

Mars Reversal

*Where Women Rule
and Men Obey*

Mars Book 1

Alex Rissini

MARS REVERSAL

Where Women Rule and Men Obey

Alex Rissini

Kindle edition

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Also by Alex Rissini

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Extract from Wedding Vows

The man shall kneel before the woman and say: "I promise to love
you and obey you, ..."

Then the woman shall say: "From now on, you belong to me. I will
chastise you when you do wrong, ..."

Extract from the Euthanasia Law

"Any unmarried man beyond 50 years of age is required to register
for termination. Within 30 days of registration, termination is
mandatory, except where the man provides evidence of substantive
means to support himself, or becomes married."

Part 1 – OPPORTUNITY

“So you’d have me look like a transvestite?”

Nicole shook her head. “You’re exaggerating, Greg. The men in Utopia have more colorful clothes, and wear their hair long, but that’s about it.”

“And what about the attitude they have to men?”

“But it’s only the reverse of the situation here. What’s wrong with that for a month?”

“It’s more than that. Women here have as many rights as men, technically at least, but from what I’ve heard, men in Utopia don’t dare do anything out of line, without facing jail. And there’s even use of castration.”

She laughed. “That’s only in extreme cases. Of course, it does mean you’d better not upset me while we’re there.”

“It’s not a joking matter. They really do treat men as second class.”

“But it’s hardly going to affect you. Oh please come with me. We’ll have such fun.”

Greg took a sip of his drink. “Well, it’s not for me. I’ll stay here in Cassini, and keep an eye on Tim and Rebecca.”

“They don’t need you. They can stay with friends. So why don’t you come and keep me company? It’s only a month, and you could do with a break after the last few jobs.”

“That’s true enough, but what would I do all day when you’re at work?”

“You can take it easy. You deserve it. You’ve been to the other cities on Mars, so come on, and get a new experience too.”

“What about my hair being longer? I’m not wearing a wig —”

“Now you’re being silly. You’ll just need extensions, that’s all.”

“I’m going to feel ridiculous ... Do you really want me along, Nicole?”

“Darling, we’ve only been together a short while, and I’d hate for us to be apart. But this contract is too good to turn down. I’ll be making a year’s salary in a month.”

“Haven’t they got their own computer experts?”

"It's very specialized, and they've some critical deadlines to meet, so that's why they've tried recruiting in Cassini and the other cities. And as they have to employ a woman, they've little choice. Lucky for me, I suppose."

"It still seems a hell of a lot of money."

"Don't forget that the exchange rate's a big factor. Their economy is booming, which can't be said for ours."

"That's mostly their monopoly on drugs and medicines. It's crazy what we have to pay them."

"You can't blame them for exploiting it. They're decades ahead of us. Probably always will be."

Greg looked at his drink, now nearly all gone.

"All right. I do need a break, and I don't want a month apart either."

Nicole jumped to her feet. "That's wonderful. We'll be heading off in a couple of weeks, so that's plenty of time to make the arrangements. And I'll tell Tim and Rebecca this evening."

Greg knew that if he was to live permanently with Nicole, he'd be taking on a family too. Tim at fourteen was a problem boy, spending all the time he could with computer games, and being generally disruptive at school. But he had a good sense of humor, and Greg got on with him fine.

Rebecca at eighteen was totally different. Studious and moody. She'd been a few months in her first job, in the local tax office, and liked the work, although she was already frustrated at what she saw as excess bureaucracy. At school, she'd always got the top grades, and had been anxious to get a job where she could carry on learning. But she was annoyed that promises made at interview about training hadn't yet come to anything.

She had no real social life. Just a few female friends, and no mention of boyfriends. It didn't help that she was so tall, in fact taller than Greg, and never wore makeup, nor made any attempt to wear attractive clothes.

And she didn't get on with Greg. When he'd tried to be friendly, and engage her in conversation, she'd either ignore him or rebuff him with some smart remark. Then a week ago they'd had a blazing row, with her accusing him of trying to get between her and her mother, and him in turn calling her a nasty little brat. Since then, they'd hardly talked.

Now Nicole was explaining the situation.

"So that's about it. Greg and I will be in Utopia for a month, but I'm sure it will go quickly for all of us."

Tim shrugged an "Okay". He was keen to get back to his games.

Rebecca looked thoughtful, and then smiled. A rare enough event.

"So do I understand it right? Over there, Mom, you'll have to shave your hair off, and wear dark clothes? I don't know if I'd like that or not. And women are in charge?"

"That's about it. It was generations ago that they switched roles, to cut down on crime and corruption, or something like that. So all the senior jobs are held by women."

Rebecca turned to Greg. "So you'll have to do what you're told. And you'll have to wear pretty clothes like a girl. Don't you think you'll feel foolish?"

"I'll be no different than the other men, so I won't feel anything."

"But the clothes will embarrass you, won't they?"

"I told you —"

She laughed. "You're embarrassed now, just talking about it. Will you email me a photo, to show my friends?"

"I don't think so."

Nicole said, "Why not? If she wants to see what you look like, what's the harm in that?"

Rebecca added, "Anyway, when you're over there, you'll have to do what you're told. And you will make him send a photo, won't you, Mom?"

"Yes darling, of course I will."

At the embassy, they spent an hour getting through security checks that seemed more like entry to a military zone, but once inside, the atmosphere was relaxed. Even pleasant.

The dress code was evidently that in Utopia. Mostly women working there, and all dressed similarly in dreary, loose-fitting clothes, with no make-up or jewelry, and hair close-cropped. The two men he saw had their hair long, and were wearing colorful tight-fitting clothes, but they didn't look as effeminate as he'd expected. All the same, he'd not want to be seen looking like that outside here.

Finally the visa office. The officer, a tall middle-aged woman, was pleasant enough, and her secretary, a little fellow in a yellow jumpsuit, was flitting around doing what he was told. He wouldn't have looked so bad, except that the pants were skin tight, revealing every detail. With the necklace and pony tail, he looked like a homosexual ready to party. Greg felt the cold of sweat on his forehead, knowing he'd not only have to mix with these people, but might even look like this himself.

After the photos, DNA and fingerprints, and the form filling, Greg was led to a separate room by the secretary.

"Well, Greg, we'll soon have the visa issued, so there's nothing more to do. But we like to take each person aside to give some advice. My boss will be explaining things to your partner, and my role is to give you the man's perspective. Now I assume you know the overall situation?"

Greg nodded. "I guess so. The place is run by women, who dress like her, and I presume the men dress like you."

The secretary laughed. "Well, women are certainly in charge, from the government downwards. You'll never find a woman taking instructions from a man. But you're over-simplifying the dress code. The rules were set long ago, so that women wouldn't be viewed by men as sexual objects. Since then, everyone in public has to wear clothes that cover everything but their head and hands. The women's clothes have to be dark and loose fitting, and they have to

keep their hair very short, or shaved. And of course they're not allowed makeup or jewelry."

"And men?"

"The only legal requirement is not to impersonate a woman, so technically there's a lot of freedom. But you can never tell how the police might choose to interpret the law, so my recommendation is to play safe, and make sure you look like other men."

"But they wouldn't arrest you for the way you dress, would they?"

"They certainly would, and you might spend the night in jail. But what would the police do here, if you walked around in your underclothes?"

"Okay, okay, point taken. So what's the advice?"

"See what I'm wearing now. You can't go wrong if you stick to pale colors. With some fashionable shoes, you should be fine."

Greg smiled. "At least the shoes don't have high heels like women have here."

"I'd never even thought about that. Of course, men don't want to be taller than women, so they'd hardly want high heels."

"Do the pants have to be as tight as yours?"

He laughed. "That's the fashion, and you don't want to look different, especially when you're out socially. You'll be expected to dress up."

"And Nicole said I'd need hair extensions?"

"Your hair's too short right now, so yes. But listen, aside from what you wear, there's something you ought to know. There are laws and rules, just as you have here, but one big difference is that you must never question the way Utopia is organized, or make negative comments about the laws or about the government. That's a serious criminal offense."

"Okay, thanks for the warning. Anything else?"

"I'd advise you also not to talk about life outside Utopia. People there know almost nothing about other cities, other than roles being reversed, and they'll be keen to know more. But if you describe life outside, there's a risk of being accused of indirectly criticizing life inside. So it's best to avoid the topic. Now have you any questions?"

“Just one. Why is there so much security here in the embassy? Is it to keep strangers out?”

“Partly. But it’s also to make sure that no one leaves the building without permission. Not that I’d want to, anyway.”

Next stop for Greg and Nicole was the shop inside the embassy. The range of clothes and shoes was limited, but at least they knew it would conform.

Then an hour again to get through the security checks, until they were back outside the embassy.

Greg said, “I don’t know what you’ve got me into, but I’m glad it’s only for a month.”

Nicole smiled. “I think it sounds fun. I can’t wait to see you in those pants. And you wouldn’t believe what women there are allowed to do.”

“What sort of things?”

“I’m not saying. If I told you all of that, it might put you off going.”

“A clue then?”

“Let’s just say you’d better behave while we’re there.”

A week later, they'd boarded the train and were on their way, with three days travel ahead, and no turning back.

"You know, Nicole, I've been in that station over a dozen times, doing work in the engineering areas, but I've never seen it from the passenger side before."

"Why not?"

"I never had cause. There are separate entrances for engineers, and I came and did my work and then left. Funnily enough, the layout back there always seemed too complex, but it's making sense now."

"I hope it's cleaner than where we were. It was filthy."

"The other stations are the same, and believe me, it's a lot worse for the engineers. Most of the areas back there haven't ever been cleaned. And there are rats too."

Nicole shivered. "Let's talk about something else."

"Okay, ... So are you excited about the job?"

She frowned. "I'm looking forward to it, but I wouldn't say I was excited. It's the kind of work I've done before on neural networks. Still, you never know. There might be something new about it. And what about you? You'll be having a nice break from that filthy work you do."

"I don't mind working on air conditioners. It takes me to every part of the city, and gives me the chance to meet all sorts of people. All the same, the break will be good. I just wish there wasn't this stupid dress code."

"You'll soon get used to that. Anyway, I think you look nice in your new clothes. You could wear them on the train you know."

"No thanks. I'll wait until we get there."

The last-minute preparations had been a nightmare. The shoes he'd bought at the embassy were too tight, so he had to buy more, and couldn't face the embassy again. But to get them in bright colors, the only option was women's shoes, and he could feel the other customers watching as he tried them on, and walked up and down. The assistants were exchanging looks too, so he could only

guess what they were thinking. Getting the hair extensions wasted an afternoon, but with it tied back in a ponytail, it didn't look too bad.

But now for three days he could relax, before he had to adopt the new persona.

Nicole interrupted his thoughts. "Rebecca looked through what you bought. She thought it was all nice too. I think she's finally warming to you."

"I don't know about that. I've a feeling that she just likes to think of me being embarrassed. You know that we don't get on."

"But now that she's shown some interest, you could at least make an effort. I love you so much, and I know you get on with Tim, so I'd really like you to be friends with Rebecca too. A month from now, we'll be back, and then will you try?"

"I suppose so. But a month in Utopia's going to feel a lot longer than that. You'll have to remind me."

On the train, they had a small cabin with two bunk beds. The furnishings were old and shabby, and the cabin was cold, so they spent most of the time in the communal areas, where it was slightly warmer. Greg asked the train supervisor about raising the temperature, but all that got was a lecture on what it already cost the train operator to run the heating.

There were about a hundred passengers in all, the majority of whom were women, dressed ready for Utopia. There were a couple of men with them, and some men from home, who looked like manual workers.

The journey took longer than it should have. There was only a single track, with passing points for trains coming the other way, mostly freight trains. So they had to wait several times at these places. Nicole was annoyed each time, saying that it was stupid not to have two tracks, like to other cities. To Greg, it was obvious that with only one passenger train each day, it would be impossible to justify, but he didn't feel like arguing, so he said it was stupid too. He had to wonder about a city run by women.

A day into the journey, the train stopped at a mining camp, and the workmen got off. So then the only other men on the train were

two businessmen from home, and the two Utopia men. Greg was beginning to feel isolated.

He got a chance to talk to one of the businessmen.

Greg said, "So have you been there before?"

"We go regularly on business, about once a month."

"And what do you think of the place?"

He laughed. "I've no idea. We never leave the railroad station. There's a hotel inside there, and the people we deal with come to see us. Always women."

"So why not leave the station? Is it the dress code?"

"We've no great wish to conform to that, but the reason is that part of the station is neutral territory, just like this train, with rules agreed between the two cities. The laws of Utopia don't apply, and we don't need a visa. It's the same arrangement at our end in Cassini."

"So you've never actually seen Utopia?"

"No, and I've no regrets. But I take it you're going there with your partner?"

"Just for a month. The dress code's annoying, but for a month I can put up with it."

"Better you than me. And you be careful. The dress code should be the least of your concerns. I've heard some strange stories about how men are treated."

Nicole checked the display. "Only two hours to go, so it's time we got ready. I'll strip off and you can cut my hair."

Greg picked up the trimmer, and watched her undress. "It's a shame. You've got beautiful hair."

He stroked it, feeling the silky texture for this last time. Then he started. Soon the hair was falling away, as he went back and forth until it was evenly cropped, almost to a stubble.

Nicole looked in the mirror. "It's weird. I feel so much less attractive like this. But I suppose that's the idea. Oh well, let's get dressed."

It didn't take long, and then Nicole held up a brush. "Your hair's a mess. We need to get it to lie properly, after having it all bunched up."

It took a while, with cursing from Nicole when it didn't behave, and the air thick from hair spray, but finally she decided it looked presentable.

He stood up, and looked at himself with Nicole in the mirror. Nicole now sexless in her loose clothes and bare head. And he looked like a transvestite, with hair onto his shoulders, and in a pale blue jumpsuit that was almost as revealing as that of the embassy guy.

"I look stupid, don't I?"

She stroked his hair, and smiled. "You look cute, and a little vulnerable. I think I'm going to like you like that."

The passenger area at the station in Utopia had the same layout as the one they'd left, no doubt built to the same design. Greg wondered whether they would be similar behind the scenes. Maybe they had rats here too.

Within minutes they were with an immigration officer. A stocky woman, with no smile.

She handed Nicole a form to sign, and asked questions, typing the responses into her computer. All the while, whenever she

mentioned Greg, it was as if he was a child that Nicole had with her. Not once did she acknowledge that he was present.

Then out came the chip device. Greg knew what was coming and tensed up, but the officer did a swift and painless job. So now he had an implant in his neck. Back home, only criminals were chipped, but here visiting men got the treatment too.

The officer said to Nicole. "That's all. You can continue now."

Greg said, "What about our passports?"

The officer ignored him, and said to Nicole, "Anything else?"

Nicole glanced at Greg, then "Our passports, do we get them back?"

"They'll both be returned to you when you depart, just you."

"What if he leaves before I do?"

The officer looked confused. "That's not possible. While he's here, he's your responsibility."

Greg stood up. "That's ridiculous. If I want to —"

The door swung open. The officer must have pressed a button somewhere.

A small man in a pale tight-fitting uniform was standing there. He'd have looked pathetic, but for the stun gun ready to come out of his holster.

The ride to the apartment took nearly two hours. Plenty of time for Greg to see what people here were like, as passengers came and went. To start with, he'd felt uneasy in his new clothes, but he fitted in fine, and drew little attention. The worrying thing was that some of the men were wearing jewelry, and a couple looked like they were wearing makeup. They really did look like transvestites.

The biggest surprise was the height difference. Most women were taller than Nicole, but none of the men were taller than Greg. On the train, he'd been able to access a load of preparatory information about Utopia, so he knew about the selective abortion of fetuses, meant to increase the stature and intelligence of women, over that of men. Over the many generations they'd been doing it, it was obviously going to have an effect. But he hadn't expected the difference to be that obvious.

And then there were the tattoos. He'd read that married men have their wife's name tattooed on the side of their neck. But it was still bizarre to see it.

It was a relief to get to the apartment, and take the jumpsuit off.

Nicole frowned. "Can't you keep it on? It looks sexy."

"Maybe it does, but the pants are as tight as hell. I think it's the wrong size."

"Nonsense. It fits you perfectly. You just don't like dressing up."

Greg laughed. "That's true enough. But did you see those guys with makeup? What did you think of that?"

"I thought they looked fine. In fact the one with dark hair had done it perfectly. His face was quite beautiful. Maybe you could try it sometime. I'd help you, if you want?"

"No way. I'll do what I have to here, but that's it."

"Come on, Greg, let's have some fun. I can't use my makeup any more, so let me try it on you, and see how you look."

"I told you, no. It's going too far."

"Greg, we've only just arrived, and we're arguing. But you know, men here are supposed to do what the women tell them, and not argue about it. Can't you try and get into the role?"

"Okay. But I draw the line at makeup."

Nicole smiled. "Hey, we're in Utopia now. If there's a line to be drawn, then I'm the one to draw it."

Part 2 – REVERSAL

Nicole had gone off early for her first day at the new job, and Greg had lazed around in the morning, reading magazines. But by the afternoon, he was bored. There only seemed to be three TV channels. One for news and documentaries, another with cartoons for children, and the third called the leisure channel. It seemed to be aimed at men like him at home, and was full of discussions about cooking and childcare, and how you could look your best for your wife. They talked a lot about moisturizing cream and lip balm, and the tints they came in. It sounded like makeup to him.

The news channel was the best, but it was of course only news about Utopia. In a city of two hundred million, there should have been plenty of stories, but after a while, most of it was repeats. Either there was no crime here, or they chose not to report it. There was occasional mention of laws and regulations, but as expected, never any adverse comment.

When a news item came on about how marvelous some guy was after being castrated, Greg switched off, and played a few computer games. Finally, the only thing that seemed worthwhile was to download a couple of novels, and spend the rest of the afternoon reading.

He was ready at the door when Nicole returned, and gave her a hug and kiss.

She smiled. "That's a lovely welcome. Have you had a nice day here?"

"Not bad, but how was the job?"

"It's what I expected. It's a tricky problem they've got with a neural network, and they don't have the expertise here to fix it. But I've already made a start."

"And the people there? What are they like?"

"It's nearly all women, and they're great to work with. There are a few men doing admin work, but they shy away from conversation with the rest of us. And get this, when I overheard them chatting to each other the one time, they were talking about jewelry. It was like

you'd hear women chatting back home. And one of them's a eunuch."

"A what? You mean he's —"

"Exactly. That stuff we read on the train mentioned eunuchs, but I never expected to work with one. Actually, he's rather nice, and so polite, you wouldn't believe it, and quite good-looking. Anyway, what did you do all day?"

"I watched some TV, read books, and tidied up. To be honest, Nicole, I got a bit bored."

"You could always go out for a walk, or catch a bus somewhere."

"I know, but I'd have to dress up, and I don't even know what there is to see yet. But don't worry about me, I'll be okay."

Later on, Greg went onto the computer, to do a little research. The more he read, the more surreal it seemed. When boys got to the age of eight, they went through a review, and any that seemed likely to develop hostile tendencies were castrated. That was where the majority of eunuchs came from. The rest were where castration was done in later life. It was almost routine where men had been convicted of crimes, or had assaulted women. Some men even volunteered for it. It was creepy thinking about why they would do that.

The second day started better. Greg found a fourth TV channel, running science programs, meant for schools. It wasn't bad, although when they were using footage from other cities or from Earth, it was comical to see how they'd clumsily cut bits out, or spliced in their own commentary.

It was in the afternoon that Nicole phoned.

"I've made reservations at a restaurant this evening. I thought that would be a treat for you, and get you out of the apartment."

"Sounds good. I suppose I've to dress up."

"Of course. And you'll have to wear jewelry. I'll buy a necklace on the way back."

"Do I have to wear it?"

"That's what I'm told. In the daytime it doesn't matter, but at social occasions, men are supposed to make an effort, and that includes jewelry. Don't worry, I'll pick something sensible. Oh, and I'll get you a shoulder bag, as you don't have any pockets."

Greg felt uncomfortable as soon as they entered the restaurant. The manager, an elderly woman, looked him over as if he was a vagrant, before leading them to a table as far from the other customers as was possible. As they walked through, it was obvious what the problem was. The other men were wearing jewelry, glittery clothes, and glossy shoes. They were wearing plenty of that moisturizer too, making their faces smooth and blemish-free. Enough to make him the odd one out.

As they walked, conversations stopped, with glances at him, and little muttered exchanges as they passed. Even after they were seated, he could see people looking across, evidently discussing him.

Nicole's face was drawn. "Greg, I wish we hadn't come. This is awful."

"Well, don't blame me. How was I to know they all dress like tarts."

“I’m not blaming you, but calling them tarts will get us nowhere. They are what they are, and it’s their city, not ours. I did ask at the office what we have to wear, and all I got was that business about the necklace. Maybe they assumed I knew more than I did.”

“Well, we’re here now. But let’s have a quick meal, and be gone. I’m not going to enjoy it, with them all watching me.”

On the way out, after Nicole had paid, the manager took them aside.

“I’m sorry, but I can’t have you here again like this. It’s too disruptive, and one of the other customers has already grumbled to me.”

Nicole said, “We’re new to Utopia, and we just didn’t know. I’ll have him looking smarter next time.”

The manager smiled. “All right, and please do something about his hair too, won’t you?”

At the weekend, they went shopping. Greg hated shopping at the best of times, and buying clothes and jewelry came at the worst end of the scale. But Nicole had made it clear that she wouldn't go out with him unless he conformed, and the thought of being stuck in the apartment the whole time was a worse prospect than the dressing up.

At least it was other men in the stores, not like when he was buying women's shoes back home. So they picked up a couple of dressy blouses, one that even had sequins, and pants to match, then a necklace and bracelets, some strappy silver shoes, and finally the goddamn makeup. Once or twice he'd tried arguing, especially about the makeup, but Nicole had been insistent. Just as irritating was that she refused to call it that. The moisturizer did more than moisturize, as it had pigment to tint the skin, and conceal blemishes. But that's what they all called it. At least the lip balm tints were subdued, and it wasn't a euphemism for lipstick.

Nicole had asked why there were no brighter colors for the lip balm, and it got the assistant giggling. Then a whispered explanation that the only men who use such products are prostitutes. Until then, Greg hadn't even imagined that there could be male prostitutes making money from women. It certainly wasn't mentioned in the reading material about Utopia. Now he was wondering again about the men on the bus, and even at the cafe he'd visited the day before.

It was a couple of days later that they were at the restaurant again. This time Greg got an approving look from the manager, and any glances from the other customers looked neutral.

Greg relaxed and began to enjoy the meal and the evening out. He'd had to pay a price. Now he was dressed like a tart, and he'd had to endure an hour with Nicole working on his hair and makeup before they set off. But it was a price worth paying. After the boredom of the apartment, it was great to be out, and he soon forgot he was dressed the way he was. In fact, the strappy shoes were beginning to feel comfortable. It had been a good evening out.

Back at the apartment, Nicole took hold of him. "You did really well tonight. I'm proud of you."

She stroked his hair and kissed him. "It's strange though, like I'm kissing a woman back home. It's very erotic."

Greg smiled. "Let's go to bed then, while we're in the mood."

