angel's relief at the ending of her own inflections. The twins would watch big sister get her just desserts.

If Mia had been whipped as often as had Melody and in the many ways Melody had, her ordeal would have been infinitely easier. But Mia was not addicted or experienced. The manner in which the little whip would now discolor and scorch her most secret places was a thought to make her shrink and tug uselessly against the cords that held her. She closed her eyes.

It was punishment for real. Against each cunning feminine cut Mia could wiggle, tense and weave her bottom in a limited range of freedom. She performed all the motions, knowing them obscene but not caring. All she cared about was the pain and Melody's smug pleasure in its inflection. Mia squealed as the thong entered her crotch and cut in unsuspected cruelties. She screamed in anger and fear as the first slap of the thong vibrated each of her breasts in turn. She sobbed and moaned in the misery of a taunt belly which became a constant recipient of the thong's overlap. She heard her own voice pleading that the blows be less severe. Wide eyed she turned again to Gentry but received only an approving nod. She could not believe that she was acquitting herself well. Mia was deeply shamed.

It went on forever. The punished girl felt certain it went far beyond the bounds of what she had done to Melody that first time. Melody was in her glory and was prepared to continue with her work upon the bound girl's sexual parts until her arm grew tired. But that was far away and in the meantime there was this withering, gasping femaleness responding so satisfying to her lash. When Ryan intervened quietly, "That's enough, Melody, save a bit for next time," the girl with the whip stepped back, sweating and panting from the exertion of whipping bound flesh. The twins were bright eyed in ecstasy. They had seen big sister whipped and heard big sister's cries of despair and desolation. They would remember big sister's whipping and would remind her of it often. For them it would be like having a treasure in the bank.

Mia was sobbing in an effort to control her reactions as Melody's fingers searched the wounds her thong had planted. It was a pleasurable, almost loving searching and tracing of weals and scarlet curves. It did not stop until Ryan's caustic comment, "Hey, that's enough of that. You're forgetting, Melody, you've still got work to do."

In different circumstances Mia might have laughed. Fancy's sudden realization of her turn being about to begin was clearly reflected in the startled look upon her young face. She looked around to all present, she visibly gulped and swallowed. Whether her sudden struggle against the straps

by which the bench held her tight was motivated by a belief in possible escape or simply as a venting of suspense, no one could tell. Fancy watched Melody and the flagellum with a fixed stare of horror. But she was a twin and echoed her siblings complaint.

“Stay away from me, Melody. I don’t want to be whipped by a girl. I want to be whipped by Mr. Gentry. Please, Mr. Gentry, will you whip me?”

The effort looked forlorn indeed, it appeared to have fallen on deaf ears. Angel retorted with a touch of smugness, “It’s not good, Fancy darling, she’ll do it to you same as me. It hurts something awful. Everybody’s being very mean to us.”

Mia was tiring in her awkward stance. Her wide-spread legs longed to close, her bend back cried for release. Her wrists protested their cording to the post. But once more this was temporarily forgotten in her absorption with her younger sister as the flagellum snapped and slapped and cracked upon Fancy’s bottom. The twin spheres vibrated and jounced beneath the impacts. The basement room became a sound box in which the thrum and cut of limber leather on the vibrancy of Fancy’s tautly stretched rump rose slowly to a final crescendo of erotic sound.

“Well, that’s that,” Gentry observed. “Damn good job, I’d say. Hope you three girls enjoyed it.”

The twins were resilient and hopeful enough to contrive a weak, “Thank you, Mr. Gentry.”

Mia said nothing.

“I could do that all day, every day!” Melody assured her audience. “I’d simply no idea! I mean, well, I’ve always been on the other end of things and missed all the fun.”

Gentry rose to the occasion. Softly yet sardonically he assured his guests, “We don’t want to cheat you, Melody. I’m certainly grateful for the work you’ve done today. I expect you’d appreciate a reward?”

It was a loaded question, all four girls knew it for what it was. Melody gazed at the whip she was still holding, she sat it aside and said briskly, “Thanks, Ryan, but I really should be running along. This has taken longer than I expected.”

Ryan shook his head, almost sadly, his former wife could be relied upon to run true to form. Softly he replied, “Melody, you know damned well you’re not going anywhere expect on one of those benches now occupied by a twin. Just hold things a minute while I unstrap the girls.”

Melody strode forthrightly for the door but found it locked. She turned and said angrily, “Some other time, Ryan, I really can’t today.”

Utterances of naked girls in Ryan’s basement room mostly went unheeded, this was no exception. Melody watched the

twins rise stiffly and finger their bottoms as though surprised to find them still intact. But their eyes were shining and frequently flitted in her direction with sly smirks.

“Dressed or undressed, Melody?” Ryan inquired politely. “We don’t mind, take your choice.”

“I certainly do not intent to strip naked. I did not come here to be punished, I came to give punishment.”

It was an uneven tussle. It took perhaps two minutes for the master of the house to strap his former wife to the bench. Melody’s complained throughout but, to Mia, it seemed her protests became fainter and fainter as the straps tightened down to hold her body immobile and ready for punishment. By the time the last strap was secured down tight, Melody’s protests had been reduced to a weak, “You’ll be sorry for this, Ryan. You shouldn’t be doing it. I shall never speak to you again.”

“Could I please be unfastened?” Mia asked plaintively. “I’ve been like this a long time and I hurt.”

Mia’s words trailed into the same limbo as had the complaints of hers. If she had been able to she would have shrugged but she could not shrug. Once more the fate of another girl was absorbing her interest, Melody was not looking very worried. The former Mrs. Gentry was wondering if what was going to be done to her would fall under the category of pain or pleasure. It always hurt, of

course, but what Ryan prescribed as “his thrashings” had about them a shockingly erotic association for her. But this! Her plight was shaming, cruelly helpless, in the extreme. Melody was positive her reared up rump revealed her sex lips and a good deal of pubic hair. The strap around her waist, which was the main factor in her exposure, was cruel, Melody was still fully clothed but this did not last long. Gentry unceremoniously pulled up her skirt and drew it up to her shoulders. Her pantyhose were untidily pulled down. A pair of scissors clipped joyously them until the shreds could be tugged away to reveal everything Melody feared. For what it was worth she said, “You’re being very kind, Ryan. Besides this is horribly rude to expose me like this.” Her final indignity was now added. Ryan handed the flagellum to Angel and suggested cheerfully, “Your turn, sweetheart, she’s all yours.”

“No! No, Ryan, please!” Melody was distraught. “You know nobody ever whips me but you. I forbid this. I refuse to be whipped by a pair of teenyboppers!”

“We’re not teenyboppers, Mrs. Gentry,” Fancy explained gently. “We’re just two fourteen year old young women who you’ve just whipped. We’re going to love whipping you. How would it be if Angel whips one cheek of your bottom and I whip the other? Isn’t that sweet?”

“Smart girl,” Ryan approved. “And not a bad idea. You two girls do what you like about it. Melody’s bottom belongs to you for the time being. I’ll tell you when she’s had enough.”

The scarlet bottoms of the already whipped girls bounced and flitted around the large room in motions of pure delight as they inspected their victim and planned the use of the supple leather upon that part of Melody which was crimson upon themselves. Their slender youthfulness was a joy to behold, they were as supple and limber as the flagellum itself. The strapped down woman would receive the resounding thwacks with the same force as she had herself given. The youth of those who whipped her would diminish nothing. The twins were strong.

Mia hoped her sisters would evoke from Ryan’s wife the same shameful sounds she had made while being whipped herself. But Melody ran true to form in this as in all else. He eyes glazed, her fingers sought vainly for expression, her breathing came in heaving gasps after each impact of the leather, she surged against the straps. But that was all. Mia envied her.

The steady beat of the flagellum filled the room.

Mia kicked her shackled foot idly as she lay beside her master in their early morning communion. Kicking her shackles had become an involuntary moment in which she found pleasure. It was always followed by the musical

sound of links and a sense of belonging to the man beside her and an inability to go away. Mia was a pleased and pleasured prisoner. She often assured herself that without the shackle on her ankle she could not have slept.