"If you freshen up your lip balm, and keep your hair loose like that, maybe we'll have some fun. And keep your jewelry on too. I want you making love to me just as you are."

Greg pulled on the new jumpsuit, and zipped it up. It was a stretchy satin material, a shiny pale pink. It felt comfortable enough, but very close fitting, and some stiffening material was accentuating his shape.

"Hell, Nicole, don't you think it's too revealing?"

"It looks sexy. Your legs look good in satin. And why not hint at what's underneath? The others will be no different, so no one's going to pick you out."

"Okay, okay. And what's the party about?"

"My boss, Kelly, is forty five, so we thought it would be nice to have a little celebration, outside the office."

"So I'll meet your colleagues then. Women and men?"

"Heavens no. It's only for the women in the office, and their husbands. You'll like the people I work with, but I've no idea what their husbands are like. Now let's get your moisturizer done. I want you to look your best for Kelly. She's never even seen a man from another city before, and she's dying to meet you."

The party turned out to be pretty good. The women were all good looking, even with the cropped hair, and they were interesting enough, albeit talking a lot about work. The husbands were okay too. Most of them had jobs, some manual, like Greg's work back home, and some clerical, and a few of them stayed at home looking after their pre-school children. One downside with all the men was that every now and then someone would switch the conversation to clothes and fashions, or to how wonderful their wives were. And worst of all was when they got onto the subject of their children. Once the children were born, it was the men who had the main responsibility for bringing them up.

He'd been introduced to Kelly early on, but later he had a chance to talk to her. She was inquisitive about what it was like in Cassini, and Greg steered carefully around that, giving her some information, but nothing important. He was saved by Nicole joining them.

"So, Kelly, what do you think of my man?"

“Greg’s adorable. You’re a lucky woman, Nicole.” Then she turned to Greg. “I’ve got to circulate, but how about a birthday kiss for me?”

Greg hesitated, but Kelly wasn’t waiting for an answer. She was taller than Greg, and strong. She put her hands on either side of his head and pulled him close, then kissed him on the lips. Then she let go, and took hold of Nicole’s arm, and took her off to join another group.

Meantime, Kelly’s husband, Joe, had joined him.

“Kelly’s hyperactive at these things. It would exhaust me, but she loves it. So, Greg, I understand you’re only here a short while. It must be quite a culture shock for you.”

“It is strange having roles reversed, but I’m getting used to it.”

“If it was the other way round, I don’t think I could cope. I wouldn’t want to wear dull clothes, and I’d hate having to take responsibility for things. I don’t think I’d ever want to spend time in your city.”

Greg said, “Nicole said you work in the drug company. Do they pay you well? They must make enough profit.”

“It’s pretty good pay, yes, but the profits all go to the city government, so it’s not like we see money sitting around. I’m told it ends up keeping our taxes down, so that’s got to be a good thing.”

“And you actually make the drugs? You must have a lot more brains than I have.”

Joe laughed. “It’s skilled work, and it needs precision and care, but the genius is in the people who developed the processes. I just follow the instructions. Not that they’re simple. The anti-cancer drug, that we export to the other cities, involves nearly fifty separate processes, and a load of intermediate chemicals.”

“You know, those instructions would be worth a fortune back in Cassini. That’s if you were able to transmit them.”

“No way! Even attempting to copy that material would be treated as espionage, and that’s an automatic death penalty. Let’s talk about something else, can we?”

“All right, ... These women here, ... Are they all married?”

“Yes, all of them. And that one over there in the corner has a eunuch at home as well. He looks after the children and their

apartment, and it seems to work out all right. Not that I'd want one of them around at my place. So is anything else puzzling you?"

"I've not seen any really old people, especially men. I know it's euthanasia after a certain age, like back home, but it does seem odd."

"It's mandatory at seventy, but sooner if you want it, if say you're in bad health. Oh, and it's compulsory after fifty for a man if he doesn't have a woman responsible for him, and he's not got the means to support himself."

"So if you're a single man, and over fifty, you'd better be healthy and have a job?"

"That's about it, Greg. But it makes sense. These men would only be a burden on society, and if we started allowing that, who could tell where it would lead?"

"But what if there were no jobs?"

"There are always jobs available, if you're fit. But for older men, they're often low paid, and can even be dangerous. Most men give up after a year or so of that ..."

"Then that's one hell of an incentive system for the men to get married."

Joe frowned. "And to stay married. And that's not easy. There's a lot of competition out there for women like ours."

"Well, I wouldn't want to be here permanently. The risk of early euthanasia isn't my idea of a future. I'm glad I'll be going back."

Joe hesitated. "But that's for Nicole to decide, isn't it?"

Greg sipped his coffee, savoring the taste before swallowing. Whatever they make it from, it was better than he could get back home. And this cafe wasn't bad. Not too far to walk, and most of the customers were men, conservatively dressed, at least for Utopia.

He put the cash card back in his shoulder bag. He'd almost run out, so he'd have to get Nicole to top it up this evening. Like everything else, the women controlled the finances.

He'd been learning more about life here, by chatting to the other customers. It seemed that men on their own had almost no rights. They couldn't own or rent property, so they live in hostels, one or two to a room, sharing amenities. They can accumulate cash as much as they want, and can have cash cards, but they can't have bank accounts or investments, so any savings they have get no interest. No wonder they're always anxious to please the women.

Still, only a week to go, then he and Nicole would be heading back, and leaving all this behind.

Nicole was in a good mood that evening. She'd finished her project, and was now making minor corrections and writing it up. She was pleased too about the attitude of her managers, who viewed her as some sort of genius.

Greg said, "It's worked out well, hasn't it? What will you do with all the money?"

"I don't know yet. Maybe make some investments, even over here. Their economy's stronger than ours, and business prospects are better, what with no unions to worry about."

"That's true, but don't you think it's the men who pay the price?"

"It's the men who cause all the trouble back home. Here they won't tolerate it."

"And then the poor guys end up on their own in a hostel somewhere. It seems harsh."

"Actually, one of the women at work was going to do just that with her husband. He's been so argumentative and unpleasant, that it was causing real stress. She was at that party, but he'd refused to

go to it. That's the kind of person he is, and there was no prospect of him changing his ways. So she was on the point of throwing him out."

"But she didn't?"

"No. He pleaded with her, and was crying all evening, and said he'd do anything to stay. So they agreed to a compromise. He's going to be castrated."

Greg tensed. Not just at the idea of castration, but also at the way Nicole spoke of it so casually. "Are you serious?"

"He's the one that suggested it. He was desperate to stay."

"So he'll become a eunuch?"

"She's spoken with the doctor, and they can do it next week. The doctor says it'll change her husband for the better within days."

"Hell, that's a step too far. If I was him, I'd take my chance and leave."

"I don't think she'd let him go now. She doesn't really want to lose him, and this way it solves the problem. She's quite excited to see what he'll be like afterwards."

"You mean she can have him castrated against his will?"

Nicole laughed. "I told you it was amazing what women can do here. I could have you castrated too, if I wanted. I'd just have to fill in a form, and they'd come and take you away."

At the restaurant, Greg was savoring the delicacies that he couldn't get back home. They'd soon be going back, and this time he'd dressed up specially as a treat for Nicole, overdoing the makeup and the jewelry. There had even been approving glances from other customers.

After the meal, Greg said, "Nicole, let's drink to our last dinner in Utopia."

She raised her glass, and then put it back down. "I can't do that. The thing is, I'm happy here. The job's good, there's no crime to speak of, and the people here are friendlier than back home. And having you with me makes it perfect."

"But it's not our home, is it?"

Greg pointed towards the mirrored wall, and their reflections. "And that's not who we are. You in that dreary getup, and your hair shaved off. And me just the opposite, dolled up like a transvestite. It's not me I can see there, and it's not you either."

"Well, I don't mind looking like this. Maybe I'd rather be the one dressing up, but it's not that important. And to be honest, I like you like this, helping you choose clothes, and getting you ready to come out as my escort."

Greg frowned. "I suppose when we're back, we can dress up for fun occasionally at home. I wouldn't mind that if it makes you happy. So long as Tim and Rebecca don't see me anyway."

Nicole smiled. "I appreciate that, but the point I was making was that life's better here, and what we wear doesn't matter. The thing is, they've offered me a permanent job."

"It's not surprising, the way they think of you. But you've got great prospects back in Cassini too."

"I know all that, and it was a difficult choice, but I've made my decision. I've accepted the offer."

Greg sat in silence, trying to make some sense of the situation. "What about Tim and Rebecca?"

"I'll send for them. They'll soon get used to it here. Young people are very adaptable."

“Tim gives you enough trouble already. He’s not going to like leaving his friends behind.”

“Even if you’re right, I’m sure they’ll cope. Anyway, my mind’s made up. We’re staying, and starting a new life together.”

Greg shook his head. “I love you Nicole, but I can’t stay here. I could manage it for a while longer, maybe another month, but I’ve got to return to some normality, and get back to work.”

“You can get a job here. There’s as much need for your skills as at home. Don’t you see that it’s all for the best?”

Greg sipped his wine. “I’m sorry, but the answer’s no, even if it means splitting up. I can’t stay in a place like this.”

Nicole was quiet for a few seconds, then, “Actually, you’ve no choice. You can’t go back without my permission. And I won’t give it. I want us all here as a family, and I can’t have you going back.”

Greg’s voice was getting louder, and the other customers were watching, but he didn’t care. “You’re thinking only of yourself, you bitch. You can’t keep me here against my will.”

The slap caught him hard on the cheek.

Nicole’s face was pink with rage. “Don’t you call me names. You’re staying, and that’s final. Look in that mirror. That’s you now. You’re mine, to dress up and show off as I like. That’s who you’ll be, as long as I want it. My pretty husband in makeup and jewels.”

Greg slapped her face hard, nearly knocking her from the chair.

The restaurant was silent. No one was eating. No one was talking. Just staring.

Then the manager came over. “Please, you must leave immediately, before the police come.”

They'd been back at the apartment for less than an hour when the door buzzer sounded. Greg was pleased to have the interruption, as Nicole had been arguing non-stop since they got back.

But it was the police. Nicole seemed as surprised as he was, so it can't have been her doing. Must have been that woman at the restaurant.

A confirmation of his identity, and then he was handcuffed, and taken away.

An hour later, he was facing a magistrate, watching the video surveillance of the restaurant. The policewoman paused it at the point where he hit Nicole, then ran that part in slow motion. It made it look ten times worse.

The magistrate seemed a pleasant enough woman, probably in her fifties.

She said, "It's a serious matter what you did. Have you anything to say in your defense?"

"It was just a stupid moment. We'd been arguing and she'd slapped me, then when she said one last thing, I didn't think, but struck out. I know it was wrong, and I'm sorry. It's not like me, but it's been stressful for me here, and this was the trigger. I promise it will never happen again."

She looked at him, then down at her notes, and then typed something into her keyboard.

"For anyone living here, striking a woman that violently would get you a week in jail. I'm going to be lenient as you're from elsewhere, and unaccustomed to life in Utopia, and it is a first offense. You are sentenced to one night in jail, and ten strokes."

"Is there any possibility of appeal?"

"You can appeal if you wish, but you'll still have to stay in jail until an appeal can be heard tomorrow. And if you do appeal, my opinion is that the punishment will be increased not reduced. It's your decision."

The cell under the courts wasn't as bad as he expected. Almost like a cheap hotel room. But there were two brackets high up on one

wall, and the guard had already told him what they were for. The wall below them was stained with sweat.

It wasn't long before he heard the footsteps.

It was late morning by the time he got back to the apartment. By now Nicole knew what had happened to him, but there was no word of sympathy. He showered and looked at the damage in the mirror. His back showed the weals from the flogging, a couple of which had touches of blood.

Back in the living room, Nicole was waiting for him, and pointing to the corner of the ceiling.

"We've a new addition to the apartment, thanks to you."

It was a small box, with a lens. "Is that a camera?"

Nicole nodded. "First thing this morning, an electrician came and put them in. They're in every room. It's in case you're violent again at home. I told the electrician I didn't want them, but she said I had no choice."

"Are they recording all the time?"

"She said that they're intelligent cameras. They pick up your neck tag, and they'll only record if you are present, and then only if they sense that you're about to act violently. But they don't just record. They'll be transmitting to the police too."

"And how long are they going to be here?"

"They review it after a year, and if there have been no problems, they'll remove them."

"Hell, Nicole, it's like a police state. Aren't we better off going back home?"

"This is our home, Greg."

Part 3 – PERMANENCE

It was a week since the night in jail, and now it was his first day at the new job. Quite good pay, and it was work he could do without training, working on air conditioners again.

In the changing room, he put on the coveralls. White, but otherwise no different to what he'd wear back home, and just as loose-fitting. So they were willing to forget the dress code when it suited them. It was two other men he was working with, with a female supervisor.

It turned out to be a tough task that day. A large unit had failed, and he'd had to crawl inside the outer housing to replace a part. The unit was old, maybe fifty years, and was filthy, and there were rats around. The other men had easier jobs, but no more pleasant. And his supervisor did nothing, other than get them started, and check what they were doing once in a while. She was overweight, but not unattractive, and most of the time sat watching them. When she did do her checking, she'd come close and touch them. The other two didn't object, and even seemed to appreciate it, so Greg played along.

Back at the depot, in the changing room, she told the others to get changed first, and for Greg to wait. After they left, she came close, and told him to get changed. When he took his coveralls off, her hand went downwards, and he felt her fingers exploring.

She asked if he liked it, and he wasn't lying when he said that he did.

She kissed him on the lips, and moved away slightly.

He reached to touch her breast, but she knocked his hand away.

"Greg, if you ever try that again, I'll have you fired."

It was the end of their second month here, and Greg had a day at home on his own. He'd been busy enough at work, and he was enjoying it, not least the attention from his supervisor, but it was good to have a day without having to do anything.

It had been a strange time, getting used to this place as a home. He still didn't want it to be permanent, but knew better than to raise that with Nicole.

He'd been careful what he said and did, most of the time, and only had one slip up. It was at work, with the other men, when he said in confidence that men ought to have more rights. He'd have loved to know who informed on him.

Next day he had to attend the local education center, and watch a one-hour video about how wonderfully Utopia was run, and why the existing laws and customs are so perfect. Then he had to answer a set of multiple-choice questions on the computer. And because his score was low, he had to go through the whole thing again, the video and the questions.

It was a long day. By the end of it, after watching the video three times, he was almost beginning to believe the propaganda.

Nicole of course loved it here, and had got into the social life. And that got her into being fashion conscious. While women's clothes all looked the same to him, it seemed that the women were conscious of more subtle things, like the quality of material, and the cut.

It wouldn't have been so bad if she only worried about her own clothes, but she spent as much time planning what Greg should be wearing. So he had a wardrobe of clothes that was growing by the week. In the name of fashion, the clothes she was buying him were really too small a size, and the pants were shaped to accentuate. To start with he'd been embarrassed, but if that's what turned other women on, what the hell.

Ever since her decision to stay, Nicole had been hinting about getting married. Greg had never given marriage much thought

before, but it didn't seem that bad an idea. The only concern was that from what he'd read, it gave her more power over him. Not that she was lacking that anyway, so it probably wouldn't make any practical difference.

He was reconciled to getting married, but the ceremony was another matter. The law only requires documents to be signed and commitments to be made. But custom and law aren't the same things. He would be expected to wear white at the ceremony, and to be tattooed with her name on his neck.

But Nicole was excited by the thought of the ceremony. So they'd arrived early to meet the marriage official.

The official smiled as she waved them to sit.

"Today my job is to run through what's involved at the ceremony, and make sure you're both ready to make the commitments. Then I'll answer any questions you have."

Nicole said, "That's fine. My friends have told me a little, but it will be helpful to know for sure. Are you going to be conducting the ceremony?"

"I certainly am, Nicole, and I'll be looking forward to it. I've never married a couple from outside Utopia before. I'll start off with statements about the importance of marriage, and then Greg can have his tattoo, although I'd recommend getting it done beforehand, as it does tend to slow down proceedings."

Greg leaned forward. "Do I have to have a tattoo?"

"I've never known a man not wanting it done. Why do you ask?"

"I guess it's because we don't have anything like that back home. I'm —"

Nicole interrupted, "Greg's had a lot to get used to here. But he will be having the tattoo before then."

The official continued, "After that, while you make your commitments, I'll hand Nicole the chastiser. And that's about it. I'll pronounce you husband and wife."

Greg said, "This chastiser. It's some sort of electronic thing isn't it?"

"Exactly. It's ceremonial really, and a symbol of Nicole's authority. The point is that marriage is a commitment by the man that he belongs to the woman, and a commitment by her to look after

him, so long as they are married. That means that Nicole will be responsible for your behavior, and so she is duty bound to punish you if you behave badly. But don't be alarmed. These devices are hardly ever used when there is a loving relationship. Look, I'll show you one."

She took a little device from the desk drawer, and handed it to Greg.

He looked it over. "It's pretty small. I guess it's not like a police stun gun then?"

She laughed. "Dear me, no. And anyway, a wife is expected to be sensible, and not to overreact if little things happen. And in practice, when women find things are really unacceptable, they're more likely to annul the marriage than resort to the chastiser."

Then they were off to the marriage salon.

They started on Greg's hair, bleaching some highlights, and giving it a chemical and heat treatment. Afterwards, Nicole was pleased how stylish it looked, with its soft waves, but Greg still felt it was a woman's look, not a man's. The hairdresser wanted to take some follicles to grow hair for implanting, where he was thinning, but Greg managed to avoid that one, at least for the present.

Then the tattoo. It didn't take long. A spray of anesthetic, then the operator clamped the unit to his neck, and set it running. Five minutes later, it was done, with Nicole looking proudly at her name on the side of his neck.

Then they fitted him with the wedding clothes. All in white, and with strappy sandals that were too narrow for his foot. He could hardly walk in the things.

But Nicole was excited, and in no mood to hear objections.

Two days later, they were back at the marriage office.

Kelly and Joe had come, as well as a couple of other women from Nicole's office, with their husbands. The women were excited, as they gathered around Nicole, chattering away about marriage and children.

Joe came to join Greg. "You don't look very cheerful. Aren't you looking forward to being married?"

"I suppose it was inevitable, and Nicole wanted it for sure, but I can't see what I gain from it."

"Security of course. You may think differently, but for most men it's about security. If a woman is willing to have you as a husband, it means that she's more than likely going to keep you with her in the future. That's a very positive thing for a man."

"But she can annul the marriage any time, so what's the difference?"

"If you look at it in a legalistic way, then maybe there is no difference, but in practice most marriages do last longer than other relationships, and often for life."

Greg said, "But the flip side is that the woman has more rights as a wife. She's got the law behind her to make the man do whatever she wants. And that business of the chastiser worries me."

Joe looked around, then back to Greg. "I agree with you there. I hate that thing. When Kelly used it on me, —"

The official called them into the marriage room. She stepped up onto a low platform at the far end, and beckoned Nicole and Greg to stand before her. Kelly and the others gathered behind, busy taking photographs, and chatting with excitement.

Then the official called for silence, and the ceremony began.

For several minutes, she rambled through her opening statements, then, "Are you both ready to proceed to marriage?"

In unison, "We are."

"Then make your first commitments."

Nicole looked at Greg and smiled. "Greg, I promise to care for you, and protect you, as your loving wife."

Then it was Greg's turn. He forced a smile in response.

"Nicole, I promise to love you and obey you, as your devoted husband."

The officer handed Nicole the chastiser.

"Nicole and Greg, this chastiser is a symbol of Nicole's authority, and of the enduring superiority of women to men. Now you must make your final commitments, under the laws of Utopia, to seal the marriage. Greg, you can kneel now."

Greg knelt down before Nicole. It was difficult enough in the tight clothing, and all the more humiliating, with everyone taking photographs.

Nicole smiled down at him. "Greg, from now on, you belong to me. I will chastise you when you do wrong, but praise you when you are good. And if one day I should choose to end this marriage, I will treat you with dignity and respect."

Greg swallowed. So this was it. A commitment that Nicole could get out of, but he could not.

He looked up at her. "Nicole, from now on, I belong to you, and I'll willingly accept whatever praise and chastisement you consider I deserve. And if one day you should choose to end this marriage, I will accept your decision with grace and humility."

The official said, "Then I pronounce you husband and wife. Greg, you may stand now, and kiss your wife."

Greg could hear the faint clicking of cameras as he got to his feet and embraced Nicole.

So now he was married. Before long, Tim and Rebecca would arrive, and they'd be a family. Tim no doubt complaining about the move, and Rebecca her usual nasty self.

While the women were chatting again, Joe came over, and shook Greg's hand.

"Congratulations. I know you had reservations, but believe me, it's the best thing for you."

"I suppose so. But it doesn't feel like marriage, with all this talk of obeying and chastising."

"But that's part of what marriage is about, so what's the problem?"

Greg had to smile. Joe was genuinely confused, and it seemed pointless to try and explain.

So this was his life now. A prisoner in a city where he had no rights, with a wife he had to obey under threat of punishment. And men like Joe who thought the situation was fine.

“The thing is, Joe, it doesn’t feel like I’m her husband. It’s almost like I’m being viewed as her property.”

Joe frowned.

“But, Greg, you are her property now.”

Part 4 – OBEDIENCE AND BONDAGE

Greg looked in the mirror. A yellow jumpsuit, that was almost skin-tight. It would have looked ridiculous back home, but here in Utopia it was just one of the things he'd had to get used to. He'd brushed his hair, to lie loosely on his shoulders, and applied a little moisturizer. Hopefully it was enough to avoid criticism from Nicole.

It was three months since they'd arrived here, for Nicole to carry out a one-month contract. He'd been to the other cities on Mars, but this was the strangest. Women in control, over every aspect of life, with husbands weak and timid after a century of genetic manipulation. It had been bad enough conforming to the dress code, with women in dreary clothes and shaved heads, and men dressed almost like transvestites. But what annoyed him more was the submissive attitude he'd had to adopt in public towards Nicole. Still, her contract was well paid, and for a month, he'd been willing to put up with it.

But then Nicole decided to stay, and insisted that Greg should stay with her too. That argument had been violent, and not only had he ended up in jail for the night, but there were now intelligent cameras throughout the apartment, programmed to detect any sign of violence by him.

And now he was trapped, not able to leave Utopia without her approval. They were husband and wife, but not like back home in Cassini. Here his role was subordinate, sometimes like her servant, and sometimes like an accessory, for her to dress up and show off to the other women.

She'd changed from the woman he knew in Cassini, with her attitude now reflecting the attitudes of the women she worked with. She insisted on making all the decisions, and if he tried arguing, all he got was tension and threats.

She would talk casually now about women punishing their husbands, or using male prostitutes, or even sleeping with eunuchs. One of her colleagues had had her husband castrated, and unbelievably he'd been willing to have it done. And Nicole thought it all seemed reasonable and logical. It was scary at times.

And now her son and daughter were coming to join them. Tim was a boisterous boy, certain to rebel at the changed roles. But he was fun to be with, so that was something to look forward to.

Rebecca was another matter altogether. Her superior attitude would fit in well here, especially if she got a job in an office like Nicole's. There was enough friction between him and Rebecca back home, so heaven knows what it was going to be like here.

Nicole called out.

It was time to go.