The slave-girl's legs were spread wide, not so much to accommodate the chain upon her ankles, but to provide easy access for Ryan's hand which was cupped lovingly upon what he always described as "her bag of tricks." It was extremely comforting. Her master's voice came drowsily.

"That bunch of slave-girl paintings I did of you, sweetheart, I had them in a gallery. Had a showing, in fact. They've been a bit of a sensation in some quarters. We're by way of becoming rich."

Mia's ears picked up the plural he so rarely used. Her spirits soared. "Oh, darling, that's wonderful. And you kept it a secret."

"Well, yes. No use getting you excited, these things often flop." His voice took on a different tone as he added, "Look, Mia my pet, I'll tell you all the lovely details later. But there's something that's been bothering me. A man, who appears to be a millionaire, fell in love with you. Yes, really, the idiot has gone absolutely overboard. He discovered I painted from a model and he's offered me a million pounds for you, sight unseen. He's been hard to get rid of so I asked him to lunch today to sort of… well, lay the ghost."

“A million pounds!” Mia was thrilled. “Darling, you must sell me at once. You can get the million pounds and sometime later I’ll escape and we’ll live happily ever after. Oh, wow!”

Mia had sat erect in her excitement but Ryan pushed her back. “Hold it, love. Don’t get excited. I don’t particularly like the fellow but he bought several of the paintings and might be useful. His name’s Fenimore Hilbert. I can’t quite place him, probably from the USA.”

It was the strangest of lunches. Ryan had insisted on his model being clothed and without restraint. Mia hated the clothes and the chains didn’t matter, wild horses would not have dragged her from an examination of a man stupid enough to pay a million pounds to possess her. Ryan had laughingly assured her the “possession” intended would be very real indeed, she would be taken from his house, tightly bound or tightly chained, probably both. It appeared Mr. Hilbert was a devotee of bound and naked young woman in awkward circumstances. As Ryan cheerfully said, “He likes his maidens in distress, the more distress the better.”

Fenimore Hilbert was a large, hearty man, nothing vulgar. He possessed a smoothness that revealed nothing of what he really was. Mia almost shriveled under the intensity of his regard, but that regard was also an intense compliment

to what she was and could not be taken lightly. She found she could not take offense.

Their visitor was a man who took lunches in stride. His business, he assured them, was commodities, which left them no wiser than before. Mia was uncertain about his barrage of questions, they probed!

“You are normally kept in chains, Miss Argent?”

“Well… yes, I suppose I am.” She smiled at the intent eyes which told her nothing except adoration. “It’s a thing between Mr. Gentry and myself. Please don’t take it seriously.”

“I take it very seriously indeed, Miss Argent. I wish to purchase you. I’ve offered Mr. Gentry the considerable sum of one million pounds for the complete possession of your person.”

“I’m not for sale. I expect Mr. Gentry told you and anyway, such a sale would not be legal.”

Hilbert let the question slide but continued, “I have always been fascinated with the captured girl.” He nodded towards Gentry. “For me she has an extraordinary allure, the quintessence of which was caught by Mr. Gentry in those paintings. Naked and in chains you are exquisite.”

“Mr. Hilbert finds a quality of the aesthetic, something almost spiritual, in the bound girl,” Gentry interposed.

“That’s correct, that’s exactly it,” Fenimore Hilbert agreed. “Meeting you like this confirms my assumption that those paintings were real. You could walk in and out of any canvass. It is something quite miraculous. I wish to possess you.”

Mia caught Gentry’s eye. She suspected they were not laying a ghost, they were nourishing a fetish. Mr. Hilbert was being a nuisance.

“I’d like to see your chains, my dear and the places where they are locked on you, the rooms and dungeons, I mean. I’m sure you have them.” He turned a benevolent countenance to Ryan. “Would it be asking too much if, after lunch, you adorn Miss Argent in metal as in any one of your paintings?”