Greg and Nicole had been waiting in the outer area of the railroad station for nearly three hours, before Rebecca emerged. She was rarely cheerful anyway, and now with dark clothes and short-cropped hair, she looked more sullen than ever.

Rebecca said, "Tim will be out soon. He caused a lot of trouble, refusing to answer questions at immigration, and that's what delayed us coming through."

Nicole said, "So how are you feeling? Sorry to leave your job behind?"

"I'm okay. In some ways I'm glad to be out of that office. One of the managers was pestering me, and it was beginning to make life difficult."

Greg said, "What did he want?"

"Sex of course. He's nice looking, and I would have done it, if I thought he was interested in me, but he's got a reputation. He only has sex with the new girls, so he can brag about it."

Nicole said, "Well, you're in Utopia now, and I can assure you that men here wouldn't dare try that sort of thing. Oh, there's Tim now."

As Tim came near, he was already shouting that he hated the place and wanted to go back. They'd put him in pink clothes, and used extensions to give him shoulder-length hair. He looked effeminate, and he knew it.

When they got to the apartment, Tim ripped off the pink outfit, and changed into his old clothes, cursing all the while, before disappearing off to his room.

Rebecca was intrigued with the tattoo on Greg's neck.

"I like it, Mom, but what does it signify, having your name on him?"

Nicole smiled, "Now we are married, it's Greg's way of telling the world that he belongs to me, and no one else."

"Belongs?"

Greg laughed. "Don't read too much into it all. Women do have the stronger position in society, so it's their custom to use words like 'belong'."

Rebecca said, "Maybe so, but I like the word anyway. It's kind of romantic that a man would belong to a woman. It's the same in the wedding vows, where the man says he'll obey his wife. So what does that mean? Do you have to do anything she tells you to do?"

"It's just the old-fashioned language they use. It probably dates from generations ago."

Rebecca jumped up. "Hey, Greg, can I see you in your wedding outfit?"

"It's packed away. It's nothing special anyway. You've seen the photos."

Nicole stood up. "I'll get it out. Come on Greg, let Rebecca see you. It's the least we can do as she wasn't at the ceremony."

When Greg came back into the room, Rebecca stood up and smiled. "You look so smart. And those strappy shoes are so elegant. Almost like high heels."

"They're not high heels, it's just the design."

"And your outfit's so smooth and silky. It really reveals your body shape. It makes you look a little vulnerable. Don't you agree, Mom?"

Nicole smiled. "I think he looks perfect like that. Now I'd better check on Tim. He's been very quiet in there."

After Nicole left the room, Rebecca walked around him, and whispered. "I like the pants, especially where they're shaped. Is that just you, or have they put padding in?"

"It's just me, but stop asking that kind of question, will you? So have you seen enough?"

Rebecca came up close, face to face. Greg was always uneasy with women taller than him, when they came close like this. And Rebecca was no exception.

She touched his hair. "For now, yes."

Tim stamped his feet. "I don't want to wear those stupid clothes. I'm going as I am."

The school uniform was laid out on his bed. Pale green blouse and pants, with white socks and shoes.

Greg would have agreed with the poor kid if it was back home, but he had to do his best.

"The other boys will be wearing exactly the same. I'm having to wear different clothes too, and they're not my choice, but you soon get used to it."

It took more persuasion, and a bribe of a new video game, before Tim got dressed. With his long hair, and in the school uniform, he'd have been mistaken for a girl back home, but Greg wasn't saying anything.

Rebecca was no problem though. She was going to the job center for aptitude tests, and Nicole had bought her a dark green outfit, loosely fitting, with black socks and shoes. She seemed to like it, based on the time she spent in front of the mirror. She'd be attending the center for a week, taking tests and attending interviews, to determine her future career possibilities. She was looking forward to it.

When Tim emerged into the living room, Rebecca looked him over.

"You look really sweet, Tim."

He scowled, "Get lost."

"In your year, you're allowed to wear an item of jewelry. Shall I find you something? A pretty bracelet maybe?"

Tim marched off to the kitchen, and slammed the door behind him.

Nicole said, "Rebecca, you were deliberately trying to annoy him. Can you stop that? He's being difficult enough as it is."

"I was only trying to help, honestly."

She gave Greg a wink, unseen by Nicole.

Greg was already home when the others got back at the end of the day.

Tim arrived first, and was no happier than when he left. His clothes were soiled, and he had a bruise on his forehead.

“What happened, Tim?”

“I hate that place. The boys there are all stupid, talking about clothes and girl things. So I got into an argument, and in the end I punched one of them.”

“You were in a fight?”

“Yes, and not a fair one. His two friends joined in, so I didn’t stand a chance. But I still got a couple of good punches in, before the teacher stopped it.”

“Are you in trouble then?”

“I got told off, but that was it. Oh, and the stupid teacher said I’d better get my clothes cleaned before tomorrow, or I’ll be disciplined. The only thing they care about with the boys is whether we look smart.”

Then Nicole arrived with Rebecca, who was smiling.

Nicole said, “Rebecca had a nice day. She’s already got some new friends.”

Greg said, “Tim wasn’t so pleased with his day, but we can talk about that later. So, Rebecca, what did you do today?”

“I started doing the tests. I found them easy, but not everyone did. The supervisor said she was impressed with me, as I’m scoring in the top few percent. And what’s interesting is that because of that, a couple of young men wanted to be with me at the breaks. It seems they’re keen on women who pass tests. So I think I’m going to like it better here than back in Cassini.”

Nicole said, “So no problems?”

“Well, there was one incident. One man, a bit older than me, was really rude to me, about coming from another city. So I slapped him hard, and he tripped over. The supervisor came rushing to intervene, and took him away.”

“And are you in trouble for that?”

“No. Why should I be? He was in the wrong, and he got what he deserved. They’ve what they call the reflection room. It’s completely

dark, and he had to go in there for an hour, to think about his bad behavior. Then he had to apologize to me. I enjoyed that.”

“Well, you’d better behave in future, or you might end up in there yourself.”

“Oh, it’s only for the men.”

It was a Monday morning, and Greg was at the railroad station to do a repair job.

It was strange being back at the station, this time as part of his job.

The last time he'd been here, it had been to meet Tim and Rebecca, and then before that was the day he'd emerged from the train, dressed for Utopia, feeling ridiculous. He'd been ready for a one-month experiment, that had now become permanent.

It wasn't that long ago, but already Nicole had changed. The laws and customs of Utopia meant that they had to behave a certain way in public. When she spoke to him, it had to be authoritative and assertive, and in turn, he had to be meek and submissive. But she didn't have to behave like that when they were in the apartment, away from the public gaze.

The big problem was that she was strongly influenced by her boss Kelly and her office colleagues, and so her attitudes were beginning to reflect their own. Far from viewing Greg as an equal, she now seemed to believe that he was inferior. And the few times he objected, she'd started getting angry, and he'd had to back off.

What made it worse was having Tim and Rebecca around. Tim didn't fully understand, but it was clear that Rebecca was fascinated with his changed role. And she was already beginning to mimic her mother —

The supervisor interrupted his thoughts. "Greg, you've got to go to the back end of the station, where there's some problem with the extractor fans. You may not be able to fix it, but at least find out what the problem is. Take some spare relays with you. It might be just that."

Greg said, "Have you got a layout for the building?"

"I've got a plan here, but I don't think it's much help. You may have to find your way by following the numbering."

Greg looked at the plan and laughed. "It's identical to the station back home. Hardly surprising, as they built them at the same time. In that case I probably don't even need this. I worked at the other

station so often that I know most of the layout, at least the places where engineers go.”

She said, “Well, I’m going now. I’ve got another job to look at. This is the key code to get into the building, and I’ll leave you to it. I’ll be back here in about three hours and see what progress you’ve made.”

The key entry system was old, like the one back home. Primitive, and not even connected to a central computer. Greg closed the door behind him, and headed down the passageway. He knew where he was going, but occasionally he checked the plan in case they’d made some alteration.

It was a long walk down the twisting corridors, past ventilation ducts and piping, all of it old and dirty. But not as bad as the station in Cassini. It looked like once in a while somebody did a little bit of cleaning, which no one ever did back home. He worked his way round and found the relays. There was a bank of them, with two of them blackened and failed.

It didn’t take long to replace them, and he was ready to head back. But he still had a couple of hours to kill, before the supervisor returned.

It occurred to him that he wasn’t far from where the trains departed. So he carried on walking, beyond the places he knew, and relying on the plan.

Sure enough, he came to a big sliding door, with a danger sign warning of trains.

There was no lock, but the door hadn’t been used in years, and was stiff to move. He was able to shift it just enough to look through. The passenger train was standing there, a short distance along the track.

He smiled. All that security they have out front, with emigration controls and the rest of it, to stop people getting through or smuggling goods ... yet through this door, there was no security at all to prevent access to the track. If only he could find a way of getting inside that train and hiding away, ... he could be heading back home.

But there was no way to access the entrance door from down on the track, and even if he got in there, there’d be no place to hide

anyway.

But it was an interesting situation all the same.

Greg and Nicole were at the job evaluation center, with the supervisor.

Nicole said, "So what's the situation with Rebecca? She says she's been enjoying every minute here, so I'm hoping there's good news."

"She's proving to be an exceptional young woman. She scored highly on nearly every test, and was rated excellent in her interviews. And that does raise an interesting issue. Usually the test results narrow down the career choice, but in her case, she can choose whatever she wants. And as she seems keen on administration, I think that's what we should be focusing on. I've checked, and she could start straight away as a trainee in the civil service. While she's there, she'll get time off to study for a qualification."

"That's great. And do you think she'll be able to progress with a career there?"

"I'm sure of it, and I wouldn't be surprised if she advances to senior levels fairly quickly. She really is gifted."

Greg said, "How's she getting on socially?"

"She gets on well with the other women, and of course the young men are always attracted to clever girls. She's tall too, and they like that. So I'm sure she'll fit in wherever she goes."

Nicole said, "So what happens next?"

"Rebecca's keen to go for that job, so unless you've any objections, she can start work on Monday."

It was great news, but Greg would have been more cheerful if they hadn't to go next to Tim's school.

The school principal looked across the desk. Then she typed something into her computer, and a display came up for them all to view.

"Let's talk about Tim. He's been here a week, and these are the incidents that have occurred. I have to tell you that I've never come across such a troublesome boy."

Nicole said, "But it's a culture shock for him. He was never any trouble at school back in Cassini. I'm sure it'll just be a matter of time, before he settles down."

Greg knew he had to lie too. "Nicole's right. Back home he was just an average boy for his age."

The principal switched off the display.

"We don't have the luxury of seeing how it works out. I've got several teachers complaining, and now I've got other parents complaining too. So I've had to take action. I've arranged for him to spend a week in a care facility, where they're used to sorting out problems like this."

"You mean he'll be away from home?"

"Just for a week. There are people there who can work with him, and get at the underlying problems, and, if all goes well, guide him into better behavior."

Greg said, "It sounds ominous. How do they guide people?"

"Mostly counseling, although they do use some drugs to ease the process. Believe me, he'll be fine, so there's nothing to be concerned about. And he'll come out of this a more balanced individual. You'll be pleased with the results."

Nicole shrugged. "I suppose if it makes him happier in the end, then it's worthwhile. When will he go away?"

"I've arranged for a pickup this evening. Better sooner than later."

With Tim due back the next day, Greg was tense enough anyway. The care facility wouldn't give Nicole any information on how things had gone, and if the school principal knew, she wasn't saying either.

And now Rebecca was being irritating. She was excited to tell them something, but said they had to wait until after they'd eaten.

So the meal over, Greg said, "Right, Rebecca. What's so important?"

"It's the marriage vows. You've got it all wrong. My friends at work have told me all about it. 'Obey' really means what it says. It's not some old-fashioned language. If mom tells you to do something, then you have to do it. It's the law."

Greg laughed. "She's always telling me to do things, so what's the difference?"

"You don't understand. For example, she could tell you to eat something horrible, just for the fun of it, and you'd have to do it, even if you found it disgusting."

Nicole said, "That may be the law, but we're in a loving relationship, so I won't be asking him to eat horrible things or anything else like that."

Rebecca frowned. "Well, I think it's a wonderful idea. I'm definitely going to get married one day, and have my own man to obey me. I'd make him do all sorts of things to please me. And if I was in a bad mood, I'd make him suffer too."

Nicole said, "So what sort of man would you look for?"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe someone like Greg. I'll have to think about that. Are you allowed more than one man?"

"You can have as many as you want, but most women are happy with one."

"But if you did have two, you'd have two weddings, and then you'd have two men obeying you?"

Nicole laughed. "I suppose so. That's something you'd have to decide when you're older."

"Mom, I'm so glad we came here. I never want to go back."

“Don’t worry about that. This is our home from now on. Now I’ve got some work to do, so I’ll have to stop chatting. I’ll be about an hour.”

After Nicole had gone off to her study, Rebecca sat down on the sofa next to Greg.

“If you were one of my husbands, I’d expect plenty of affection.”

“In what way?”

“I’ve seen you and mom on the sofa here, cuddling and kissing. That’s what I’d like.”

“Well, you have to meet the right man first.”

Rebecca smiled. “I could practice with you.”

“Hey, stop talking like that. Your mother will hear you.”

“No she won’t. Now give me a hug, that’s all. It’s not much to ask.”

“And if I don’t?”

“Then I’ll tell mom you tried to kiss me.”

The bitch was serious. She meant it.

He put his arm around her, and pulled her close. “There, are you satisfied?”

“Look deep into my eyes, and tell me you love me.”

“Damn it, Rebecca, —”

“Go on, tell me, or I’ll do what I said.”

Greg could hear sounds of Nicole, some distance away. The last thing he wanted was Rebecca getting away with this, but there was no choice.

He looked at her eyes. “All right, ... I love you.”

It was unnerving. He hadn’t said that to many women in the past, even to longer-term girl friends. He wasn’t even sure he’d said it as directly as that to Nicole. He stared into her eyes, hesitating, not knowing what to do.

Rebecca smiled. “Now kiss me.”

It was early evening, when Tim was brought back to them by a social worker from the care facility. Tim was the same as ever. He marched off to his bedroom, without a word, and slammed the door.

The social worker said, "I'm afraid we haven't made much progress. He's still unhappy and angry about his clothes, the school, and everything else. We've tried everything to curb his aggressions, and he hasn't responded."

Nicole said, "The school won't be happy about that, will they?"

"Actually, they've refused to have him back. He's been just as disruptive at the care facility, and the school staff have read the reports. No school will accept him now."

"Then what can we do? Surely he has to go to school?"

"I know you're from elsewhere, and maybe there you have alternatives, but here we're very limited. Unless something drastic is done, he'll never go to school."

Greg said, "What do you mean by drastic?"

"I'm sorry, but unless you two can get him to change his behavior, there's only one way forward that my people can think of. It may seem extreme, but we're talking about castration."

Greg tried to speak, but couldn't. He thought of Tim back home. Boisterous, yes, but he'd have got over it in time. And he'd been no worse than some other boys his age.

Nicole said, "That's terrible. Why on earth do you even suggest it?"

"Because I can't see any other way. It's not uncommon here, and it's always very effective. His aggression will disappear, and he'll be so much happier. I think it's best for him. Otherwise he won't be able to attend school, and well, ... his future would be very uncertain."

Greg said, "So he'll become a eunuch?"

"Exactly. And life as a eunuch can be very satisfying. He'll be happier at school, and soon get used to having a new personality. Within a short while, he'll be thanking you for agreeing to it."

Greg said, "Nicole, I'm against it. He was born a man, and it's wrong to take that away from him. Isn't this the time to think whether we should go back?"

"But Greg, I love it here, and so does Rebecca, and maybe Tim would be better off having the operation. He was never that happy back home anyway. We're staying, and we should do what's best for all of us, Tim included."

"Then let's educate him ourselves. Surely that's better than the alternative."

Nicole shook her head. "We're no teachers, and we both need to be working."

There was a silence, and then the social worker said, "So shall I make the arrangements?"

When Greg got back, Rebecca was home, and watching TV.

"Your mom not back yet then?"

"No, but she's on the way. She stopped off at the shops. I think it's something for you."

Greg sat down. "You like it here, don't you?"

"I love it."

"I wish Tim felt the same. He's going to be different when he comes back you know."

"For the better, presumably. He was always an irritation."

"That's a bit unkind, about your brother. But you've no thoughts about wanting to go back home?"

"Not at all. I can do all sorts of things here that I couldn't back home. I never want to go back."

"What sort of things?"

"For a start, entering the civil service at this level. I might be a trainee, but I've already got responsibilities. Back in the other place, I'd have had to wait a couple of years to get to this point, and then the men would always have had the advantage for the top jobs. Here they give you responsibilities straight away, and the opportunities are wide open."

"I suppose so, at least for women. But is that it?"

She laughed. "No, it's all sorts of things. For example, I can do what I want with the men in the office. They can't retaliate, as they know they'll get the blame."

"Oh, yes, and what can you do with them?"

She smiled, and came to sit next to him. "Do you see the camera?"

He looked up. "Yes. So what?"

She slapped him on the face.

His instinct was to respond, but then he looked up again.

The little bitch knows all about the surveillance cameras.

She said, "I can do things like that. Now kiss me, or I'll do it again."

He hesitated. "If I kiss you, will you —"

—” “Kiss me, Greg. You know you want to. Or do you want another

The noise of the outer door interrupted her, and she jumped to her feet.

Nicole came into the room. “Greg, we’re going out to dinner tonight, with my boss, Kelly, and her husband. Rebecca, you’ll be all right on your own, won’t you?”

“Of course. What time will you be back?”

“Not late. We’ve all got work tomorrow.”

The restaurant was busy, half the customers being groups of women, and the rest couples like them. Greg was in his best clothes, Nicole made sure of that. And he wore the new bracelet that she’d bought him. It was gaudy, but no worse than what some other men were wearing.

Kelly might be older than Nicole, but she was very good looking, even with the cropped head. Joe had been dressed up too. The guy was probably long-suffering, but he seemed very content with his life.

It wasn’t a bad occasion. They found plenty to talk about, and the food was good.

The only irritation was the waiter, constantly fawning over and flirting with the women, as if the men weren’t there. Back home, Greg would have done something about it, but here it was safer to let things be.

Then the waiter leaned close to Kelly to whisper something, and next thing, he was kissing her. Joe seemed not to notice and carried on chatting.

When the waiter had gone, Joe said, “I think that’s why she likes this place so much.”

Kelly smiled. “It’s harmless fun. And rather nice too. They’ve some lovely waiters here, always willing to please.”

The waiter was soon back, and moved in on Nicole. Then a whisper.

She didn’t lower her voice in response. “Yes, I’d like that.”

And he kissed her, taking his time over it.

Greg sat back, and took a drink.

In one day, his wife had a passionate kiss with a stranger, in front of him, and her daughter had slapped him in the face just because she could.

What a place.

Greg had the day off and, for want of anything else to do, he ended up at the local cafe.

He knew a few of the locals now and there was usually someone there to chat to. But today the place was almost empty, and there was no one he recognized.

There was a maintenance engineer in the corner, working on what seemed to be something interesting, so he walked over.

"Hi. You fixing the electrics?"

"That's right. They've got some problems here with the wiring, and I'm going through it, replacing a few of the older cables. Simple job really. Are you an electrician?"

"No, I work on air conditioning. If it's electrics on that, then fine, otherwise I keep away from it. Hey, can I buy you a coffee when you're done? I'm Greg, by the way."

"Thanks. That'd be good. I'm just about finished. And I'm Adam."

By the time the coffees came, Adam had closed up the box containing the wiring, and had come over to Greg's table.

"Well, that was easy enough. I don't do much of this work now, so it's good to keep my hand in."

"What do you normally do then?"

"Mostly bar work, waiting on tables. It's not ideal, but I get occasional maintenance jobs like this, which are always good for a change. I used to work for a big electrical contractor, but that was a few years back. The work was hard and non-stop, and when I got ill, I couldn't keep up, so they let me go. Then my wife kicked me out, and here I am."

"And what sort of things did you work on in those days?"

"I was usually in office complexes. With all their elevators and lighting and computers, there was always something to fix. I spent time working on the trains too."

Greg said, "At the stations?"

"No, in the engineering center. There was always plenty of work there."

“Those trains are old, so I guess there’s a lot of things can go wrong with them.”

“That’s right. They really need replacing, but that’s expensive, so the operators keep them going. There’s always a lot of maintenance and repairs. It was good work for me while it lasted. Then they laid me off, and that was the end of the good times. So what about you?”

“I get a lot of interesting work, so I’m happy enough with that, but I’m from another city, and to be honest with you, I don’t like it here in Utopia. I’d do anything to go back.”

Adam said, “What’s it like where you come from? Is it very different from here?”

“A lot of it’s the same, but the big difference in Cassini is that men can do what they want, and that’s the way I like it. I like to make my own decisions, and not have women deciding for me.”

“That would be strange. It sounds stressful, but I suppose it would be better than what I’ve got now, on my own, living at a hostel. These days, I’ve no decisions to make anyway. It’s no life.”

Greg said, “Those trains are the only way out of here, but my wife won’t let me leave. I did wonder whether there was some way to get on the train, past the security, but I came here by train, and I know that there’s nowhere to hide anyway. In effect, I’m a prisoner here, with a life sentence.”

“There’s nowhere to hide in the passenger area, but there is a place where you could hide, if you could get in there. It’s the baggage compartment.”

“I hadn’t thought of that. But does no one check it? No inspections?”

“The security’s very tight for the passengers, but no one pays much attention to the baggage.”

“So a man could hide in there?”

Adam laughed. “It would be easy. The only problem is that by the end of the journey he’d be dead.”

“So it’s exposed to the Martian atmosphere?”

“No. They can’t do that, in case it damages the items in the baggage. But the conditions would be unbearable. The air pressure would be reduced, and it would be cold most of the time. At night the temperature would be well below freezing. You might last several

hours in the day if surface temperatures were up, but you'd certainly die in the night."

It was a different Tim who returned with the social worker. When he came through the door, he rushed to Nicole, and hugged her.

"Oh, Mom, it's good to be back. I've missed you all."

"Are you feeling alright then, Tim?"

"I'm a little sore where they operated. But they told me that'll only last a few days."

"Well, you go off with Rebecca now, as Greg and I need to have a private discussion."

When he and Rebecca had gone, Nicole asked the social worker, "Is he really all right?"

"He's fine. They did the operation over a week ago, so it's nearly healed. There's just a tiny scar to show for it."

"He certainly seems a lot calmer."

"That'll be partly the reduction in testosterone, but also he's been implanted with a slow-release capsule, containing female hormones. They'll last about five years, while his body and brain are adapting and maturing, and if there's any problem then, he can have another implant."

"And he can go to school now?"

"Of course. They're looking forward to seeing the new Tim."

After she had left, Nicole called Rebecca and Tim back in.

Rebecca said, "Tim's so much nicer now. I think I'm going to be very proud of him. And for once he's keen to get back to school."

Nicole smiled. "Is that right, Tim?"

"I can't wait. I know I've got to apologize for the way I was, but I'm sure they'll forgive me. There is one thing though. Can I borrow one of Greg's bracelets? Most of the other boys wear one, and I don't want to be the odd one out, especially on my first day back."