It went on and on to the point of embarrassment. Mr. Hilbert, still protesting, was escorted back to his car. Back in the house Ryan said, “See what I mean, the man’s obsessed with having you. Well, anyway we did our best. I’ll make sure he doesn’t bother us again.”

It was on the following day Mia Argent was “taken.”

Ryan had left early on business. His slave-girl remained shackled to the bed with the familiar bonds. Whatever she needed was within the span of the many links with which her captivity was assured. When Hilbert and his men entered, she sat up in surprise and shock, covering her

breasts and knowing with a fearful certainty what was about to happen.

They were cruelly capable. While Mr. Hilbert smoothly explained his need of her, Mia was tightly bound, tightly gagged and blindfolded. She was carried she knew not where. The kidnappers had even possessed a master key by which her shackles were removed.

It was a very long ride. By the discomfort and the sounds, Mia judged herself within the trunk of a car. She had been hogtied so she could not move. She was both blind and could not speak. She wet the bandages around her eyes with bitter tears.

Fenimore Hilbert was undoubtedly rich. His house, where ever it was, was isolated magnificence. When she was unbound and her lips and eyes freed from bondage, the helper bound her wrists afresh behind her back and departed. Mr. Hilbert was an exuberant and kindly host. He insisted on tilting coffee into her lips and then taking her on a tour of her palace of imprisonment.

Hilbert had thought of everything. There were chains enough for an army of captives, there was rope, there was also a great number of rooms holding a great many devices, all designed for a girl's discomfort. Mia had no choice but to go where she was led. Whatever words she uttered

fell upon deaf ears or were swallowed in the immensity of her new prison.

While viewing the objects with which she was certain she would be making a more intimate acquaintance, her mind was filled with thoughts of Ryan. Ryan had to guess! How could he fail to guess! Ryan would track her down and rescue her. Fenimore Hilbert was surely a well known figure and would not be hard to trace. She was comforting herself with such thought when her captor's voice intervened.

"I'll want you chained, Mia. I'm sure you'll understand." Fenimore Hilbert sighed as though possessed with all the wealth of the world. "You're so beautiful, so very beautiful."

Mia asked herself why, if she was so beautiful to him, he had purchased or caused to be constructed the brutal implements for her dismay and discomfort. He was evidently a complicated man. She feared he was insane.

Mia had been naked when kidnapped. She was naked now. She stood without complaint while her kidnapper chained her in a weight of shackles she could scarcely bear. Hilbert had a chain for every part of her. When he was done, she could easily have sagged under the combined weight. But she was wise enough to know she must please this man so she tensed within her bonds and wore them proudly. He was enraptured.

“I wish I could paint,” Hilbert said regretfully, “but I have the next best thing.” He waved magnificently to a collection of camera equipment. “Gentry has immortalized you in oils, my dear, I shall do the same for you with the lens. As I have you chained this moment you are the most glorious creature in the universe.”

Mia stood in chains. She moved within their clutch according to the directions of this strange man whose eyes were alight with happiness. The intensity of Hilbert’s emotions and delight with her inhibited protest. Mia felt herself possessed by a strange force or power emitting from the man so busy with his cameras. Hilbert heard little she said. He was not hurting her, it was best to remain mute.

Hilbert’s removal of the first set of manacles brought his first reference to something not previously mentioned. Mia cringed.

“I can see you’ve been whipped, Miss Argent.” Hilbert ran an inquiring finger over the still visible marks Melody had placed upon Mia’s skin. “Next to the maiden bound and constrained there is the maiden who suffers the pain and anguish of the lash. It is equally beautiful. I do hope you agree?”

Mia tensed. She was desperately afraid but she quietly responded, “I don’t like being whipped, Mr. Hilbert. If I am whipped I cease to be a good slave-girl, I become unattrac-

tive, noisy and untidy. Please, you have so many other things…?"

Hilbert would return to it later, but for now he allowed the subject to drop. "These shackles I've just taken from you were marvelously heavy, fine for the camera, of course, but let us now change you to something more feminine. I have a set of what would be described as 'harem chains.' I suspect they are largely symbolic, though I wish to see whether they could hold you should you attempt to escape."