"Of course you can."

Tim went to her and hugged her, and then went to Greg and hugged him. "I'm so happy to be back. I won't let you down again."

Then he burst into tears, and Rebecca rushed to comfort him.

It was clear that Tim was happier now than before, even compared with when he was back home, and it looked like the problems with the school were over. But what a price. He'd be going through puberty with who knows what result. He'd never be the same again.

And Tim could never go back home.

Part 5 – CHASTISEMENT

"Greg, I've something to tell you, and it might annoy you, but I'm doing it whatever you say."

"I'm getting used to this. What now?"

"I won't be back tonight. I'm staying at a hotel with Kelly. We're having a meal together, and then later we're having a bit of a party."

"And husbands aren't invited?"

"No, not this time."

"So who else is coming to the party?"

Nicole hesitated. "Actually it's a couple of waiters from that restaurant."

"Good grief, are you telling me that you're having a party with just the four of you?"

"That's right. What's wrong with that?"

"With a few drinks in you, I can guess what those guys will try. Isn't it obvious?"

Nicole laughed. "We won't need any drinks for what you're thinking about."

"So you're going to be sleeping with one of those guys? That's crazy."

"When Kelly suggested it, I knew you'd object, but the other women do it, so why shouldn't I?"

"Because we're married, that's why."

"They're all married. Having a night out doesn't change that. Anyway, Kelly's paying for it."

"The rooms?"

"And the men. They don't do it for nothing, you know."

"So they're prostitutes?"

"Not at all. They just earn a little extra this way."

"Well, it sounds like prostitution to me."

"There's no point arguing with you. You can think what you like. Anyway, I must be off. So I'll see you tomorrow evening."

After she'd gone, Greg got himself another coffee. This wasn't the Nicole he'd known back home. Now she was so immersed with

Kelly and those other women at the office, that she'd become one of them.

Back home, if she'd even suggested anything like this, he'd have walked out on her. But now what option did he have but to accept it? If he'd argued more, she would only have threatened him.

He stared at his coffee. If she carried on like this, he'd eventually have to give up arguing, and let her do what she wanted. Then he'd be like Joe. Meek and obedient. Like all the other meek little husbands.

Back home that evening, after Tim had gone to bed, Rebecca came and sat next to him on the sofa.

"Are you annoyed with mom?"

"Of course I am. We're supposed to be married, and she's spending the night with another man."

"But women do that here all the time."

"That may be, but it's not the way I was brought up. Back home, it would be reason enough to split up."

"But you're here now, and you have to forget the past. It's stupid to make yourself miserable about something as trivial as her having a night away."

"It's not trivial. It's important to me."

"Then you're stupid. And you're getting me annoyed talking like this. If you carry on, I might slap you again. Harder this time."

Greg sighed. "You're not being very nice are you?"

"I can be nice when I feel like it."

"Well, I haven't seen much of that."

"I'll show you then."

She came close, and he was ready for the slap.

Then her face was almost touching. She stroked his hair, then put her hands either side of his head, and held him tight. Then she kissed him on the lips, with the tip of her tongue just pushing through.

He jerked away. "Rebecca, you shouldn't be doing that. Not with me."

"Would you rather I slapped you?"

"No, ... but you shouldn't kiss me like that. I'm your mother's husband."

"Listen, Greg, I'll do whatever I want. That's why I like it here. And tonight you're not her husband anyway. You more or less said that. And when we're alone, I don't think of her as my mother. She's just another woman. Anyway, now it's your turn. I want you to kiss me, like you kiss Nicole."

"I told you it was wrong. Let's leave things be."

She raised her hand to slap him.

"Do I have to force you? I liked it when we kissed, and I know that you did too, even though you won't admit it."

"I'm not —"

Her hand swung round too fast for him to avoid. Aside from the pain in his cheek, he could taste blood where it had slammed into his teeth.

"Now give me a long, passionate kiss, or I'll have to slap you again, or do worse."

What was scary was that she wasn't showing any emotion. This crazy girl would keep hitting him until he did what she wanted. And with those damned cameras, he couldn't retaliate. If he even appeared to be aggressive, the cameras would activate ...

He came closer to her and meant to kiss her gently. But she grabbed hold of his head and pulled him so hard that he could feel her teeth pressing into his lips. When she let go, he had to draw breath.

"So Greg, admit it, that was something different, wasn't it?"

"Of course it was. You're very intense. But it's still not right. I'm married to Nicole, not you."

"If she's happy enough to be romancing other men, why shouldn't you be having your own fun? Anyway, when she's not here, I'm the one in charge, and I can do whatever I want, with those cameras there. If you retaliate, they'll know, and then you'll be punished."

"Hell, Rebecca, stop talking like that. I'm going to my bedroom to read, and I've got a headache, so you'll have to leave me alone."

He stood up, and went to the bedroom, but she followed him in, then sat on the bed.

"Are you naked when you sleep with Nicole?"

"Yes, what of it?"

"I'd like to see you naked."

"No way."

She stood up, frowning. Then she slapped him on the cheek. This time he was braced for it, but it still hurt.

"Greg, take your clothes off, or I'll hit you again. And don't forget there's a camera in here too."

“You can slap me all you want. I’m not stripping off in front of you.”

“Very well.”

She went off, but was soon back, holding a leather belt. She stood in front of him, playing with it.

She said, “I’ll use this on you if you don’t do what I say.”

“I told you, I’m not going —”

“You’re beginning to annoy me. Aren’t you scared what I might do?”

“You’re crazy. Now —”

She whipped the belt round to hit him in the face. The pain was instant and severe.

He shouted, “Stop it, Rebecca! That really hurt me. Just leave me alone and go to bed.”

As she swung the belt round again, he put up his arm to protect his face, so his forearm took the impact. It was just as well. The pain was bad enough there.

This was a nightmare. She wasn’t smiling or showing any emotion, other than a slight frown of concentration. She was being methodical, as if she had a job to do, and would carry on until she got her way. And if he lifted a finger against her, the cameras would get him.

He slowly took off his clothes, down to his briefs.

She stood in front of him, looking him over. Then she raised the belt.

“Take them off.”

He slipped off his briefs.

“I can see why Nicole likes you. You’ve a beautiful body.”

She lowered her hand to touch him, and it stiffened.

“Greg, why is it doing that? Do you want to make love to me?”

“It’s not something I can control. Please stop this, and leave me alone.”

She touched it again. “All right, I’ll leave you alone. And by the way, you’d better not tell Nicole about this. If you do, I’ll make your life a misery.”

Greg arrived at the station late at night and everything was dark. No lights anywhere, on this lower level. Just what he wanted.

He tapped in the key code and went through into the engineering area. The lighting was off, but he had his flashlight, and he knew the way, so he walked quickly to the back of the station. He'd got a steel bar to lever the sliding door, and this time he got it open enough to slip through, out onto the tracks.

The train was standing there in the gloom, with some subdued lights around the perimeter. It was obvious where the baggage compartment was, at the rear of the train. There were sliding doors to enter it, with an old-fashioned lock that needed a key. No electronics, and no keypad. He tried levering the door, but it was solid.

It was a crazy idea coming here tonight, as there was almost no chance that he would get into that compartment. But he had to try something. Nicole was bad enough, the way she treated him, but now he had Rebecca to contend with. And it was so easy to get to the train, that he had to try the next step. Yet now he was there, what could he do? Just a short distance away, there was a space where he might be able to hide.

But there was no way he was going to get a key for that door.

Greg and Nicole hadn't spoken much in the days following Nicole's night out, but things were getting back to normal, or at least as normal as they were going to be.

Greg said, "I hate to ask, but did you have a good time on your night out?"

"It was fun, but those waiters weren't as romantic as they make out to be in the restaurant. They're both married to the same woman, and I think she trains them up, and uses them to make money. So you could tell they were doing a job as instructed, without any great enthusiasm. I spoke to Kelly about it, and she said they were all about the same, and these two were as good as you could get."

"Do you know how much she paid them?"

"No, but they weren't cheap. I think she might have spent a day's pay on them."

"And you get me for nothing."

"Yes darling. And you're better than any of them. But that does bring me to something. Kelly's been hinting at it for a while, but now she's asked me. She said she'd like to sleep with you sometime."

Greg laughed. "I can't keep up with this. What did you say?"

"It's a way of returning the favor, and she is my boss, after all. So I said yes, of course."

"And you don't mind me having sex with Kelly?"

"No. It's fair enough, after my night out."

"So when does this happen?"

"Tomorrow night. You're to go to her apartment. And she's bought you some ear studs as a present, so you'll have to wear them. Look, I've got them here. They're lovely aren't they? Gold with a tiny jewel in the center."

"Hell, it's enough trouble having to wear jewelry, so I don't want earrings as well. And anyway, my ears aren't pierced."

"Then you'll have to go and get your ears pierced tomorrow."

"I don't think so. I've no wish to have a needle pushed through my ear."

“You’ll have to. Otherwise she’ll be offended. There’s a salon along the street that does piercing. They open early, so you can get it done before you go to work.”

“Nicole, I know you’re the boss here, but surely there’s a limit. Can’t we draw the line at earrings and piercing?”

“Don’t be silly. They’ll look nice on you. And they’re just studs, so stop calling them earrings. That’s your problem, always exaggerating. Well, you can get it done, and that’s the end of it.”

“But don’t my feelings come into it? I’ve sacrificed a lot coming here.”

“Nonsense. You have as good a life here as back in the other city. It’s just different. It’s time you accepted it, and stopped looking back.”

“Well, I’ve had enough. You marry me, and next thing you’re kissing strangers and then having sex with them. It’s no way to treat me.”

She was quiet for a moment, then spoke softly. “If you don’t like the way I treat you, you can leave me. It’s up to you.”

“Where would I go? I can’t leave Utopia without you.”

“If you’re not going to show me proper respect, then I don’t care. It’s your decision.”

When Greg arrived at the apartment, Joe met him at the door, and ushered him into the living room.

"Kelly will be a little while yet, so we might as well have a drink together. She's choosing her nightie, and playing around with the lighting and the aromas to make the room feel romantic. I suppose Nicole's the same about these things?"

"I guess so. She certainly took enough nightwear for that hotel party with Kelly."

Joe smiled. "I don't think they had as much fun as they were expecting. I told her before she went that those waiters wouldn't be that good, but well, you know what women are like. Our opinions count for very little."

As they sipped their drinks, Joe was frowning.

Greg said, "Are you annoyed that I'm here?"

"Heavens, no. If that's what Kelly wants, it's fine by me. And it's not the first time by any means."

"Then what's troubling you?"

Joe leaned forward, lowering his voice. "Greg, if I ask you a question, will you give me an honest answer?"

"Of course."

"Then tell me you won't think of trying to take Kelly away from me."

Greg felt like laughing, but the guy was serious.

"Joe, there's nothing further from my thoughts. I'm here because Nicole told me I had to come. It's not something I wanted, but being honest, Kelly's an attractive woman, so I'm not objecting. But I've no intentions other than doing what I'm expected to tonight."

Joe brightened up. "That's a great relief for me, Greg. I've been so worried. Let me get —"

Kelly called out, "Greg, I'm ready."

Greg took another sip of wine, and stood up. His earlobes felt heavy with the movement. So much for arguing with Nicole about the studs. He headed for the bedroom.

Then the passion started.

Kelly was all over him, touching and kissing, as soon as he entered the room, and then in bed she was insatiable. He'd never had sex with a woman as tall and strong as this, and it was one hell of a new experience, having a woman take the lead. And it added to the excitement to see her naked, after only ever having seen her fully clothed. It had already been the best night that he'd had since he got here, when she woke him in the early hours, wanting more.

Breakfast with Joe was embarrassing. He was rushing around to please both Kelly and Greg, as if it was their place, and he'd become their servant. What made it more surreal was that Kelly was chatting to Greg as if they were man and wife, and only speaking to Joe to tell him to do something.

When Greg was leaving, she came to the door with him, and they had their final embrace and kiss. Kelly was back in her day clothes, but Greg could feel the shape of her body, recalling every detail. He made the embrace last.

As he left, she kissed him again, and whispered, "You know, you could earn a lot more than you do. I've got friends who'd pay the earth for a night like that."

Greg laughed. "You mean I could be a prostitute?"

"Of course. An expensive one."

Greg was bored. After their evening meal, Nicole had gone off to her study, excited about something, and with Rebecca away, and Tim already in bed, he spent the evening scanning hopefully for something interesting on the TV. It was late before Nicole came back into the living room.

"Kelly's got herself a eunuch now."

"Good grief. When did that happen?"

"She got him a week ago, not long after your date with her. But she only told us at the office today."

"And why did she want one of them?"

"She doesn't have time for housework and cooking, and Joe's no good at either, so while they're out working, the eunuch stays there, keeping the place tidy, and preparing their meals."

"I wonder what Joe thinks of the idea?"

"From what Kelly told me, he's happy enough. Why do you ask?"

"Well, the poor guy seems insecure already. It's not going to help having another man around."

Nicole laughed. "It's hardly real competition for him. Anyway, he's not objected to it. I suppose we'll have to see how it works out, but it seems a good arrangement so far."

"I hope you're not getting ideas."

"Well, actually I have been giving it some consideration. Of course, it costs to keep one, if he's not working, and we don't have the same money as Kelly. But if we could find one who works part-time, it might work. And if it doesn't, we'd get rid of him. So what do you think?"

"I don't want another man in here, even a eunuch."

"Why not? Do you think I'd get up to something with him?"

"Not with a eunuch, no. But it wouldn't feel right, with another guy sitting around in the evening. Anyway, where would he sleep?"

"The spare room's full of junk. We could clear that out and put a bed in there. Why don't you come and look at the computer. I've got the agency page where Kelly found hers."

Greg followed her to the console and sat down with her. A bunch of pictures of good looking men, with descriptions. None of whom he'd want to have around.

Nicole said, "I think we can filter on employment. Yes, ... that does it. These are all working part-time, in this zone of the city, and there's still six to choose from."

Greg stood up. "Enough of this. Let's talk about it some other time, can we?"

"Sit back down, Greg. I don't like the look of that one, so we'll eliminate him. And this one's too old. Personally, I like those two best. What do you think?"

"I told you, I don't want any of them around here."

"But if it was down to those two, which would you choose?"

Greg pointed randomly. "That one. Now can we finish this little game, and get to bed?"

Greg liked his job, but he still liked weekends better. An early breakfast with Nicole and Tim before they went out, then time to relax with a coffee and watch the TV before Rebecca got up.

He was watching the morning news, when Rebecca appeared in her nightie, and sidled up to him.

"Nicole and Tim are out all day, so what shall we do?"

"You can watch TV. Haven't you a book to read?"

"I think I'd rather do something with you, like we did before."

Greg switched off the TV. "Look, Rebecca, you shouldn't be talking that way. Do you think the young women you work with are like that?"

"Most are. Some have had sex with more than one man already, and they're the same age as me."

"Good grief, no wonder you get these ideas."

"Never mind them. Lets have some fun. I know, why don't you get undressed again?"

"Please, Rebecca, find something else to do. I had a rough day yesterday, and today I just want to relax and watch TV."

She sat quietly for a while, then, "All right, then how about this? Put your arm around me, and tell me you love me. Then you can give me a really nice kiss."

Greg started to protest, but she said, "And don't make me have to use that belt, will you?"

Greg knew she would, so best to get it over with. He put his arm around her. "Okay, I love you."

Then he leaned towards her for the kiss.

She said, "No, that's no good. You've got to say it like you mean it, and use my name. And pull me close when you kiss me."

Greg drew breath, and tried to put feeling into it. "I love you, Rebecca."

Then he kissed her. He wanted to feel objective about this crazy situation, but saying those words before the kiss confused him, as if it reflected his real feelings towards her. It couldn't be love, after the

way she'd coerced him, but what was it that he was feeling? He kissed her longer than he'd meant to.

Rebecca said, "Oh, Greg, that was lovely."

She cuddled up to him, and switched on the TV.

Greg relaxed, and in doing so, realized how comfortable it felt to be with her. If he'd met her as a stranger, and got to know her, he'd have wanted her, and to hell with the age difference. Yet this was Nicole's daughter, ... Not that Nicole had been particularly loyal to him.

When the program finished, Rebecca switched off the TV again.

"You've been so good, I've decided to give you a little reward. Let's go to the bedroom."

"I thought the kiss was enough."

"Don't argue. I don't want to have to hurt you. So come on, let's go to your bedroom and you can take your clothes off."

He let her lead him by the hand, and stripped off. She was smiling all the while, evidently about whatever she had in mind.

Rebecca said, "Now lie down on your back, with your hands above you."

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to tie your wrists to the bed. But I won't hurt you, if you do what I say."

He put his hands up. She was thorough. He couldn't move his wrists at all. Then she went to stand at the foot of the bed, and took her nightie off.

She swiveled around. "Don't you think I look nice?"

"Of course you do. So what now?"

"I'm still not sure how to start. I've never imagined what it would be really like, having you here like this. It's kind of scary knowing I can do what I want."

She approached him, and touched his foot. He jumped.

"That's ticklish."

She took hold of his foot, and smoothed her hand over it.

"You've got nice feet. Nice to touch. And I have to start somewhere."

As she stroked his feet, he began to relax. Her movements became more smooth and more confident as she progressed to his

ankles, and then to his calves. Each time she changed position, his muscles tensed, but as she worked on him, he let them relax again. He'd had massages before, and she wasn't as skillful as any of them, but it was still pretty good, and very erotic.

She said, "I'm going to work on your thighs now, and you know where I'm going after that. So lie back and enjoy it."

He relaxed as she stroked and kneaded his thighs, moving gradually upwards. Being restrained, and knowing he couldn't get away, somehow made it easier to stay calm.

But now he tensed, as he felt her hand under him, gently cupping it all, and then the other hand taking hold of him. It had gone hard, and he knew he couldn't last long.

Rebecca laughed, and jumped away. "Now where did I put that condom?"

She got the condom and slipped it on him.

"Now I'm going to make you ejaculate. That's your reward."

She took hold of him, and started on him with both hands.

But the pause had given him chance to recover, and now he was able to resist by tensing his body, and trying to think of anything but Rebecca.

Until she slid on top of him, still holding him, and her face came close to his. Her eyes were wide and excited, and beautiful. Dark brown disks that were almost hypnotic. And all he could feel were her long delicate fingers.

She kissed him on the lips, then whispered, "I wonder if it would fit into me? I think it would probably feel like this."

She squeezed him. Then relaxed, and squeezed him again.

It was too much.

He climaxed, and his body shook under her, uncontrollably.

She shouted out, "I've done it. I've made you ejaculate. I told you I would."

She slumped down on the bed next to him.

She said, "You know, I was scared to start with, thinking about doing that, but I'm not scared now. I can do anything I want, and no one can stop me. Whenever Nicole's not here, you'll be my man, not hers."

She leaned over him and untied his wrists. Then she kissed him on the lips.

She said, "Come on, a bit more passion. We're almost lovers."

She kissed him, and this time he responded.

He hadn't wished for her to kiss him, but he had no regrets. She was more passionate than Nicole, and more sensual than Kelly. When he responded, she came back at him even more intensely. Then nothing mattered, but the excitement and energy of her kissing.

Finally she'd had enough, and lay back at his side.

"Greg, will you tell me you love me again?"

It was easier to say this time.

"I love you, Rebecca."

The following weekend started off well enough. Rebecca had been away the night, staying with friends, and Greg had made pancakes for breakfast for Nicole and Tim.

Nicole brushed Tim's hair to neaten it. "You look really smart. Now what's this about shoes?"

"My shoes are okay, but some of the other boys in my year have started wearing the new designs, with buckles, and I'm beginning to feel left out."

Greg said, "What's so great about buckles? Do the shoes stay on better?"

Tim laughed. "No. It's just more fashionable."

Nicole shrugged. "Well, I don't see why not, if the other boys have them."

So before long, they were at the shopping center.

Greg hated shopping, as always, but the shoe shop was a nightmare. Then one of Nicole's colleagues turned up, and it fed the frenzy over shoe buying. Tim was excited, and tried several on before he was satisfied. He still looked like a boy, but he was behaving like a girl.

Greg said, "I still think it's a waste of money. The shoes he's got look fine to me."

Nicole frowned. "You wouldn't want Tim to be the odd one out, would you? If that's the fashion —"

"The idea of fashion for boys still seems ridiculous. It seems a stupid waste of time and money."

"Well, it's my money, and I'll —"

"Okay, if you want to be stupid with your money, then I can't stop you."

Nicole went silent. She looked at her colleague, who'd backed off and was avoiding eye contact.

The journey back was in silence.

Back at the apartment, Nicole slammed the door shut.

Rebecca was back home now, but Nicole ordered her and Tim to their rooms. They didn't argue.

"Greg, you've no right to humiliate me like that. My friend must think I'm pathetic, the way you spoke to me, and no doubt she'll be telling everyone. It's no way for a husband to talk to his wife. I dread to think how embarrassed I'll feel when I go to work tomorrow."

"I'm sorry Nicole. It all got out of hand. But I felt strongly about it, and when you argued, I forgot about your friend there and reacted without thinking. Please forgive me."

"How can I? Who knows what the shop assistants are saying about me now? They're probably still laughing about it."

"What else can I do but apologize? I promise it'll never happen again."

"I don't know. I'll have to think."

Nicole went off to the bedroom. So Greg sat down, not sure what to do. It seemed no big deal to him, and he'd have put the TV on. But he had to look contrite.

It was a quarter hour before she came back. She'd been crying, and her face was pale.

She said, "I've realized what I've got to do. It's what I committed to in the marriage. I've got to punish you for the way you've behaved."

"What do you mean by that?"

Nicole said, "You remember your vows. Mine was that if you do wrong I would chastise you, and your vow was that you would accept it. That's what we'll have to do, Greg. My friends will ask me what I've done about your behavior, and I'm sure that they'll expect me to have punished you."

"You mean with that electronic thing?"

"Yes, the chastiser. I know it might hurt you a little, but I've got to do it. You have to be punished."

"You don't have to do anything. Just tell them that you did."

"I can't lie about it. They'll ask me for details, and they won't believe me if I try making them up."

"Suppose I refuse?"

"You can't. It's the law that you've got to fulfill your vows."

"But just suppose I did refuse. What then?"

Nicole frowned. "I'd have to call the police. If you gave me no choice, what else could I do?"

Greg remembered that time in prison. The night in jail was no problem, but the flogging wasn't something he'd want to repeat. And who knows what the punishment would be this time, in this crazy place. Maybe worse than last time. He turned to Nicole.

"All right. What do I have to do?"

"Come with me to the bedroom. We'll do it now, and then it will soon be over."

In the bedroom, she said, "Take off your clothes, then go over to face the wall."

Greg undressed, and did as she said, putting his hands on the wall in front of him.

Then he heard her coming up behind him. He had the same sick feeling as when he was in the jail, waiting for the flogging.

She said, "I do love you, Greg."

He felt the cold of the electrodes on his back, and then jumped as the electric current fired into him, twisting his back muscles into a spasm. He couldn't help cry out. It wasn't as bad as the treatment he'd had in prison, but it was still painful. He waited for her next move.

She said, "That's the first one. I'm going to give you six of them altogether."

"Six? Does it have to be that many?"

"Yes. That's what other women talk of. Six for something like this."

They must all talk about these things at her office. What a place.

He felt the electrodes again on another part of his back, and tensed for it. Again a violent electric shock, which made him jump, but this time he managed not to shout. His back muscles were already twitching from the first one, and now he was feeling more of the same.

Then two more shocks. All the muscles in his back now were stinging, and twitching.

She came close, stroked his hair, and whispered, "I'm sorry, my darling. I hate to have to be doing this. But you must learn to do as I

say, without questions or nasty comments. You're my husband, and you must obey me."

She pulled his hair aside and kissed his neck, where her name was tattooed.

Then a delay. He thought she might be stopping, but then he felt the electrodes touching the back of his thigh.

He held his teeth together, ready for the shock, expecting much the same as before. But when it came, it was so violent that it made his whole body twist, and he nearly fell over. The pain was more intense than before, and ran through his thigh and groin and up the side of his body. And there was a burning smell, which he knew was his skin. So the bitch had increased the voltage.

He shouted out. "Nicole, please stop now. You've done enough, surely."

"Darling, it's just one more, and then it'll be over."

She stroked his hair again and whispered, "I love you darling, but it's your own fault. You didn't behave, and so I have to punish you."

"But you're really hurting me. Can't you stop now? I promise I won't say things like that again."

"But I have to hurt you, to be sure you learn to behave. And it's not just that incident in the shop. You're supposed to be submissive to me, and you've had long enough to get used to it, but your arguments and disagreements prove otherwise. My darling, you have to forget the past, and accept the way things are now. I've a responsibility to look after you, and you've a responsibility to obey me and make me happy."

He heard her move away from him, and then come back. Then the electrodes were pressing against his buttock.

If it was like the last time, this was going to hurt a lot.

She whispered, "I do love you, Greg, but you must never talk to me like that again ..."

Then it fired, and he screamed out. His body convulsed with the shock, and he collapsed to the floor.

He'd never felt such pain in his life. His body was shaking, and his muscles quivering, and the pain was everywhere. His buttock

had no feeling, and there was that burning smell again. He couldn't talk, or even think, but lay there moaning.

She knelt down next to him.

"I'm sorry, darling. I'm sorry it had to be done. But it's all over now."

Nicole was out with friends, and Tim had gone to bed, so Greg was on his own with Rebecca. Since the time when she gave him a massage, he'd been nervy about being alone with her, but she'd not done anything since. Apart from the occasional kiss.

She came and sat next to him. "Did it hurt a lot?"

"What do you mean?"

"What Nicole did to you with that electronic thing. It hurt you a lot didn't it?"

"How do you know what we were doing?"

"I was watching you. Nicole left the door open a fraction, and I pushed it open a little bit more, so I could see what was going on. It looked like it really hurt you."

"Well, it did. But it was something that had to be done."

"I know you'd been disrespectful, and I understand why she had to do it, but I thought she was really harsh on you."

"It wasn't her choice. She had to use that thing because of what her friends would be saying. Neither of us wanted it."

Rebecca frowned. "She was enjoying it, you know."

"No she wasn't. She was sorry she had to do it, and she was upset by the whole thing."

"Then why was she smiling while she was doing it, especially before she did that last one? I know my mother better than you do, and I tell you she was enjoying it."

Greg was ready to argue, but how did he know what Nicole was doing behind his back? Surely she couldn't have wanted to hurt him that much?

Rebecca interrupted his thoughts. "She was fiddling with that gadget before she did the last two. I think she was turning the power up."

Greg knew that was true. The last one especially was a level of pain well above the others.

He said, "It did hurt me but I want to forget it now. So I really don't want to talk about it any more."

“All right. If that’s the way you feel, ... but to be honest, if I was doing that to a naked man, I think I might have enjoyed it too.”

“How could you enjoy hurting someone?”

“I’m not saying I would. But it must be exciting to use that thing and watch the reaction. So I might enjoy doing it, but you never know. I suppose that one day I’ll be married, and then I’ll find out whether I like it or not. I won’t know until I try.”

Greg looked at her. She looked so innocent and sweet, yet she was talking about inflicting pain on some poor guy.

Greg stood up. “You’re certainly an unusual girl, and it’s always interesting to talk to you, but I’m tired and have to go to bed.”

Greg went to the bedroom, closing the door. In the cupboard, the chastiser was safe in its little box. The power setting was from one to ten. One to four were colored green, four to seven were orange, and eight to ten were red, with the word “danger”.

And it was set to ten.

The cafe was busy, but Greg had found a quiet corner to have his conversation with Adam.

Greg said, "Just suppose I could get to that train. How would I get into the baggage compartment? Wouldn't the door be locked?"

Adam nodded. "Of course it's locked. You'd need a key. But why are you asking these questions? Have you got a plan of some sort?"

"Not really. I was just thinking, that's all. If I could get to the train, and then get into that compartment, I might be willing to risk the cold to get back home."

"But I told you before. Even if you got in there, you wouldn't survive the journey. The cold would kill you. And then there's the low pressure, of course. But the cold would be the real enemy."

Greg said, "Of course it's all hypothetical if I can't get into that compartment. But suppose I could insulate myself well enough against the cold? Maybe then there's a chance?"

Adam said, "What's so good about where you came from? Why would you risk your life to get back?"

"Here everything is too restrictive. Life's a lot simpler there. Although men tend to be in control, it's not as clear cut as here, and anybody living on their own is free to do what they want."

Adam looked thoughtful. "Would you take me with you?"

"I would if all this was a practical possibility. But if I can't get onto that train, there's no chance."

Adam paused. "I know how to get onto that train."

"You mean into the baggage compartment?"

"Exactly. I could get us into there, the two of us."

Greg said, "But suppose we succeeded. There's no saying that you'll like it in Cassini."

"It's got to be better for me than here. I'm at a dead-end, with no opportunities to do the work I really enjoy, and the prospect of living my life out at the hostel. It would be different, if we got back there, wouldn't it?"

"Well, that's true. Life's not perfect there, but you could go for any job you want, and you'd have your own place to live ... You

know, if we did go together we'd need to do a lot of careful planning."

Adam said, "I'll do whatever's necessary, but how would we get to the train?"

Greg said, "That's the bit I can handle. So if you can get us into that compartment, then the question is how we can survive. For three days, we can manage without food, but we'll need something to drink. And then the big challenge is insulation from the cold."

Adam said, "What we need to drink is something with a high sugar content. It's less likely to freeze, and will give us some nutrition. I'll find out what's available. Also I can get hold of bottled compressed oxygen. That might keep us going for a while, if the pressure drops too low. But what about protection from the cold? Would thermal blankets be the answer?"

Greg said, "Those guys that work outside, in space suits, have an inner survival suit that's very highly insulated. I've done work where they make these suits. I'm sure that for the right money, I could get us a couple, no questions asked. With those on, and with some extra blankets, I think we could survive the cold even at night."

Adam smiled, and was about to talk, but then choked and coughed.

Greg said, "Are you okay?"

"I've not been feeling well lately. I don't know what it is, but it's happened before. If it's like last time, I'll be recovered soon, and when I am, I'll be ready to go. So shall we get things organized?"

Greg said, "Why not? What have we got to lose?"

It was a weekend when Brad moved in. He didn't have a lot of belongings, other than clothing and jewelry.

Greg didn't want him there, but he couldn't help but like the guy. He was smaller than Nicole and Greg, slim, with long blonde hair. So polite, and always smiling.

And there was no risk with Nicole. Brad was effeminate in his behavior, and told Greg that, like most eunuchs, he took female hormones. From the look of him, he took plenty.

It had been weird to start with, having him around at breakfast, cooking and serving, and then when he was home, constantly tidying and cleaning. Nicole loved it, and Greg was beginning to see the advantages of the arrangement.

In the evening, for the first few days, Brad stayed in his room. But then Nicole had a word with him, and after that he was sitting with them, like part of an extended family. It wasn't long before she was occasionally sitting with him rather than Greg, with her arm around him, and stroking his hair like he was some sort of pet.

It was irritating enough watching him with Nicole, and to add to that, it was soon apparent that Rebecca and Tim liked having him around. Brad would take Tim shopping, and they'd be out for hours, usually coming back with some little fashion item for one or the other. And Rebecca thought it was great to have a man she could order around, and who was a captive audience for her chatter.

It was two weeks after Brad moved in when, after breakfast, Nicole took Greg aside.

"Greg, I want to do something different tonight. I want to spend the night with Brad."

"What, with a eunuch?"

"He's still a person, and he can be very loving. I just want to see what it's like."

"And I suppose I'll have to sleep in his room? That's great."

"It's only for one night. And you know I won't be having sex with him. Don't be annoyed, please."

“Have you spoken to him already?”

“There’s no need. I’ll tell him when I’m ready.”

“How do you know he wants to sleep with you? He might prefer men.”

Nicole laughed. “Shall I ask him if he’d rather sleep with you? He’d do it, you know. He’s fond of you, especially after I told him that you were the one who chose him.”

“It wasn’t much of a choice, ... Okay, you go ahead, so long as it’s only one night.”

Nicole liked her night with Brad, and it wasn't long before she had another night with him and then another. Within a month, a pattern had developed, with Brad sleeping with her on weekdays, and Greg having the weekends.

So Greg was doubly annoyed when Nicole decided to go away for another hotel party with Kelly, leaving Greg to sleep alone on one of his weekend nights. Before she left, he tried to negotiate getting a midweek night in return, but she said it would hurt Brad's feelings. Then off she went.

Before long, Tim went off to bed, and Greg was left watching TV with Brad and Rebecca.

Rebecca said, "I'm bored."

Brad seemed to panic as if he was responsible. "I'm sorry. Is there anything I can do?"

She sat there, looking sulky. Then, "Yes, there is one thing you can do. Go to your room, and stay there."

He jumped to his feet and was off.

Greg said, "You're very harsh, the way you talk to him."

"He doesn't mind. He's used to it. So what can we do, now he's gone?"

Rebecca hadn't shown much interest in him recently, but now there was something in her tone of voice. The thought of holding her and kissing her, and maybe more, was appealing. But she was too unpredictable.

"Can't we just sit together and watch TV?"

"I want us to have some fun again. Come on, let's go to your bedroom."

Arguing would have led to threats. And he couldn't go through that again, with her and the belt.

So before long, he was lying naked on his back, with the lights dimmed. This time she didn't secure his wrists.

She said, "Did you like it last time? My special massage?"

"Is that what you're planning today?"

"Tell me you liked it. You did, didn't you?"

“It was okay.”

She stripped to her underwear, and looked down at him. Then she took the last items off and stood there naked.

Skinny and tall, with small firm breasts. Not at all voluptuous, yet very sensual looking down at him.

She didn't bother with the massage routine this time, but put both hands on him straight away. She started kneading him with her delicate fingers, as she made his body respond.

She had the condom ready, and rolled it on.

She said, “Now doesn't that feel nice. Aren't I getting good at it?”

“Of course you can do all that, and I can't help reacting, but we shouldn't —”

She leaned down and kissed him.

“Why not?”

“You know why not. I'm in a relationship with your mother, not with you.”

She laughed. “You're fooling yourself. What sort of relationship is it where she nearly kills you for speaking out of turn, and now spends more time in bed with Brad?”

“I'm still her husband, ...”

“You're expecting a special massage now, aren't you?”

Greg kept quiet. It wasn't going to matter what he said anyway.

She kissed him again, touching his lips with her tongue. She did it so perfectly, that he couldn't help respond.

She whispered, “You know what I want you to say, but add some more words to show you really mean it.”

Greg looked up at her. She was so intense and excited, waiting for his response. He couldn't disappoint her. “Rebecca, my darling, I love you.”

She kissed him, then giggled. “Then maybe we should move on and have a relationship like you occasionally have with Nicole. Maybe it's time we had sex.”

“No, Rebecca. Leave that for the future, when you meet someone you want to marry.”

She reached down to the bedside cupboard and searched for something. Then she lifted it up to look at it. Greg tensed again. It was a tube of lubricant, and she was applying it to herself.

She looked down at him. "I want to get you really excited, if I'm going to have sex with you."

She went to the bottom of the bed, and stood astride, with her arms outstretched to the side.

"Look at me. You're my man, and I'm going to make love to you. Tell me that's what you want."

Greg tried to blank his mind off, but she did look so erotic standing there. And so desirable. He was aching to have sex with this woman.

"I want you, Rebecca. I want you desperately."

She put her fingers on her breasts. "Keep talking. Say nice things, ... how you feel about me."

"You're beautiful, and sexual. I love you and I want you, ... I want you more than anything."

Greg was getting warm as he spoke, and she caressed herself. All he could think of was her. "Please, Rebecca, come and make love to me."

She crept onto the bed, and on top of him, and he felt her body sliding over his. Then she had hold of him, and was guiding it into position. She pushed her hips downwards, until it was beginning to hurt him.

Then suddenly it slipped into her, and she gasped with pleasure.

"Greg, I can feel it inside me. It's wonderful. That's my first sex in Utopia. And you're the man that did it with me. You're my lover now."

She started moving around on him, and he closed his eyes feeling the shape of her body against his. Her breasts were firm, and her nipples were erect. Each time they touched his chest, he wanted more.

As she kissed him, he put the tip of his tongue between her lips. She responded, by pushing her hips hard onto him.

And that was it. His body shook, and as he climaxed, he gasped, "I love you, Rebecca. I love you, ..."

She was so excited, that she momentarily had trouble breathing. Then all she wanted to do was kiss him and kiss him again. And he responded to all of it, until they both could do no more.

Finally, they lay back side by side.

She said, "You're my lover now, and that makes you mine as much as Nicole's. Greg, tell me you desire me as your lover."

Greg wondered what to say. Nothing was safe. So why not the truth? Rebecca wouldn't be telling her mother any of this.

"Yes, of course I desire you."

"And do you desire me more than Nicole?"

"Rebecca, you're a beautiful woman, and you've just made love to me, so how do you think I feel? Right now, I desire you more than any other woman."

They lay there for a long time in silence.

Greg said, "Just now, you said it was your first sex in Utopia. Does that mean you had sex back home?"

"I had it twice with a man in the office. But it was a bit dull. Not like with you. So really this was my first proper sex."

"Nicole doesn't know, does she?"

"Of course not. Why should I tell her?"

Then silence again.

"Greg, tell me again how you desire me."

He laughed. "Rebecca, I desire you more than anything."

"Then I want you to make love to me."

Arguing would be pointless. And anyway, it's what he wanted too.

Given the choice of her against Nicole or Kelly, there was no question who he wanted most. And it wasn't just sexual desire. Maybe it was her youth, or her vitality, or even her self-confidence. Whatever the reason, this woman was like no other.

In the past, he'd never been sure about what love meant, even with Nicole. But this was different.

He really was in love with Rebecca.

The next morning, Brad made breakfast as usual, but then disappeared off to his room with Tim to play video games.

Rebecca moved to sit opposite Greg. "That was exciting last night, wasn't it? Or are you feeling guilty?"

"I love you, Rebecca. Of course it was exciting."

"Better than with Nicole?"

Greg looked round to double-check that Brad or Tim hadn't come back.

"Better than with anyone. You've so much energy, and you're so passionate, I can't stop thinking about it."

"Then we'll do it again sometime. Now I'd better get on with my project. I've had some ideas and I'm going to write them up before I'm back at the office. That'll impress them. Nobody else does work at home."

She blew him a kiss, then slid off the chair, and headed for her room.

Greg switched on the TV. Not much on, as usual, but it passed the time, and kept him from thinking about Rebecca.

It was late morning that Nicole returned, still in her evening wear. A quick kiss, then she went to her bedroom to change.

She seemed to be a long time, then Greg heard shouting. Next thing, the living room door flew open. She marched in, and switched off the TV. What was ominous was that Brad was with her and was looking frightened.

Nicole faced Greg. "Is it true? Have you been having sex with my daughter?"

Greg froze. A hundred confused thoughts, and nothing clear. Had Brad been listening? What had he heard? Had he even opened the door a little, and seen something?

Nicole said, "Well? Aren't you going to answer?"

By now, Rebecca had come into the room, looking pale and nervous.

Greg said, "Rebecca was upset about something, and came to my room to chat, that's all. I hugged her and comforted her, but that's

all.”

“So how come Brad says he saw you both naked on the bed together?”

Nicole burst into tears. “How could you? With my own daughter?”

Rebecca stuttered, “Mom, it was —”

“Shut up, and go to your room. I’ll talk to you later.”

Rebecca shuffled back out of the living room and closed the door behind her.

Nicole dried her tears, with a tissue from Brad.

“So, Greg, what have you to say?”

“It just happened. I was on my own, and feeling sorry for myself, what with you not here. When Rebecca came to me, things just seemed to happen. It wasn’t —”

“You’re disgusting, taking advantage of her. Well, one thing for sure, that finishes our relationship.”

“But Nicole, —”

“How could we carry on, now this has happened? And how could I trust that you wouldn’t do it again? No. It’s over between us, and you’ll have to leave.”

“But where would I go? I can’t leave Utopia on my own. Please, Nicole —”

The door buzzer sounded, and Brad rushed off to answer it.

Nicole said, “That’ll be the police.”

“What? Why did you call them?”

“Because I’m sure that you forced yourself on Rebecca. And that’s a crime.”

The night in jail wasn't so bad. At least when women run jails, they're kept clean, and the food's okay. And this time there was no flogging.

Early next morning, he was back in court. The magistrate this time was an elderly woman. Whether that was good or bad for his case, who could tell?

She told him that the charge was rape, and then she advised him at length of his rights, which in total were near to zero.

Then the police read out Nicole's statement.

It was damning, and clearly accusing him of the crime. She'd said that Rebecca had not realized how Greg had been manipulating her, and that even though she said it was consensual, it was nothing of the kind. It was an older man seducing and confusing a young girl, until she didn't have any will to resist. In Nicole's opinion it was no different than a man forcing a woman to have sex.

Then it was Greg's turn. He repeated what he'd told Nicole, and emphasized that it was consensual. But every time he said that, he sensed that the magistrate would be thinking back to what Nicole had said. Things didn't look good.

Then the police got to Rebecca's statement. And it was unexpected. She'd said that it wasn't just consensual, but that she'd pressured Greg into it, even though he was unwilling initially. She said that her mother still thought of her as a girl who could be manipulated, but she wanted to make clear that she was a woman with her own mind, empowered by being in Utopia, and that no man would be able to manipulate or influence her to do anything she didn't want to.

The magistrate took a few minutes to type in her notes, and then she turned to Greg.

"I've heard all the statements, and I'm far from satisfied that you are as innocent as you and the girl say. However, she is extremely clear and articulate in her statement, and I have to accept her version of events. But I warn you that, if you ever come before me on a similar charge in future, I won't be so inclined to favor you. And this

arrest and charge will stay on your record, so it will be accessible to any other court in Utopia.”

She stood up. “Case dismissed.”

By late morning, Greg was back at the apartment.

It was no surprise to find that his entry code didn’t work. When Nicole came to the door, her face was flushed, ready for confrontation.

“So you got off. Well, that doesn’t make you innocent in my eyes. You’re not welcome here any more.”

She pulled a suitcase into the doorway.

“Here, take your belongings and go. I’ve put some money on your cash card, although heaven knows you don’t deserve it.”

Greg swallowed. “But I’ve nowhere to go.”

“That’s your problem. You’ll have to find a hostel. Now go, and never come back.”

She slammed the door.

Greg walked for a while, trying but failing to make sense of the situation. He’d never wanted to come to Utopia, and now he was trapped here, on his own, and homeless. He found a bar, and got in a couple of drinks while he searched for lodgings on one of the computer terminals.

The hostel where Adam was staying didn’t look too bad, although like most it was in a run-down neighborhood. And it wasn’t cheap. The owners of these places knew they could exploit the men staying there, and now for one room, and shared facilities, he’d be paying as much as renting a small apartment.

But at least he’d know someone there.

Next morning, Greg headed off to work from the hostel. But when he checked in, he was escorted to the personnel department, where he had to sit and wait, without any explanation.

After nearly an hour, he was ushered into a meeting room, to be seated opposite the personnel manager. There were two others present, who gave the impression that they were there to take notes, but undoubtedly were also there as witnesses. The setting wasn't much different from the magistrate's court.

The manager checked her computer. "I think you know why you're here, don't you?"

Best to play the innocent. "Sorry, but I don't. What's it about?"

The manager glanced at the other two, and then looked back at Greg. "I'm afraid we have to terminate your employment. You've been arrested and charged with a serious offense, and the company has a strict policy on such things."

"Just a moment. Those charges were dismissed. I'm guilty of nothing."

She smiled back. "I know that. If you had been found guilty, you wouldn't be here now, you'd be in jail. The problem, Greg, is that it's a matter of the company's reputation. When we send an engineer to a customer location, we have to be sure that nothing about the engineer could give the customer cause for concern. And as it's not difficult to access criminal records, we can't take the chance. That's why you have to go. It would be the same with most large companies."

"Is any appeal possible?"

"No, the rules are clear. We'll give you a week's pay in lieu of notice, but that's all we can do."

Greg made his way back to the hostel. So now he was unemployed.

He phoned a couple of job agencies, but got nowhere. They took his details, but it seemed that although some of the smaller employers weren't concerned about arrests, so long as there was no

conviction, they wouldn't take on someone without a permanent address. And that didn't include hostels.

The only suggestion he got was to get casual work, until something better came up.

At least in the evening there were others to talk to, who'd been through the same problems, including of course Adam. There was plenty of advice too, although none of the men thought of a future beyond what they were doing, apart from speculation on the possibility of finding a woman to take them on, and get them out of the hostel.

Aside from bar work, the others did unskilled jobs paying a little more, but without the prospect of extra money from tips. And Greg wanted to earn as much as he could. Whatever the future held, he'd need money, and as Adam said there was a vacancy where he worked, that made the decision easy.

He went to meet the manager there, who for once was a man.

"So, Greg, have you done any bar work before?"

"No, but I'm a quick learner."

"So Adam says, but I'll be watching you, and I'll want you up to speed within a few days."

"That won't be a problem, trust me. So I start tomorrow?"

"Okay, we'll give you a try. Now regarding tips, the policy here is that half goes to me and the backroom staff. You're good looking, and the customers will love that. So if you make an effort with the way you look, and be really attentive to them, you should make plenty."

"That's what I'm hoping. Is there anything else?"

"Just one more thing. Look at the other staff. We don't have a uniform, but you'll need to blend in, and pink is the theme color here."

Greg looked around. The customers were mostly women, and the waiters all men, in the usual tight clothes, with a lot of pink and bits of jewelry. Their faces were shiny and smooth from the moisturizer, and their lips reflected the light.

Greg felt sick, but forced a smile.

"No problem."

Part 6 – ESCAPE?

It was quiet when Greg arrived mid-morning for his first day at the bar. The manager looked him over.

"Not bad. You could do with a little more moisturizer round your eyes, but otherwise you're okay. I think the customers will like you."

"So what do I have to do?"

"We'll start you off waiting on tables on the day shift. It's less hectic than working at the bar, and it gives you a chance to get used to things before you deal with the evening crowd."

Then a quick tour round, and it was time to attend to his first customers.