It was like a series of fittings for a new dress. You stood, you were pushed, you were turned, you were prodded. Mia kept silent while silver links and silver bands were locked upon her nakedness by a man who was now breathing heavily and pink of complexion. After the last lock had snapped she was instructed to walk around the room. This she did to the music of many links. She did not trip. She was experienced.

Fenimore Hilbert watched entranced. Had the circumstances been different, Mia might well have been amused, it was innocent enough. There was no mirror but she knew the chains enhanced her loveliness and were, in themselves, lovely. Light as they may be she knew they could hold her helpless.

It was too good to last. Male fingers were soon fumbling with keys and silver chains fell with a clatter. Almost panting, Hilbert said, “I have to take this further, my dear. I have an appointment quite soon and must get you properly attended to. Come alone, you’ll love this.”

Mia took the plunge, “Do you have to do this, Mr. Hilbert? This is kidnapping, you could go to prison. I haven’t minded your trying out these chains on me, it was rather fun. But I know you want to do a lot more. Please?”

“You see this funny looking thing here?” Hilbert asked enthusiastically. “Looks a bit odd, I’ll admit. There’s twisted iron and it looks funny but just wait a minute. Now I want you to kneel with your knees on these two pads.”

Mia obeyed. It seemed innocent and silly, the contraption itself looked as though someone had made a mistake. Her owner busied himself by pushing forward a small table. “I want you to lean forward, placing your forearms on this table. You can cradle your head, too, if you wish. In fact, this table is entirely for your comfort so use it as you may please.”

The naked girl obeyed. It meant leaning well forward and well down. A glimmering of what lay ahead was not hard to come by. Her bottom reared well above the rest of her body. It could well be elevated more.

“I wish you wouldn’t do this to me, Mr. Hilbert,” she said earnestly. “This thing’s designed for girls to be hurt, isn’t it?”

The words were lost along with her previous utterances. Mia felt ridiculous, experimenting with Fenimore Hilbert’s toy. She could cradle her head in her hands upon the small table or thrust upward on outspread palms. Behind her Hilbert was busy securing her ankles to the frame. That was all it was, a quite smallish frame within she knelt and which clamped her ankles tight and which provided a strap for her waist which was drawn slowly tighter and tighter until she gasped fearfully. “You’re breaking my back! Oh, Mr. Hilbert, please!”

The pressure stopped. But now Mia had little choice but to lay upon the table on her bare forearms, she could no longer rise herself. She could look back to either side by straining awkwardly, she could even glimpse her thighs exposed obscenely as though no longer a part of her. The little frame was performing its function to perfection. The helpless girl knew, without a doubt, she was about to be either caned or whipped. Either one meant pain. Pure and simple: pain.

Fenimore Hilbert had produced the inevitable cane. He was flexing it with loving care and looking at his target in perspiring excitement. But his voice was controlled, “Just one stroke now, Mia my dear. I want you to gage its quality

while I leave you along. Regrettably I have a lengthy errand. However you will be safe as you are now and will have time to realize your good fortune."

Mia's reflections about Hilbert's sanity were cut short by the searing cut across her cheeks. The cane lapped from hip to hip. She screamed. Mia was certain she must be cut and bleeding. Hilbert was a strong man.

The cane was set aside. Mia watched it fearfully as though it possessed a life of its own. Fenimore Hilbert fingered and frictioned the rising weal he had placed across the kidnapped posterior. He was muttering small exclamations such as, "Wonderful!," "Exquisite!," "Classic!," and "Marvelous, marvelous!" He lifted Mia's bent head, kissed her forehead gently and went away while she was still gasping from the agony.

Time passed, a lot of time. Mia's single wound burned steadily while her mind raced and she made frantic efforts to free herself. They failed. Miss Mia Argent was tightly and implacably held. She could not tell how much time had passed when the silvery, feminine tinkle of a laugh softly invaded the room.

"I knew I'd find you somewhere. I'm never quite sure with Daddy, but in most ways he's wonderfully predictable."