It was a group of four businesswomen, laughing and joking together, until Greg arrived.

One of the women said to him, "You're new aren't you?"

"I just started today. Can I take your orders?"

"I like the fit of your pants. Come round here."

Greg moved to stand next to where she was seated. Her hand moved across to his behind, and slipped over the material. "Very nice. I think you're going to get on well here."

He smiled at her, and she smiled back, only slowly taking her hand away.

And that set the pattern for the rest of his shift. All his customers were women, and if there wasn't touching, there'd be comments, with sexual innuendo. The worst was where one of them put her fingertips to his crotch. It wasn't easy, with his erection fighting against the tight pants.

The shift finished late afternoon, and the manager was smiling as he counted the tips.

"Greg, you've done better than I expected for a first day. The job's permanent if you want it."

With the tips, tax-free, Greg had made more money than in his old job. It was going to cover his rent, and leave money spare for savings.

"I certainly do want the job. It was stressful, but I can't say I didn't enjoy it. It's just frustrating having these women so close, and

not being able to do anything.”

“Don’t worry about that. Sooner or later, you’ll be propositioned. All the waiters get that. And it’s up to you what you do about it. Just make sure they pay you up front. And be sure they pay you enough.”

Greg laughed. “Doesn’t that make me a prostitute?”

“We don’t view it that way. It’s just about making some extra money. Now if you want big money, of course you could go the whole way, like those two over there.”

Greg looked across. Two young men, in the usual clothes, but too much jewelry, and overdone makeup, with glossy red lips. And strappy little shoes, like Greg had to wear for the wedding.

“I couldn’t dress up like that, and anyway I wouldn’t want to be having sex for money all day. It takes the fun out of it.”

“Well, it’s your choice. But meantime, it suits me if you stick with the bar work. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Greg closed the outer door behind them.

Adam put down his load, and stood still, looking around at the dimly lit entrance area, with the dark passageways leading off.

"I can't believe we're in here, Greg, and so easily."

"Well, come on then, and you can see the rest of it."

Greg led the way, down the corridors, round the back of electrical panels and pipes, until they arrived at the hiding place. Greg had always known where he could hide the supplies. It was in exactly the same place as back home, where the men used to hide for a while, away from supervision. A long narrow space, behind a mass of ducting, where no one ever went. And this part of the station carried the dust of decades, not just years.

Greg had already stored most of the supplies on previous trips. The sweetened drinks, the oxygen, and a couple of insulated blankets were where he had left them. Now they had the survival suits. Greg pushed them up behind the piping, next to the other supplies. No one was likely to come to this place, but just in case they did, it was best to hide everything.

Greg said, "Let's go and look at the track now."

"I can't wait. Do we have to keep quiet?"

"Not right now, but once I open the doorway, we'll have to be careful, just in case there's someone around."

Greg led the way again, until they were at the door.

"Now we need to be quiet, and keep the flashlights off."

He slid the door open a little, to view the track, and the train.

Adam looked through and smiled. "It's just waiting for us ..."

"And you're sure you can get us into that compartment?"

"No problem. I know exactly what to do ... So when I'm well enough, are we going to do it straight away?"

"There's a problem with the weather right now, so we might need to wait a few weeks. But once you're fit enough, and the storms have cleared, there's nothing to be gained by delaying it."

Adam said, "These have been the best days of my life, preparing for this. Thank you, for giving me the chance to come with you."

“No need to thank me. I couldn’t do it without you. Just give it a few weeks, and we’ll be in Cassini, celebrating over a drink, and planning our futures.”

Adam smiled, but his face was pale. To Greg, he didn’t look as if he was going to be well anytime soon.

Greg said, “There is one thing that worries me. If something happens to one of us, then neither of us can get out of here. I’m wondering if we should trade our secrets. Maybe I should tell you my key code, and you tell me how to get into that train. What do you think?”

Adam shook his head. “My knowledge is my ticket out of here. If I told you what I know, what’s to stop you going without me?”

“But the same is true the other way round. You could go without me. It’s a matter of trusting each other.”

“Hell, Greg. You know I haven’t the confidence to go on my own. So let’s leave things as they are.”

After a couple of weeks on the day shift, Greg started on evening work. The evening clientele were younger and less sophisticated, with more partying and drunkenness. Often groups of young women would come in, already half-drunk, and it was a nightmare getting orders without being grabbed by each one of them.

But the tips made up for it. These drunken women might be badly behaved, but they were generous.

It was at the end of the third evening, near midnight, and the customers were thinning out and going home. The manager called Greg over.

“That woman over there would like a word. And if you want to leave early, that’s okay.”

Greg looked across. She was overweight, and older than him, and not the sort of woman he’d seek out. But she seemed pleasant enough, and she wasn’t ugly. And there had to be a first time. He’d spent long enough thinking about it.

An hour later, they were in a room at a nearby hotel, and were stripping off. She’d put the cash on the table, but he hadn’t wanted to count it openly. It was clear enough anyway that it was serious money. So he gave her the best he could.

It was early morning before he got back to the hostel, and got a chance to count the money. It was a day’s wages for a couple of hours work, and some would say it wasn’t even work.

Something made him glance across at the wall mirror.

It was comical really. He was sitting there in his jewelry and makeup, counting cash.

Now he was a prostitute on top of everything else.

The bar had just opened up, and as yet there were no customers.

The manager said, "So, Greg, are you still trying to get yourself a woman?"

"My ex-wife won't give a reference, so it's not that easy. But anyway, I told you already what I'd really like to do. I want to go home."

"But going back's not so simple, without a wife to take you."

Greg said, "That's true ... but how about you? Don't you ever wonder what it would be like to be somewhere else, where you'd have more rights?"

"I've never thought about it. I'm happy enough as things are. My wife runs the house, and organizes everything for me. And here in the bar, I'm the one in charge, well of the staff, if not the customers."

"But what about the chastiser?"

"Hell, did your wife use that on you? You must have really pissed her off. My wife gave me a blip of that one time, and I've been careful ever since."

Greg laughed. "She gave me a lot more than that, trust me. But is there no way I can get back, without getting married?"

"No, it would be impossible. The only thing you could do is pay a woman to marry you and take you back. It could be done, but the woman would be risking prosecution under the emigration laws. It would cost a fortune."

"But these prostitutes earn good money. Would that be enough?"

"It's the right kind of money, but it would take years of being fucked by ugly women, and then there are no guarantees."

It was a quiet evening, with few customers, and it gave Greg time to think. Adam's illness could go on for months, maybe years, and without Adam, he couldn't get into that compartment. He needed a fallback plan, and that meant that he had to try and get a wife.

Next morning, he logged onto an introduction agency, and entered his details, then phoned them.

It was a pleasant-sounding young woman that answered. She gave him her standard opening about how successful the agency was at pairing unattached men with women, and then she got into detail. She said that his age and appearance were fine, and she'd already put him on the system.

But without a reference from Nicole, and with the arrest on his record, she told him that there'd be little chance of success. He could have guessed that anyway, but at least he was on the system, with some chance of moving forward. He knew that he'd have to go for any woman that would have him, however old or ugly. And he'd have to do it with enthusiasm.

And so life went on. Every few days, Greg logged onto the agency site to see if anything was happening. A number of women had viewed his details initially, but no one had wanted to meet him. And there were fewer and fewer views now. Some days none at all.

So his attention had gone back to escaping by train. The good news was that, after weeks of extreme weather, it was reported that the surface conditions had finally stabilized.

Adam's health had hardly improved, but he'd said that he didn't want to wait any longer. So they'd made their decision. They would attempt their escape tonight.

Greg started work at the bar, cleaning tables and getting things ready, but with his mind on rehearsing the plan. Timing was critical, as they needed to enter the train after the baggage was loaded. He'd timed every part of their plan that he could, and he'd been back to make sure the supplies were ready to pick up. He'd watched a couple of trains departing, to be sure they kept to the schedules. And he'd made sure —

The manager interrupted him. "Hey Greg, any idea where Adam is? He should have been here by now, and he's not answering his phone."

Greg went back to the hostel, and hammered on Adam's door, but got no response, so called the building manager. After knocking the door, and shouting his name, the manager opened the door. Inside, Adam was lying on his bed, motionless, with his eyes open, and a look of surprise. His body was cold.

Greg said, "What you think happened to him?"

"The door was locked, so no one's been in here. Looks to me like a heart attack. Not that it matters."

The manager went through the chest of drawers, and the two cupboards, taking out any money he found.

"Right, Greg, help yourself to anything you want from here, although I doubt there's anything valuable, and there won't be any more money. I'm keeping that to cover the unpaid rent. You take what you want, and then I'll call the police. Once the body's gone,

I'm clearing the room out. I've got a tenant ready to move in, and I don't want to lose him."

After the manager left, Greg carried out his own search. There were a few drawings and diagrams of the trains, and some handwritten notes. He put them all in a bag, and then went back to work.

It was later in the day, when he had a break from his bar work, that he looked through the documents. There was information about the baggage compartment, and some layout drawings. But nothing about the lock or the key.

Greg slammed his fist on the table.

Now he was never going to escape from Utopia.

Greg had almost given up on meeting a woman through the agency.

He'd been on their system for some time, and most days his details didn't even get viewed. But finally, someone wanted to meet him.

He'd arrived early at the agency office. This could be his only chance, so he'd had his hair styled, and was wearing a pale green jumpsuit, with a necklace and bracelet, and a little make-up. In the mirror, he still felt uncomfortable, but it might just be what a woman here would be looking for.

It was scary waiting for the door to open. At worst it would be some ugly old crone, who couldn't get any other man. But if she had money, and if that's what it would take, then he'd play along.

The door opened, and a young woman came in. She closed the door behind her, then turned to face him.

It was Rebecca.

Greg stuttered, "What are you doing here?"

"I've come to meet you. Aren't you pleased to see me again?"

"But why are you here? Don't you know I'm looking for a woman to take me on?"

Rebecca smiled and sat down. "I'm a woman, if you recall. Maybe I'll take you on."

Greg hesitated. This might be Rebecca fantasizing, but if there was a possibility, ...

"But you don't have your own apartment, do you?"

"No, but your details said you have a job. If you provide the money, I can rent a small apartment for you. Then I can visit you, and we could have fun together again. I think that would be perfect."

It seemed a crazy scenario, but he realized it could work. A rental would be no more costly than his hostel room, and then he'd have a permanent address, and could go job hunting again.

"What about your mother? She's sure to find out."

"How would she do that? My bank account's private, and I never tell her where I am anyway."

The thought of getting out of the hostel was appealing enough, and it would be a bonus to have Rebecca come and play her games once in a while. There was no downside.

“All right, Rebecca. If that’s what you want, let’s do it.”

It had been four weeks, since Greg moved into the apartment. It wasn't a great neighborhood, but it was costing less than the hostel. And the big difference was that he was in his own place, rather than living like a transient.

The apartment was tiny, with a single room to eat, sleep and cook in, and a corner bathroom that he could hardly get into. But at least he didn't have to share it with anyone.

He'd decided against getting a new job. The bar work was flexible, and he generally worked in the day now, rather than the evenings. Now that he had his own place, where he could bring clients back, he could go to the bar in the evening, dressed up, and pick up an occasional escort job, for money to go into his savings. One day, if he ever did try to escape, the money could be vital.

Rebecca came about twice a week, in the evenings. They'd chat for a while, and have some good sex, and then she'd be gone.

Their relationship was one-sided. When she arrived at his apartment, he felt the same loving feelings towards her as before. He wanted to kiss and embrace, and to love her. But more than anything, he wanted her to love him too. But she never said that she loved him, and he never asked her, fearing the answer may not be what he wanted.

All the same, life in Utopia didn't seem so bad now. And Rebecca liked the arrangement. It was her escape from Nicole, and her chance to have her own man, and of course do what she wanted with him.

The only irritation was that she wanted the tattoo changed to her name. That was going to be extremely painful, and he was resisting it. But she'd been getting more insistent.

And she'd already hinted that she could easily end the arrangement, and have him back at the hostel.

One evening, Rebecca arrived in high spirits.

"Greg, what would you say, if I told you I'd had sex with one of the men at work?"

"What could I say? It's your life, and you can do what you want. Did you enjoy it?"

"Mmm... it was all right, but not as good as when we do it. I might try again with one of the others. Maybe I was just unlucky with this one."

Greg laughed. "You'll have to keep scores, and let me know how I am in the rankings."

"I think you'll always be near the top, however many I get through."

"Rebecca, has Nicole's new husband ever tried it on? Or have you suggested anything to him?"

"No, he's not my type. He's hardly different from Brad, so I don't see why she wanted him. She still usually sleeps with Brad, you know. Actually, I did think of trying, but after what happened to us, I don't trust Brad, and I don't want to go through all that again."

Greg said, "You know, I never thanked you for owning up about our sex together when I was at Nicole's. I shudder to think what they would have done with me if you hadn't."

"There's no doubt about that. You'd have been castrated. And that didn't fit with my plans at all. That's why I took the blame."

Greg laughed. All this time, he'd assumed that Rebecca had felt guilty, or even sorry for him.

"Well, thanks anyway, whatever your reasoning. And you got what you wanted, didn't you? Me as your man to order around and have sex with?"

"Exactly. But I've not been too bossy, have I?"

"I suppose not. Apart from your insistence on the tattoo."

"Because I was in the right. I'm the one that's looking after you, so why should you carry on with her name on your neck?"

"But did you have to get so angry about it?"

"It was because you weren't doing what I said, and it wasn't much to ask."

"It was painful having the old one removed, and the new one on top. I was sore for days afterwards."

"You'd have been a lot more sore if we'd been married. I'd have used the chastiser, and then you wouldn't have been arguing."

"Well, don't get emotional about it now. I did it, didn't I?"

She came close and inspected the tattoo. "Yes, you did, and that shows that you're mine."

"The tattoo doesn't really make any difference, Rebecca. I'm yours anyway, and I like it like that."

She kissed him. "In a year or so, when I've finished my training, I'll be making a lot more money, and I'll get my own place. I've decided to have two husbands, and if you stay well-behaved, you can be one of them."

"Why two husbands?"

"I think it would be a lot more interesting. I could choose who I sleep with each night, and it would be fun deciding. Maybe I'd set you both a task to do, and see who wins."

"What sort of task?"

She giggled. "Oh, I don't know. Something physical though, maybe with you both naked, ..."

Greg laughed. "You're crazy."

The next day, Greg returned from work, to find Rebecca already there.

She frowned. "Nicole's going to spoil everything."

Greg sat next to her, and put his arm around her. "What's the matter? What's she done now?"

"This morning she told me she was getting tired of her husband, and she's going to throw him out. She was getting bored with him anyway, but then last night she caught him kissing Brad, and she went berserk.

"The men were kissing?"

Rebecca said, "From what I've heard, lots of men do it with eunuchs. But Nicole's old-fashioned. She lost her temper and was shouting at them both. Brad went off to his little room and left the two of them arguing. She was getting so angry that I thought she might get the chastiser out again. It was getting quite exciting. But she didn't do that. She sent him to his own room, and then she calmed down, and I thought it was all over. But now she's talking of getting rid of him."

Greg said, "Why are you upset about it? Does it matter to you what she does with him?"

"I'll tell you why it matters. Because if she throws him out, she said she might get you back, and then where does that leave me?"

"You mean as a husband? But we haven't even spoken since we broke up."

"She doesn't need to speak to you. She can go to the court and resume the marriage, and then you'll have to go back to her."

"Permanently?"

Rebecca laughed. "No, not permanently. She wants a younger man, but I think you're handy in the meantime until she finds the right one. She wants to take her time on choosing the next one, and she quite likes you still. That's why she might have you back for a while. But that messes everything up for us, doesn't it? Once you're back with her, I'll hardly have a chance to kiss you, never mind having sex, with Brad around.

Greg said, "Suppose I refuse to go back to her?"

"It's the law. You have no choice. She can resume the marriage any time she wants, unless you're already married. So as long as you're single, she can get you back any time. It's infuriating, isn't it?"

It had been a productive day.

Some big tips at the bar, and then one of his regular escort jobs to finish the day off.

"Tonight, you were better than ever, Greg. I've left you an extra little reward on the bed."

He smiled. "It's not difficult with you. You're my favorite, and by far the most attractive."

At the doorway of the apartment she hesitated. "There's no lip balm on me, is there?"

"No you're fine. This lip balm stays where it is."

He kissed her again, then opened the door for her to leave.

Rebecca was standing there, open-mouthed.

His client smiled, and winked at Greg, then left.

Rebecca marched in, and kicked the door closed.

"Who the hell is that? A girlfriend?"

"I don't have girlfriends. She's —"

"She's paid you for sex, hasn't she? Or do you always paint your lips red now?"

"So what if she paid me? I have to earn money the best way I can."

"Well, I don't like it, and I certainly don't want to have to see these women."

"But I wasn't expecting you. You didn't tell me you were coming."

"I only decided an hour or so ago. I thought it would be a nice surprise for you to have sex with me, but you're probably worn out now."

Greg smiled. "I can recover fast. I'll just go and get my face cleaned up, and we'll have a drink."

He turned to go, but she grabbed his shoulder.

"Just a moment. I haven't seen you like this before. When you have sex with them, do you keep the jewelry on?"

"Yes. They expect it."

"Then I want to pretend to be one of your clients tonight. I'll sit down, and you can bring me a drink, like you would with them. Then

I'll give you some money, and you can show me what you do for them."

Greg smiled. "All right, but I must warn you, I don't come cheap."

"And I must warn you that I'll expect a lot for my money. You're not to stop until I tell you."

Greg was never sure when Rebecca would turn up. But today she'd called and asked him to finish work early, and get to the apartment.

And then it all happened very fast.

"She's thrown him out, and she's talking about you. I've decided there's only one way out of this. We've got to get married, this evening, before she goes to the court tomorrow."

Greg sat down, and tried to breathe slowly, but his heart was racing.

It might be a good thing to block the move back to Nicole. But marrying Rebecca was a worrying prospect. Who knows what it would be like if she moved in with him? This was the girl who found it exciting to watch Nicole punishing him.

Greg said, "I don't think that's a good idea. Nicole would never talk to you again if you did that."

"Maybe so, but at least I'd have you, wouldn't I?"

And she'd have power over him. The same power Nicole had, except that Rebecca was so unpredictable. If she enjoyed watching him being chastised, she might take the opportunity to do it to him herself. He could end up making tiny mistakes, and have her electrocuting him. This girl was scary.

"Maybe you're wrong about Nicole. Why not wait to be sure what she's going to do?"

"I am sure. We have to get married straight away. Then she can't get you back. Let's phone for an appointment."

He would have argued more, but it was a good arrangement with Rebecca and this apartment, and the last thing he wanted was to be back with Nicole, disrupting it all, and then having to start all over when she tired of him again. But being subject to Rebecca's whims was maybe too big a risk.

Unless ...

"Rebecca, I can go along with this for a year or so, but I'll never be happy until I'm back home. I'll marry you on one condition. That

within a year, you'll take me back to Cassini. As my wife, you can do that."

"But suppose we're happy here. Why would you want it to end then?"

"If I change my mind, fine, but otherwise I want your solemn promise."

"All right, if that's so important to you, I promise to take you back within a year. Now can I make the call?"

The marriage ceremony was somewhat shorter than when he'd married Nicole.

The officer was clearly impatient to get it over with, and mumbled quickly through her own lines, before having Greg and Rebecca say their vows.

Rebecca also seemed to want to get it done as quickly as possible. The only point at which she showed any interest was when she was handed the chastiser.

Two hours after they'd left the apartment, they were in a bar celebrating.

Rebecca said, "So how does it feel, now we're married?"

"Much the same. But it's going to be different living together."

"I know. It's a new phase of my life, and it's quite exciting. The girls at the office will be so envious. I've told them all about you."

"Are you going to phone Nicole?"

"I suppose so. I wanted a drink first, but now I'd better get on with it."

Rebecca went off to a dark corner to make the call.

Greg could only guess what was going on at the other end, but Rebecca did her fair share of shouting.

Back at the bar, she finished her drink, and smiled.

"I knew it. She was annoyed with me getting married, and specifically to you, but what made her furious was that she was going to get you back tomorrow. So we did it just in time."

Greg ordered more drinks. "Let's have these, and go back to the apartment. It's our wedding night after all."

"Then we ought to do something special, now that we're married. Something we'll always remember."

At the apartment, they had another drink, and then another.

Greg said, "I don't know what you have in mind, but if we don't start soon, I'm going to fall asleep."

"Don't you worry. I'm wide awake, and I know what we're going to do. And it's something really different, ... a night to remember. A wedding night like no one else has had."

She didn't say much after that, while they tidied up, ready for going to bed. And in the bedroom, she was quiet too, until they were both undressed.

She turned down the lights, and lay on her back on the bed.

Greg smiled, "Well, Rebecca, lying spread out like that means you've something in mind. What do you want me to do?"

She said, "Kneel over me, and kiss me."

He complied, kissing her gently. He'd always tried to avoid getting aroused by her too quickly, but she was so sensual, ... and this time there was the added thrill that now they were married, she could do what she wanted with him. It made it more exciting than ever.

She said, "Now put your finger where I'm most sensitive, and tell me what you feel there."

Greg reached down. "It's something sticky."

He put his finger to his lips. "It's syrup."

She said, "In the ceremony, you promised to obey me. Well, this will be a test of your obedience. I want you to lick that syrup off me, every scrap."

He moved down the bed, and she lifted her knees up for him. She watched him start, and then she lay back, humming a tune while he worked. It wasn't a bad taste, but she'd put plenty on, and his mouth felt sickly. It took maybe five minutes, before he was sure that he'd finished. And he wanted to be sure. She'd stopped humming now, and was breathing heavily.

"All the syrup's gone now, Rebecca."

"Did you like the way I tasted?"

"Of course I did. You're very sweet."

“That’s good, because you haven’t finished yet. I’ve put some inside me too. So make sure you get all of it, Greg. You’ll have to go really deep to find it. Now, prove your obedience.”

And so another few minutes, where he pushed his tongue in until it hurt, gathering any speck of syrup. Meantime, she was moving around, and it got harder to hold her. But finally he was done.

He sat back on the edge of the bed. “You enjoyed that, didn’t you?”

“It was lovely. It was just what I imagined. Now we’re married, we’ll have lots of new things to try.”

“So what now, are you ready to make love?”

“That all depends ...”

She put her finger down between her legs, and brought it up to taste it. “Greg, I can still taste the sweetness. That means you didn’t get it all like I asked you to.”

“Do you want me to do it again?”

“No, I don’t. Once is enough. Now what should I do with you, as you’ve failed to obey me?”

“Hell, Rebecca, I tried my best. I thought I did pretty well.”

She jumped off the bed.

“Lie down, Greg, face down on the bed.”

“Why, what are you going to do?”

She frowned. “Quickly, please.”

He got back on the bed and lay face down.

She pulled his hair aside from his ear, and whispered, “I’m going to make love to you, my darling. Wonderful love, all night long.”

Then she kissed his neck and giggled.

“But first, I’m going to chastise you.”

Part 7 – NO WAY BACK

It had been three months since he married Rebecca, and it had been the most sex he'd had in his life. That was the good side of the marriage. The bad side was that Rebecca had become increasingly dominant and assertive. Of course, in Utopia that was her right, and Greg's status as a husband was little better than a servant. But anything was better than being single, and end up again in a hostel, only able to get menial jobs. The fact that she could terminate the relationship at any time was enough to keep him obedient, even without her using that damned chastiser.

Rebecca whispered, "I'm going to fuck you really hard tonight, my darling."

Lying naked under her, Greg couldn't help be excited, but he was nervous too.

Greg said, "Can't we just have regular sex for once?"

She ignored him, and proceeded to use the spray. He hated that stuff, as it stung like hell for the first few seconds. Rebecca smiled as she watched his penis grow and stiffen. It would be like that now for an hour or so, however he felt. But he didn't dare complain. Without that spray, he couldn't match her appetite for sex, and the outcome of that could be a much bigger problem.

Then she was back, and on top of him.

He tried to keep calm, as she got started, and for several minutes she took it easy. But then she started getting more excited, and before long he felt what he'd half-expected. The electrodes of the chastiser against his hips. That was her warning that he wasn't doing enough.

He tried to respond more actively, but he wasn't in the mood, and it was difficult. Seconds later he felt the small jolts of electricity. That spurred him on.

It was painful where the electrodes touched him, but she was only using a mild setting, and finally his hormones kicked in, and he started enjoying it. As the minutes went by, and she kept kissing him and stroking him, she was still giving him occasional shocks, but now

the pain was part of the experience, and he wanted nothing more than to carry on like this.

Finally his body shook as he climaxed, with her sighing with pleasure as she collapsed onto him.

After a few minutes, she rolled off to the side, and then they both lay there, breathing deeply in unison.

He began to feel sleepy, until Rebecca interrupted his thoughts. "We need to do something new to spice things up."

"Good grief, it couldn't get more intense."

"That's not what I mean. I just think it's time we tried something different. Wouldn't you like that too?"

The only thing Greg really wanted was to be back in Cassini, having regular sex, and with him in control, preferably with Rebecca. She wouldn't change the way she behaved here, but she'd promised to take him back after a year, and who knows, she may have tired of Utopia by then.

Greg said, "How different?"

"I don't know. But I'll think of something interesting, you'll see."

"Am I going to like it?"

"Maybe ... or maybe not. Anyway, it's what I like that matters, isn't it?"

He wasn't about to get into an argument, with the chastiser so close at hand.

"Hey, Greg. What are you doing here?"

"Oh, hi, Joe. I've been doing some work locally, and thought I'd take a walk. I didn't expect to see you though. Shouldn't you be at work?"

"I took a day off. Actually, Greg, I've not been well, and the work's beginning to get me down."

"You still with the drug company, making those medicines?"

"Yes, still there. But nothing very exciting. Nearly all my time is making the anti-cancer drug, and it's becoming tedious. I could do it in my sleep."

"All the same, it's clean and well paid, which is more than I can say. So how's Kelly? Same as always, I'd guess."

"Well, not quite. You remember she got a eunuch in? Well, she got tired of him, and let him go. She decided she wanted another real man, so now I'm sharing her with this young guy, and he's getting most of her attention. I suppose I can't blame her really, as he's a lot younger and virile. And you know how athletic she can be in bed."

Greg smiled. That had been a first for him, being told by his wife to sleep with another woman. Things weren't all bad in Utopia.

"I can guess how you feel. It was bad enough when Nicole had that eunuch in the apartment. I'd hate to be sharing with a real man. So is that what's got you down?"

"It's more than that. I'm nearly fifty, Greg, and you know what that means. If she tells me to go, I'll be finished. I'll be in a hostel, and the drug company won't want an unmarried man on the payroll. I've no real money to fall back on, so I'll be scheduled for termination."

Greg paused, trying to think of something positive.

"Are you sure you aren't overreacting? Kelly loves you, I'm sure of it, and having two men isn't that unusual. She'll probably dump the guy after a while."

"Maybe so, but I've felt so secure all these years with Kelly looking after me and protecting me, and now all this has happened

so fast. It's scary, Greg."

Greg was still thinking of that conversation with Joe when he got home. Maybe that was why he paused inside the doorway. There was an aroma of perfume. And in Utopia, that meant a man.

When he went into the lounge, a young man was there with Rebecca, and both were sipping wine.

"Come in, Greg, and meet Dale. He's going to spend the evening with us."

She held out a glass, and Greg accepted it, looking carefully at Dale. Not tall, but slim and handsome, maybe mid-twenties. Attractive enough to be a prostitute ...

Greg took hold of Rebecca's arm, and tried to pull her away.

"Rebecca, we need to talk."

But she resisted, and shook his hand off.

"I know what you want to say, so it's a waste of time having little discussions. Dale's one of my office team and I've invited him here, so be polite. Now let's all go though to the dining area. The food's been delivered, so let's eat and you two boys can get to know each other."

At the table, Dale looked nervous and this gave Greg some confidence.

"So Dale, what's Rebecca like at the office?"

Dale glanced at Rebecca, and muttered, "Fine ... Rebecca's a good manager."

"A bit bossy though?"

Dale went pink. "No ... Not at all ..."

The poor guy kept his head down and suddenly became very interested in his food.

Rebecca said, "Dale's one of my best people. He's got every chance of promotion." She smiled as Dale looked up. "So long as he does what I want."

Dale nodded agreement.

Rebecca turned to Greg. "Dale will do whatever I tell him to do, just like you. I just wonder what fun we can have together."

She carried on eating, while Greg and Dale glanced at each other, and kept silent.

Rebecca said, "Greg, don't you think Dale is attractive?"

"I suppose so ..."

She smiled. "I think we've had enough to eat. Greg, let's see if we can make him really pretty. Take him to the bedroom, and put some lip balm on him. Bright pink will be nice."

"Then do we come back here?"

"Oh, no. We're going to have some fun in the bedroom. You boys get undressed, and have Dale looking pretty, and I'll come and join you."

Dale stuttered, "But Rebecca, I ..."

Her stare ensured that he wouldn't finish the sentence.

Greg stood up. He knew there was no point arguing. "Come on, Dale."

In the bedroom, Greg closed the door.

Dale looked frightened. "What's she going to do?"

"She'll want sex, that's for sure, but what else I've no idea. We'd both better get undressed. Orders are orders."

"But it's not right. In the office, she can do what she wants, but outside there, she's no right to order me about."

Greg started undressing. "I wouldn't argue. She doesn't like that."

Dale started undressing too. He was thin and wiry, but muscular. Back home a guy like that would have all the girl friends he wanted. But Greg had a feeling that Dale might have different interests.

When they'd both stripped off, Greg said, "Let's put your lip balm on."

"No, I draw the line at that. I don't want to look like a prostitute."

"Suit yourself."

Greg went and sat on the side of the bed to wait, while Dale stood nervously by the door. Even in the warmth of the room, he seemed to be shivering.

After a few minutes, Rebecca arrived. She smiled when she saw them, but then frowned.

"Dale, why haven't you made yourself pretty for me?"

He stuttered, "I can't do it, Rebecca. It'll make me look cheap and horrible."

She shrugged, and went to the dresser, and picked up the chastiser. "Greg, take hold of him."

Greg got up, and approached Dale.

Dale backed to the wall. "Leave me alone. I want to go home."

But there was no escape. Greg took hold of him. He had to, otherwise she'd be using that on him.

She put the electrodes against Dale's body and pressed the button. Dale shouted out and his body shook. There were tears in his eyes.

Greg led him back to the bed and they both sat down. Rebecca handed the lip balm to Greg. "Put it on him, and make him look pretty."

Dale didn't resist.

Rebecca smiled. "Now let's have some fun. Get onto the bed, and lie on your backs next to each other."

When they were in position, Rebecca sprayed them, and then stood at the foot of the bed, slowly taking her clothes off, while their erections built.

"Do you like what you see, Dale?"

"Of course I do. You're very beautiful. I could tell that even in your work clothes."

"Then I'll start with you. But you two hold hands."

Reluctantly Greg clasped the outstretched hand, expecting a limp grip. But the guy was surprisingly strong.

She mounted Dale, and started on him. Greg had to smile. Dale's nervousness had gone, and he was giving a good performance, breathing deeply and moaning as she pushed down on him, getting louder and louder. Then without warning, she came off him, and dripped down onto Greg.

He'd have liked a slow start, but she'd already warmed up on Dale, and it was full speed, straight away. By the time she'd had enough, he was exhausted too, and for once it was all pleasure, without that damned chastiser.

She rolled off him, and pushed herself between them.

And then they lay there for several minutes, recovering.

She whispered, "Dale, you can go now. I'll see you at the office, and not a word, you understand?"

He slid off the bed, and within minutes was dressed, and had gone.

Greg said, "Now I know what you mean by different. Did you enjoy that?"

She hesitated. "Yes, but not as much as I expected. But I liked having Dale here, did you?"

Time to be diplomatic. "If it's what you want, then it's okay with me."

"And you don't mind that he works for me?"

Greg laughed. "No, not at all. I thought to start with that he was a prostitute."

"You were a prostitute once. What's wrong with that?"

"I don't think you could call me that. I was just making a little extra cash, that's all."

"If a client had paid enough, would you do anything she wanted?"

"I don't know ..."

"I think Dale will do whatever I want him to do, and I don't have to pay him."

"He didn't want to wear pink lip balm."

"Oh, he won't object next time. He knows now what will happen if he's awkward about it."

"So there's to be a next time?"

"Of course. But now we've got to know one another, next time we can try something more adventurous."

Greg clicked the keypad, and opened the engineering door at the back of the railroad station.

He had a job to do on the air conditioner. Otherwise he wouldn't have come here. Too many reminders of the plan that had failed, and his friend Adam.

Nothing had changed since the last time he was there, before Adam died and took with him the dream of escape. He walked along the corridors, remembering the excitement of planning the escape, and gathering the survival suits and the rest of the kit for the two of them to survive the three day journey.

After he fixed the problem with the air conditioner, he wandered further down to where he'd stored the supplies. It was all still there. Not a surprise really, but still reassuring, even though he'd never be able to use it all. He went on to the metal door, and slid it enough to look through. The train was there, like always, being loaded for the trip to Cassini.

He slid the door closed, and retraced his steps back to the outside. That was his work done for the day, and it was still only mid-afternoon. There was a coffee bar not far away where he and Nicole used to go, before she divorced him. He settled down to a large black coffee, and checked the news on his smartphone.

That's when Nicole sat down.

Greg nearly dropped his coffee. It was enough to see Nicole, but also that she sat down with him. Last time he'd seen her, she was kicking him out of the apartment, and cursing him, after his affair with her daughter.

"So, Greg, how's life with Rebecca?"

"Okay I guess ... I'm sorry for the way it happened."

"You were wrong, but I understand more now about how it happened. I hadn't realized how forceful Rebecca was. Of course I know now. I've heard plenty about her from where she works, and people use words like 'ruthless' to describe her. Anyway, that's a while ago, and we've both moved on."

"I never meant to hurt you, Nicole. Yes, she maybe did trap me, but I was willing, and I should have resisted, or at least told you before it got to that point. I do love her, but I love you too, and I'm sorry that I hurt you."

"Well, maybe it's all for the best. I've a new husband now, and I'm very happy with him."

Greg laughed. "Does he ever argue with you, like I did?"

"No, he never argues at all. Sometimes I wish he would, just for the fun of it, and then maybe I'd use that chastiser again."

"Don't mention that. I still remember what you did to me."

"Doesn't Rebecca use it?"

"Of course she does, but she's never put it on the danger setting like you did."

Nicole blushed. "Oh, you know about that ... Anyway, if you're happy now, that's okay with me. And I guess you've finally accepted that you're here for good now."

"It's not quite like that. I do love her, but when we married, she promised that after a year, she'd take me back to Cassini."

Nicole shook her head. "I wouldn't believe anything that girl promised. She'll only take you back if it's in her interest. And if she likes the current arrangement, she's hardly going to want to change it."

"But a promise is a promise."

"Believe what you want. But I wouldn't count on it."

"Perhaps I am making it too comfortable for her ... Maybe I should be less pleasant, at least in the last couple of months. Then she won't mind losing me."

"That's a dangerous game. If you don't behave, I wouldn't put it past her to throw you out. And then where would you be?"

"So what should I do?"

She took hold of his hand. "It's obvious isn't it? Forget Cassini. Accept that you're here, do what Rebecca tells you, and enjoy life."

"Like Joe? That's what he's done, and now he's not sure Kelly wants him any more. He thinks she might tell him to leave."

Nicole shrugged. "If she does, he can hardly complain. After all, he's fifty, and he's had many good years with her. But she's still got a

thing for him, so he's probably safe enough. Of course, her new man doesn't feel the same way."

"He doesn't like Joe?"

"Actually I think he likes him. But apparently he's not enthusiastic about Joe staying on there. Kelly thinks he's worried she'll move her attentions back to Joe later on."

"Well, that uncertainty's not for me. And whatever you say, I'm sure Rebecca will keep her promise. She knows how important it is for me."

Nicole frowned. "Greg, I think I know my daughter better than you do. Forget Cassini."

The aroma of Dale's perfume met Greg as he opened the door. He wasn't really surprised, as it had been two weeks since that first visit, and he knew Rebecca was impatient for a repeat session.

In the lounge, drinks as before, and some polite chatter, and then Rebecca put her drink down, and smiled, signaling it was time.

In the bedroom, with the lights low, Dale stripped off and Greg did the same, and Dale put on his lip balm, without even being told to.

Rebecca said, "Now we're going to do something different this time, boys. Are you ready for some excitement?"

Greg's muttered yes was overpowered by Dale's enthusiastic response.

"Okay, now both stand still for your spray. I don't want you slackening off half way."

They stood still while she sprayed. Dale was already hard anyway, but Greg soon caught up.

Rebecca picked up the chastiser and came close. "Good. Now boys, do exactly what I say or I'll have to use this on you, and we don't want that, do we?"

She pulled them round to face each other.

"Now Dale take hold of Greg's and Greg take hold of Dale's."

Greg hesitated but only for a second. The chastiser was still in her hand. He took hold of Dale's penis, and felt fingers close on his own.

"Now some gentle squeezing and massaging, and see how you two get on."

And so they started. Greg fought to feel emotionless, but this guy was doing a professional job. It was obvious that he'd done it before. Without the spray, Greg would have ejaculated in seconds.

Rebecca put her arms around them both. "Terrific. Now let go, and Greg, lie down ready for me."

He got onto the bed, and she slid onto him, maneuvering until she was satisfied with the position.

"I think Dale's made it bigger today. It's going to be fun for me. But Greg, what about Dale? He needs something to do."

It was pointless responding.

Rebecca waved to Dale. "Onto the bed, next to us, so Greg can hold your penis."

Dale leaped onto the bed next to them, and Greg put his hand out to take hold.

Then Rebecca started, slowly at first, and gradually getting faster and more energetic. Greg began to feel aroused, and couldn't help at times squeezing Dale's penis. He didn't dare let go.

Dale was getting more and more excited next to them, and was moving in sync as if he was having the sex too.

Then Rebecca said, "Dale, kiss him, and keep kissing him until I tell you to stop."

Dale didn't need a second invitation, and was on Greg's mouth before Greg had taken in what she'd said.

Now he was trapped. This crazy guy kissing him frantically, with his pink lips, and Rebecca humping him without tiring for a second.

Then he felt Dale's tongue between his lips, and he felt sick. But he could do nothing about it. So he closed his eyes, and tried to blank his mind by focusing on the sounds around him. And it worked. He felt the sensations of her sex and the passionate kissing, but it was as if it was happening to someone else. He lay there with them working on him, and started to enjoy it.

Greg lost track of time, until finally, Rebecca had had enough. She rolled over onto Dale, pulling him away from Greg, and started kissing him as passionately as Dale had kissed Greg.

Greg lay there calming down, as the two next to him started having sex.

It had been an experience like no other, and even pleasurable, once he'd adopted the right mindset. But it proved what he'd always suspected. He was there only for her pleasure. He wanted so much for Rebecca to love him as much as he loved her. But he knew now for certain that it would never be that way.

He looked across at her pushing down on Dale, gently and rhythmically. It was very erotic watching them. Dale's mouth was open slightly, breathing heavily, between those sensual pink lips.

Rebecca saw him and smiled.

“Greg, kiss Dale like he kissed you.”

"So, how can I help, Joe?"

"I don't think you can. But I needed to talk to someone, and you're the only person I can trust for an honest viewpoint."

Greg felt sorry for the guy, and from what Nicole had said, his days were certainly numbered. That's why he'd agreed to meet.

"Has something new happened?"

"She's going to marry him."

"The young guy? When?"

"They've not set the date yet, but I'm sure it won't be long. And Greg, I'll be fifty soon. It's all coming together, I can feel it. I sleep alone now most of the time."

"What can I say, Joe? You know my views about this place. That's why I wanted to escape back to Cassini."

"Escape? How could you do that?"

"Well, I had half a plan, but it came to nothing. Anyway, it's not so critical now, as Rebecca's going to take me back anyway. At least that's what she promised."

"And if she doesn't? Would you really try to leave?"

"I'd be tempted, if I could find a way."

"If you did find a way, could I come with you?"

Greg smiled. "The last time I asked about whether you'd want to go to Cassini, you were horrified."

"But things have changed. Suddenly there's no future for me with Kelly, and I don't want to be terminated."

"You'd certainly have a future in Cassini. With what you know about the cancer drug, you'd get a job straight away. There's a lot of investment going on to replicate that drug, and you'd be just the person they want. You could make a load of money."

"So would you take me?"

Greg thought it through. It would be easier on his own to hide and escape, but that drug information was another factor.

"My chances are better on my own, Joe. It adds to the risks of detection if there are two of us. But I'll do you a deal. If you can bring

information with you on those processes, and we both share any profits from it, then I'm willing to take you with me."

Joe brightened up. "You've given me some hope. I'm fairly sure I can get that information out of there if I work at it."

Greg smiled. But he knew the discussion was academic. He still had no solution to getting on that train.

Rebecca was his only realistic hope of getting back.

Rebecca was in a good mood when she came back from work.

"I've got some fantastic news, Greg, and you'll be very proud of me."

"I'm proud of you already. So what's all the excitement?"

"I've been promoted, and I'm to be running a whole department myself. That's twenty staff, and a huge office for me. I'll get more money of course, but the great thing is that I also get a car."

"Well, you must be doing something right. And it's good to hear they reward talent. In the civil service back home, it takes a hell of a lot longer than that before you get promotion. And a car will be handy, especially when we go out in the evening. So what are you going to do with the extra money?"

"I'm not sure. We could take a larger apartment. What do you think?"

"If that's what you want, but this one is fine really, isn't it?"

"For now, yes, but I might want an extra room sometime."

"For what?"

She hesitated. "If I want to get another husband."

Greg was lost for words, trying to think of a response. She'd talked of having two husbands a long time back, but he thought that was all forgotten.

She continued. "Actually, I'm thinking I might marry Dale. You like him, don't you?"

"He's a nice enough guy, but I'd rather it was just us two here, even if he comes over once in a while."

Then Greg knew what to say. He'd been looking for the opportunity, and this was it.

"I suppose there is one advantage for you. You'd still have him, after you take me back to Cassini."

She frowned. "Do you still want to go back? I thought you were happy here with me."

"I am happy, but I'll never be completely happy until I'm back in Cassini. I still think of it as my real home city. In fact, the best thing of all would be if you stayed there with me, rather than return here."

She laughed. "I'd never want to live there again. And I don't see the attraction for you either. Here you have everything you need, and with my income going up, we can plan all sorts of things."

"I do love you, Rebecca, and I am happy here with you looking after me, but I still want to go back."

She looked thoughtful. "I don't think this discussion is getting anywhere. Perhaps we'll talk again sometime."

"But if I want to go, you will take me won't you? You did promise me that when we married."

"That was ages ago, and anyway, I can change my mind if I want to. I like having you here as a husband, and I can't see any good reason to change the arrangement. With my extra money, we'll have some great times together, and at home we'll soon have Dale to play with whenever we feel like it."

"So are you saying you won't take me back?"

She kissed him. "Greg, my darling, you're mine and you're staying here. I want no more discussion."

Part 8 – CONFLICT AND DEATH

“Joe, thanks for coming. I’ve a problem, and I’m hoping you can help.”

“Is it about going back to Cassini?”

“Exactly. The thing is —”

“Greg, before you carry on, there’s something you need to know. I don’t want to go any more.”

“What’s brought that about? Is she not marrying that guy now?”

“Oh, she’s doing that, all right. But we’ve had a big discussion about the future. She’s promised me that whatever her relationship with the new man, she’ll never make me leave.”

“And you believe her?”

“I know you’ll think I’m naive, but yes I do. She’s never broken a promise that I know of.”

Greg sat back and sipped his coffee.

“That’s a shame. If you’d got that drug information, we’d have made a packet back in Cassini. Still, it would have been tricky getting it anyway, I suppose.”

“It wasn’t too difficult. I’ve been memorizing bits of the process each day, and then at home typing into a memory card. I’ve got most of it done. But there is a risk of course, so I’m not carrying on. Not now I have Kelly’s promise.”

“Well, after my latest run-in, I wouldn’t believe any woman here. Rebecca’s not going to take me back after all, and that was a firm promise too. That’s why I’ve got to do it my own way, if I’m ever to get back.”

Joe leaned forward. “So how can I help?”

Greg unfolded the drawings of the railroad car.

“See that baggage compartment? According to Adam, he could get us in there, but here’s the problem. The door has a lock, using an old-fashioned key, but I’m fairly sure he didn’t have a key. When he died, I searched his body and his room, and there was nothing but these drawings and some notes.”

“Could he have hidden the key somewhere?”

“The only possible place was at a bar where we both worked, and believe me I’ve looked everywhere.”

“So how can I help?”

“I know you aren’t involved with the railroad, but your company must have some access to government databases, and there will be plenty in there about the railroad. I’m wondering if you can browse a little, and see if you can get into the archives and just maybe —”

“I can’t do it, Greg. Everything I do is monitored. They’re paranoid about their drug processes being disclosed, and every access to the computers is monitored automatically and by security staff.”

Greg sat back in silence, finishing off his coffee.

Meantime, Joe studied the drawings.

Greg said, “I’ll go mad here with the way Rebecca’s been acting. She’s got this young guy living with us now. It’s bad enough having him around, but it’s even worse in terms of my sex life.”

“That’s my problem too. I think I’ll be taking turns, and maybe not getting much of Kelly at all eventually. But I can live with that, can’t you?”

Greg laughed. “It’s not that simple. I wouldn’t mind alternating with Dale, but she’s more interested in having threesomes now. She even made me ... well, enough detail.”

Joe pulled one of the drawings closer.

“What’s that on the floor of the compartment?”

Greg looked at it. “I don’t know ...”

He looked at the other diagram. “It’s on here too, and there are some markings.”

Then he laughed. “Good God, it’s a hatch. It’s been staring at me all the time. That’s how Adam planned to get us in.”

Greg had long ago established a habit of going out occasionally late in the evening to the local cafe. Rebecca used to grumble, but she let him do it. And now she had Dale on hand, she didn't seem to care at all.