It was a girl of Mia's own age, an expensive girl, but bright eyed and without inhibitions. She was gazing upon the

clamped and strapped nakedness with sparkling curiosity. “I’ve never seen him use this thing before. I’ve wondered about it. What do you think of it?”

“Let me out, that’s what I think of it,” Mia said as she strained to put all the helpless feelings she felt into the words. “Please, please help me.”

“I take it you’re not one of the little darlings he pays money to? That means you’ve been kidnapped—that’s a first for Daddy!”

The girl was fingering Mia’s weal. “My, he really let you have one, didn’t he! Just as well I found you,” she laughed gaily. “Oh, by the way, I’m his daughter, my name’s Wanda and I have to keep an eye on Daddy. Daddy has this things about girls and ropes and chains and things,” she said lightly. “I do hope you’ve not been inconvenienced too badly.”

“Thank heaven’s you’ve come!” Mia exclaimed, “I’ve been going insane with worry. And this strap over my back is breaking me in two. Please hurry.”

“I won’t be a minute, dear. But there’s something I simply have to do before I set you free. You’ve got one really gorgeous mark across your bottom. I don’t suppose it will matter much if you have another beside it, will it dear?”

Mia's hopes sank. Like father, like daughter. But, at least, this slip of a girl lacked her father's bulk and strength. Placatingly, Mia said, "I suppose not, not if it gives you pleasure."

One more sear, one more awful pain. The naked recipient of Miss Hilbert's stroke held her breath. But that was all, one single stroke! A moment later, eager young hands were tugging at straps and clamps.

Standing erect and expressing a flood of heartfelt gratitude, Mia massaged her bottom as if she was surprised to discover it still intact, there was no blood. Feeling a need to say something she uttered, "That hurt something awful. But thank you, thank you very much."

"That sounds so silly," Wanda laughed gleefully. "Look, goodness knows when Daddy will be home, it might be a good idea if we get out of here. I don't live in this place, Daddy got me a lovely place in the city. I'll drive you home."

In a splendid blaze of wonder it was borne upon Mia Argent that she was free, she had her hands, she could run and jump and fight. Her only lack was now supplied.

"You'll need clothes, dear, come along."

Wanda was brisk and businesslike, there was a touch of anxiety in her voice. She explained it away by informing,

“If Daddy catches us, we’ll both wind up the way I found you. You mustn’t think Daddy hasn’t used all this stuff on me at one time or another. He gave me a real bad time while I was a teenager. But now I’m an adult and have him pretty well figured. Come alone, darling.”

It was too good to be true. The car and the two girls headed back toward Dovecove and the twins while Mia told, breathlessly, of her adventures.

“Not mad at me for using the cane on you dear?”

“No, I’m used to it and I can understand what impelled you. Forget it.” Mia was prepared to be forgiving about anything.

The twins greeted their big sister with surprise and some resentment. “What, you again? We thought Mr. Gentry had you safely chained. Now we’ve got to tie you up for him all over again. Really, Mia, you’re so silly!”

“Don’t you dare touch me with a piece of rope,” Mia warned. “I’m free and I’m going to stay free. I’m dressed and I’m going to stay dressed. In a little while I’m going to change my clothes and go over and confront our friend, Ryan Gentry on equal terms.”

The twins giggled delightfully. “You know what will happen then, don’t you darling? Mr. Gentry will take your clothes

off and tie you nice and tight. That will be the end of woman's lib."

Mia sighed. They were probably right. Gentry might be glad to see her back but would be unimpressed at her freedom. The twins interposed on her reflection, "Tell you what, darling, we two will go over and see Mr. Gentry and sort of pave the way for you. How's that?"

"He'll strip and bind you both, so what will that prove?" Mia said irritably.

"No he won't, darling. Mr. Gentry thinks teenagers are a pain in the you-know-what. He told us so. But he'll listen to us. Maybe we'll ask him over for tea."

Mia watched them go. They could do no harm. Suddenly she was frightened, not so much of Gentry but of herself. She bathed, she changed her clothes. The old, familiar garments were stuffy but a feminine armor. If she hurried the twins might still be there.

Fancy and Angel were indeed still there. They were in the cage Mia herself had spent many hours in. They were giggling delightfully and wore their handcuffs with a flair.

"Two little birds in a cage," Gentry said without apology, "couldn't resist it, sorry. Want to join them, then there'll be three?"

Mia ignored her sisters as though a pair of naked twins inside a cage were an everyday occurrence. She bristled with purpose, “Ryan, we have to talk.”

“Why not?”

Ryan shrugged, his eyes telling her everything yet nothing. “Come on, you can make me a drink in the lounge.”

“No! You can make me one for a change. Look, Ryan, I’m free and I’m clothed! I’m not going to be ordered around.”

“I can easily fix that, darling.” Ryan was unperturbed. “You’ll fix us both drinks and you’ll serve mine while on your knees. You will then adopt the proper dress, or should I say undress, before your master. Understood?”

Mia held the lid on her indignation, at least she still was clothed. She clung to her clothes as to a lifesaver amid a sea of slavery. She told him of Fenimore Hilbert and of Wanda. His response was shattering.

“Yes, sorry about that, love. Just did it to give you a bit of contrast. The Hubert’s are old friends.”

Mia stared, letting it sink in slowly. Outraged she demanded, “You fixed it! You mean you had me kidnapped and… tortured! How could you?”

“Always said I was a bit of a bastard. You’ll have to show me those two strips on your arse, darling.”

Mia put down her drink. “I’m going straight home!”

“You won’t get as far as the door, love. You know that as well as I do, stop kidding yourself.”

It was a battle of wills. The man and the girl stared levelly at each other, everything in clarity, totally understood.

Mia’s voice was wistful in regret, “I’m not coming back here as a slave-girl, not even if I have to fight you every hour of every day. I don’t care how you chain me, I’ll fight and fight and fight!”

“Oh, have it your own way,” Ryan waved a careless hand. “You really do have a bee in your bonnet, Mia. I’ll get it out, but not today. Would a good thrashing help?”

“I am not Melody!”

“Just as well, actually.”

“What are you doing with the twins in that cage?” Mia demanded savagely.

“They’re a pair of idiots. I told them not to come here,” Ryan replied. “They’re so happy, I couldn’t deny them. Besides, what marvelous hostages they make for your good behavior. See what I mean?”

Mia seethed. As usual Ryan held all the cards. But she knew of nothing else she could have done. She could not have

turned her back on this man. Ryan Gentry held her in thrall of the mind, the spirit and the heart. If only he would allow her equality for even a single hour.

“Look here, you idiot girl, can I trust you while I go and make a couple phone calls. You won’t go dashing back home or setting the house on fire or something stupid, will you?”

Mia did not rise. She was in the grip of the lassitude she had experienced before, knowing herself powerless against a force. She quietly sipped her drink and considered how she could best capitulate to her master without too much loss of face. If only he would give her a break! Mia Argent sighed and sipped, sighed and sipped. Absent mindedly she made her way to the bar and mixed herself a second drink. She failed to notice she had returned once more to kneel.

Ryan was absent a long time. It did not matter. Caustically, Mia reflected that, now, being free to leave the premises seemed meaningless. She had been free but here she was. She refused to think about the anomaly but returned to her glass.

“Well, that’s safely looked after,” Ryan said cheerfully. “But there’s something you should see. Finish that drink and come along.”

The man standing behind the desk in Ryan’s office was unmistakably a minister. To either side, as witnesses, stood

Fenimore Hilbert and his daughter, Wanda. Both beamed. The twins were artfully attired in orange blossoms and little else except their smiles. The corsages they carried identified them as bride's maids. Ryan snapped a handcuff on Mia's wrist and led her to stand beside him facing the churchman across the desk. As in a daze, Mia heard the old familiar words.

"Dearly beloved, we are gathered here together to join…"

When the bewildered Mia drew in her breath for an exclamation, her husband to be tugged admonishingly at the metal on her wrist. The bride to be fell silent.

Happiness filled the room.