It was a useful cover for when he wanted to visit the station. And tonight he was desperate to get in there. He had to take the chance and get under that train, and see if that really was a hatch, and whether it could be opened from below.

In the back street, there was no one around, as he entered the code on the keypad.

But it failed, and just showed a red light.

He tried again, but with the same result.

The bastards had changed the code.

Greg stood naked next to Dale, while a naked Rebecca inspected them.

“Now what game shall we play tonight? Any ideas?”

Greg knew better than to say anything, and it seemed that Dale had learned the same lesson. Rebecca had taken drugs, and was high, and she'd had a shot of testosterone too. In this state anything was possible.

She giggled. “I know, you can wrestle for me. The winner gets a treat, and the loser has to do a forfeit. What do you think of that?”

Greg looked at Dale. The poor guy was trembling. Not surprising, really. Greg was a couple of inches taller, and more muscular. Dale had told him that he had been suffering at work too, although Rebecca knew nothing of it. Being favored by Rebecca had led to jealousy with the other men, and now he was having a hard time with their attitude.

Greg said, “Whatever you want is fine by me, Rebecca.”

She stood back.

“Right, face each other and stand apart.”

Greg got into position, facing Dale.

She said. “Right. When I say go, you're to jump on each other and wrestle. The winner is the one who can get on top of the other, and hold him down and kiss him. So ... Go!”

Greg jumped forward and locked onto Dale. But it wasn't as easy as he'd expected. Dale was stronger than he looked, and fought back. They crashed to the floor, and rolled around, each trying to get the better of the other. It went on like that for a couple of minutes, and then Greg could tell that Dale was tiring. In one thrust, he rammed Dale's shoulders to the floor, and rolled on top of him, and then kissed him.

Dale went limp, lying there defeated, and Greg looked up.

Rebecca said. “I didn't say you could get up. Now keep kissing him until I tell you to stop.”

It was like having a woman under him in the old days. Not the person he'd want under him, but it was better being the person in

control, and he could easily pretend. He pulled Dale's long hair aside, closed his eyes, and kissed him as if he was back home with a woman. And he kept on until Rebecca was content.

She said, "That was lovely. Now it's your treat, Greg. So onto the bed, and on your back, and we'll have more fun."

Greg lay back, waiting for her. At least he was the winner, and that had to be better than losing. She squatted on top of him, and shuffled forward, until her vagina was just touching his mouth.

"Dale, onto the bed. And put your mouth around his penis. And when we get going, make it interesting for him."

Greg wouldn't have said anything, as that could mean trouble, but right now he wasn't in a position to say anything anyway. He felt the warmth of Dale's mouth down below, and couldn't stop the erection.

She said, "Greg, stick your tongue out. And you know what to do."

She moved forward onto his mouth, and Greg slid his tongue inside her.

Then it started, with her moving gently around on him, and him trying to keep his tongue inside, and all the while Dale sucking down below.

It went on for several minutes before she started getting more animated, and every now and then she'd come away from him, and he'd have to find the opening again. And his penis was numb with what Dale was doing.

Finally she gasped, "Open your mouth wide."

Greg did so just as she pushed down into it, and as she shouted out, "Dale, bite him!"

Greg felt the pain, and instinctively his mouth tried to close, but couldn't against the pressure of her vulva. He ejaculated, and his body shook.

Rebecca leaped off the bed, clapping her hands. "That was great, wasn't it?"

Dale sat on the edge of the bed, and Greg sat upright. His penis was red raw, and he could see the teeth marks.

Then he looked at Dale. The guy looked shattered and humiliated, almost suicidal.

Winning was better than losing, but Greg didn't want any of it.
He had to get that entry code.

It wasn't easy getting into the supervisor's office.

Greg was in the offices often enough, between jobs, but her office was at the far end, and it was as obvious as hell when anyone walked that way. And anyway, she was usually in there when Greg was in.

But today he was in luck. She'd gone out to check on a project, and there were only a couple of guys there apart from him.

On the pretext of taking a document to her office, he walked casually along, and out of their sight, and entered her office. Now where the hell would she have the new code?

He looked through the papers on her desk, and found nothing. Her filing cabinet was well organized, and he found the section on the station jobs. But nothing there. So it must be in an email. That's what he half expected, but there was always the chance that she'd written it down.

Back at her desk, he opened a drawer. Some scraps of paper with handwritten notes. And then he found it. "New code 376982". It might not be the station, but it was six digits, so a match. And definitely worth a try. He read the numbers again, then closed the drawer and turned to leave.

But she was standing there in the doorway, watching him.

"What are you doing, Greg?"

Time for the cover story.

"I just brought in my vacation form."

And what was so interesting about my desk drawer?

Thank God, she hadn't seen me at the filing cabinet.

"It was open slightly and I just pushed it close."

"Don't lie. You were looking for something."

Time for a confession. There was no choice.

"I'm sorry. I was just inquisitive. I thought there might be something in there about our salary raises."

She stood aside.

Go back to your area, and wait for me. I'm reporting this to the Director, and no doubt there will have to be a punishment.

Greg stood in front of the entrance to the House of Correction. It was gray and featureless, probably deliberately designed to look ominous. Hopefully this would be the first and last time here. He was scheduled for a session of obedience training, and had no idea what that entailed.

The reception area was small, and the young woman at the desk handed him a form and pointed to a chair, without a word. Another man was already seated, filling in his form, and nodded an acknowledgment.

The form required a few details, but its prime purpose was clear. The small print above the signature, that absolved the people here of any responsibility for pain or injury sustained. He signed it and passed it to the receptionist.

She said, "They're ready for you both now. Down the corridor to room six."

The room was small, containing four chairs in a row, facing a large screen.

The attendant said, "Strip to your briefs, then take a seat, and I'll get you prepared."

As they undressed, she fiddled with some electronics box at the side of the room. Then when they were seated, she came over, and secured their wrists and ankles to the chairs. Then out came some wires, and she attached several to their chests, legs and arms with sticky pads.

She looked at them, tied up and wired, as if with pride. "First you will watch a video about obedience. It's about ten minutes, and its to remind you of the importance of obeying your women. Something you've both clearly forgotten."

There followed a tedious instructional video that was farcical in its examples, and with men doing the most idiotic things after being told not to. Did Utopian men really believe this garbage?

Greg looked across at the other man, who appeared to be concentrating hard. So yes maybe they do believe it.

When the video was over, the attendant clicked a few switches, and then there was a background hum from somewhere. That really was ominous.

She smiled. "Now your training begins. You'll be watching a longer video, about an hour, with a series of scenes. From time to time you'll see a man show disobedience. When that happens, so that you're in no doubt about how bad it is, you'll get an electric shock."

Greg said, "But I know what disobedience is already. What's the point of this? Is it just punishment?"

"Heavens no. It's to reinforce a link in your mind between bad behavior and pain. Our experience has shown that even after this little session, men are much more wary of acting badly. Now I'll leave you to it. The video will start automatically, and I'll come back at the end and release you."

After she'd gone, the two of them sat in silence, and then the video started.

Only a couple of minutes in, the first scene was obviously coming to one of these examples. The woman asked the man to leave the room, and he said he'd rather not.

Greg tensed himself ready, but it didn't stop the pain when the shock came through every one of the contacts.

And on it went. Every few minutes another corny example of disobedience, and another shock. Individually the shocks weren't too intense, but after a while the anticipation was almost worse.

By the end of the hour, when the video finished, Greg was aching all over, and the other poor guy was crying.

But in spite of the pain he'd been through, Greg couldn't help smiling.

It was a price worth paying for that code.

Dale said, "Greg, who do you think Rebecca prefers? You or me?"

Greg looked up from his breakfast. "The hell if I know. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, now she's away a few days, I thought we could chat about a few things. I think she prefers you."

Greg carried on eating.

Dale said, "It's probably your body. You're more muscular than me. That time we had to wrestle, I resisted for a while, but you have the strength. In the end I couldn't stop you pinning me down and kissing me."

"I'm sorry about that ..."

"There's no need to be sorry. She set the rules, and one of us had to win. And in a way, I'm glad it was you. It was quite exciting to wrestle like that. Do you think she'll make us do it again?"

Greg frowned. "You can't tell with Rebecca. But I'd say it's possible."

"Good. But can you let me win next time?"

"Why would I want to do that? I've no wish to have to suck your penis afterwards, or whatever new thing she dreams up."

Dale looked nervous, and was fidgeting with his fingers.

"Actually Greg, as we're not working today, and she's not here, how about we have a little wrestling game ourselves?"

Greg stopped eating. "You must be joking. There's —"

"But didn't you find it exciting too? Struggling against me, and then forcing me down."

"I suppose you could say it was exciting. But I've no wish to repeat it."

Greg finished his food, while Dale sat opposite him, sullen. Finally Greg stood up.

"I'm going to watch TV. What about you?"

"I might look at those drawings again. You know, the ones you keep hidden."

Greg froze. He'd hidden them well, so the bastard must have been searching every bit of his room to find them.

"They're just some old drawings that a friend gave me. They're nothing special."

"Then why hide them?"

"There's little enough privacy here, so I suppose it was just instinctive. Nostalgia really for my old friend."

"So there's no problem if I tell Rebecca?"

Greg sat back down. "Dale, life's complicated enough with Rebecca, so I'd prefer you to keep quiet. Anyway they're only old drawings, and no use to anyone. In fact it's best if I throw them away."

Dale looked more confident. "I've taken photos of them. I really think I should show Rebecca ... Unless ..."

"Unless what?"

"Well, I might like a favor once in a while, that's all."

"So it's blackmail?"

Dale frowned. "Not a nice word, but accurate enough. So do I get a favor today, or am I to tell Rebecca when she gets back?"

"What sort of favor? Money?"

"Heavens no. I just want us to play the wrestling game, and for me to win."

Greg entered the lounge, to face Dale, both naked.

Dale had cleared the furniture to the sides, to leave an open area. Greg felt sick thinking what he was about to do. But it would be dangerous if Rebecca discovered those plans. She'd soon guess what he had in mind.

Dale said, "Now I want a realistic game. You're to try everything you can to stop me, and you must try to get on top of me, but never quite managing it. Then I'll shout 'Now!' and you're to weaken, and I'll finish it."

Greg stepped forward, and took hold of Dale, and then they started, falling to the ground, and rolling around as Dale tried his hardest, and Greg played the game. He didn't care about the wrestling, but it was sickening waiting for the command from Dale.

When eventually it came, and Dale shouted out, he relaxed slightly, and Dale pushed him down and rolled on top. Then the kiss, with Dale's tongue slipping between his lips, and Dale's fingers now firm on Greg's penis.

When Dale had had enough, he sat upright across Greg, looking down.

"We're going to have fun together from now on. Just like this. But next time we wrestle, I want you to wear pink lip balm, like a prostitute." He smiled. "That's what you are now. My prostitute, and I pay you by keeping quiet. And you must admit it was exciting, wasn't it?"

Greg forced a smile.

Then he went back to the bathroom, and threw up what was left of his breakfast.

Joe walked round the car, and got into the passenger seat. "I like it. It's about the smallest you can get, but Rebecca must still be doing well to get one of these. Even my manager doesn't qualify for a car yet."

Greg switched on the motor. "The great thing is she's no interest in driving it, and Dale's scared to, so it's more or less mine. Anyway, let's drive over to the station. I've got a new code, and I want to be sure it works. And meantime, you can tell me what's happened."

As they continued, Joe started talking. "It's Kelly's new man ... I can't blame him, but he's the cause of it all ... and they've set the date. She's going to marry him three months from now."

"You knew it was going to happen, so what's new? Is she saying now that you've got to leave?"

Joe paused before replying. "No, not that ... I can stay, but she's going to have me castrated."

Greg momentarily lost concentration, looking at Joe, and nearly hit another vehicle. He swerved just in time.

Joe said, "Why don't you put it on autopilot?"

"No way. If I do that, it gets recorded, and I don't want a record of this trip. I disconnected it."

They continued in silence, until Greg stopped the car, around the corner from the station entrance.

"We'll talk more in a minute. But first I want to check that code, and then get away from here."

Greg walked casually around the corner, to the door. No one around, so he tried the code. The lock released. He secured it, and then walked back to the car. Elated that the code worked, but avoiding a smile as he returned. Joe was looking desperately worried.

Back in the car, he started it, and headed off to another part of the city.

Greg said, "Why does she want to do it? Have you upset her about something?"

“No, nothing like that. She wants me to stay with her, but she says I’ll get frustrated living there with her married to her new man. She’s having me operated on for my own peace of mind, so that I can make a fresh start with them. And I can’t argue with that, as it makes perfect sense.”

“But you surely don’t want it, do you?”

Joe turned to him. “If I hadn’t met you and heard about Cassini, I’d just accept it, and I’m sure life wouldn’t be so bad as a eunuch. I’d not have sex again, but I probably wouldn’t want it anyway. But things are different now that you’ve given me a choice.”

“So do you want to come with me now?”

“I do, if you’ll still take me.”

“And what about the notes on the process?”

Joe smiled. “I thought you might ask about that ...”

Rebecca had clearly enjoyed her days away on the management workshop. And she seemed compelled to tell them all the details, day after day. Not so much the work sessions, but mainly about the social activities in the evenings, and the plentiful supply of young men ready to do what they were told.

It became a bit tedious, hearing of her romantic and sexual adventures, but the good news was that after all that, she'd not been wanting to do anything weird with him and Dale. They'd each slept with her a couple of times, but so far no threesomes, and for now she was off her drugs. "Mood enhancers" she called them, but that understated their effect on her.

Greg was content enough, apart from one evening, when she was out, and he'd been cornered by Dale, and made to play the game again. This time Dale let Greg win, but it wasn't much better, having to do simulated lovemaking on him, while Dale held his balls.

Now she was out again, and the inevitable happened.

Dale's smile told him everything.

"Greg, in tonight's game I want you to really force yourself on me when you kiss me at the end. I'll resist you with all my strength, but you must carry on. I want to feel dominated by you, and helpless against your desires. Do you understand?"

It was enough to make Greg feel sick, but he nodded agreement.

He showered, ready for the game. And then he had an idea. At least he could make the best of it, and he might even enjoy it, if he lost track of what was actually happening.

He took Rebecca's mood pills from the cupboard. How many to take? It would be pointless taking just a couple ... He took four, and swallowed them.

In the lounge, Dale was naked, and ready for him, but Greg was ready too. He felt warm, and euphoric, like he'd had a load of alcohol, but without getting dizzy. No wonder Rebecca liked this stuff.

He grabbed hold of Dale, and kissed him.

“I’m going to have you, Dale, and there’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

Dale started to say something, but Greg pushed him, and flattened him to the floor, and started kissing him hard. Dale was muttering that he was rushing it, but Greg was past caring. It was like making love to a woman back home, with his penis hard, and pressing into Dale’s genitals. Dale was now fighting back, but Greg didn’t care. He could take anything that Dale offered. He slapped Dale hard, and then started his simulated sex, kissing Dale again. Dale was punching and kicking, and it made no difference. But when Dale hit him in the balls, that was too much. Greg grabbed his throat, and jammed him down, and then carried on kissing, while Dale was coughing and spluttering, unable to stop him.

Finally Greg had had enough. He jumped up, and looked down at Dale. It was only then that he realized that he had passed out. Not that Greg cared. It will have taught the bastard a lesson he wouldn’t forget.

Greg went back to the bathroom and showered again, all the while smiling at how he’d turned the tables on Dale. And if Dale complained, then Greg would say he was only doing what he’d been told.

But the effect of the drug was wearing off, and it made him slightly depressed. He could see why Rebecca sometimes popped another one.

He headed back to the lounge, ready for an argument. But Dale was still lying on the floor, in the same position.

Greg reached down and touched him.

Dale was dead.

Greg could have done with help, and thought of calling Joe, but it was safer not to involve anyone else, and with luck he could do it on his own.

At that time of night, there was no one around in the apartment block, so he took the chance of using the service elevator down to the garage.

The car's trunk wasn't big enough, so he dragged the package in, and placed it across the back seat. He'd wrapped the body well using garbage bags and tape, but it hadn't made it easy to transport.

By the time he got to the station, he was sweating, and not from the cold. This was the riskiest part, although once inside, he'd be fairly safe. But there was another car down the road, and he needed to be right by the entrance. He carried on and drove past the car, noticing that there was no one inside, and went round the block. After ten minutes, he carried on round. The other car was still there, and there was still no one about.

There was no choice. He had to do it, or he could be here all night.

So he parked by the doorway, and as fast as he could move, opened the station door, and carried the package inside. Then the hard work. He picked up the body, in a fireman's carry, and got going, down one corridor after another, until he got to the hiding place. Then a massive effort to push the body behind the piping. No one would be looking down here, and he'd sealed it well enough to stop the smell.

He thought of saying a few words of farewell to the poor guy. But then he recalled what that bastard had made him do. He spat into the empty space, and headed back to the doorway.

Back at the car, the street was deserted, and the other car had gone now.

He headed home, already starting to rehearse his story. There were going to be plenty of questions.

Part 9 – THE ESCAPE

“So neither of you have any further information?”

The detective looked at Rebecca, and then at Greg.

Greg shrugged. “Nothing I can think of. He seemed fine the last time I saw him that evening, and next morning he was gone.”

“And you heard nothing at all?”

“No. But I sleep soundly anyway, so unless he started slamming doors, I wouldn’t have heard him go.”

Rebecca said, “Has he any relatives? Maybe they’d know something.”

The detective clicked a button on her tablet, and put it in her case.

“We’ve checked them, but they’re no great help. They know about you of course, but they said he’d started another relationship recently, and he was keeping the details secret from them.”

Rebecca frowned. “I didn’t know about that. Are they sure?”

“That’s what he told them. But whether it’s a work colleague or a friend, we don’t know.”

“Maybe it’s just some casual friendship?”

The detective smiled. “I don’t think so. Whoever it was, the relationship was definitely intense, and sexual. And of course, if anything has happened to Dale, this person could be responsible.”

She half-turned to leave. “Well, if you do think of anything, give me a call. Otherwise, as we’ve nothing else to go on, we’ll file as a missing person, and hope that he turns up sometime. If he does, I’ll let you know.”

Rebecca frowned. “Don’t bother. After what you told me, I’ve no wish to have him back here.”

Greg relaxed, holding back the smile. He’d got away with murder, and as a bonus, Dale had been discredited. That might make Rebecca more cautious about bringing home another one like him.

And if the police tried looking for the mystery person in the relationship, they’d get nowhere. They’d never suspect Greg.

Greg had parked the car some distance away, and several levels down, so it had taken nearly an hour to walk to the station. He was cautious, but not too worried. As always, at this time of night, no one was around. And the new code still worked.

They were inside now, and getting used to the dim light of the flashlights.

Joe said, "Is there no security?"

"No, there's nothing. No sensors. Not even an intelligent lock on the door. But let's face it. Who would want to get in here anyway? There's nothing to steal."

"So where now? Do we need to get going?"

"Be patient, and just follow me. We'll get to the train soon enough."

Joe smiled. "I'll try and keep calm. But I know this is going to be the most exciting time of my life. I've never been in a place like this, and I've never seen a train. So excuse me if I seem impatient."

Greg set off along the corridor, with Joe close behind. When they finally arrived at the sliding door, Greg paused.

"Now so far, we've been safe to talk, but once we go through there, it's best to keep to a whisper."

He slid open the door, and they both looked across at the train.

Greg said, "The baggage compartment is down at the far end, so I think the safest route is to go straight across as quickly as we can, and then crawl under the train until we get there. Are you ready?"

Joe nodded agreement. And then they were off, across the tracks, and under the train. Crawling wasn't so bad to start with, but it was tiring by the time they got to the hatch.

Greg pointed the flashlight at it, and they both stared for several seconds.

Joe whispered, "It's hinged on that side, and those four levers must be to lock it. If we open it, could it be alarmed?"

"I doubt it. They wouldn't expect anyone to be here apart from engineers, and once it's on the surface, they know it's secure. I think

we'll have to try it."

"But what if we can't close it again?"

"We've got to take a chance sometime, so it might as well be now. And we have to check that we can secure it back again from inside."

The levers were stiff to move. Probably hadn't been opened for a long time. One after the other, until the final one was released, then they pushed the hatch upwards, until it locked in a vertical position.

Greg stood up, and looked inside. It was exactly how he'd imagined it. Boxes and crates, not particularly well arranged, and plenty of spare space, so easy to create a hiding place.

He pulled himself up into the compartment.

Joe whispered. "Can you close it from the inside?"

Greg looked at the sides of the opening.

The levers below had no corresponding levers above, just a hole in the center of each post that they swiveled on. Logical really. You wouldn't want obstructions in here, with the baggage being moved around. He shone the light into one of the holes. Inside, it was smooth, with nothing for a tool to grip.

Joe pulled himself up to join Greg.

"So can we do it?"

"I'm not sure how. If those holes were shaped, we could use a tool of some sort, but it's round and it's smooth. You look."

Joe frowned. "So it can only be locked from the outside ... That means I can't go with you, doesn't it?"

Greg knew he was right, but this wasn't the time.

"I'll take a few pictures, and when we're out of here, we can look again, and think it through. I'm sure we'll find a solution."

Greg had had a long day at work, and was tired when he got home. Today's job hadn't been easy, patching up old machinery that was way past its design life, and even more annoying that it took two hours to get back from that part of the city.

So the last thing he wanted to do was socialize.

Rebecca introduced the stranger. "Greg, meet Stephanie. She's Dale's sister."

Greg forced a smile. He was wide awake now.

"Nice to meet you. Have you some news about Dale?"

"No, and that's what I've been telling Rebecca. To start with, I thought he might have gone away for some reason, but it's been so long now that I'm sure something has happened to him."

"You're probably right. But what do the police think?"

"They're a waste of time. I've been trying to get them to continue with the investigation, but they're not interested. They tell me how many people go missing, and they can't commit resources to them all, and then of course they say he might not want to be found."

Rebecca said, "That's ridiculous. Dale's not some criminal hiding out. I think Stephanie's right. And it might be connected with whoever else Dale was seeing."

Stephanie shrugged. "It could be ... but can you remember anything that might help? Did he ever mention a name? Or some place he visited?"

Greg said, "He didn't talk much about himself. We didn't even know about you, Stephanie. I'm sorry we can't be more help."

"Well, I thought it was worth meeting up, just in case. Anyway, I'd better be going."

At the door, Rebecca helped her on with her coat.

"If we think of anything, we'll call you. And if you want us to do anything to help, just let me know."

"Oh, thank you ... I feel so alone in this. No one seems to care about my poor Dale."

Stephanie started crying, and Rebecca reacted by putting her arms around her, and hugging her.

“Well, we care, and we’ll be here for you.”

Stephanie looked up. “Oh, thank you, Rebecca. I felt so alone ...”

Rebecca smiled, and kissed her briefly on the lips.

Stephanie smiled too. “I can see why Dale was so attracted to you. That was such a delicate kiss.”

“Do you want another one?”

Stephanie closed her eyes and pouted, and Rebecca kissed her again. This time for a little longer.

Stephanie looked at them both. “I’m so pleased we met. You’re both really nice, and I can see why Dale was so happy here. It makes me all the more determined to find out what happened to him.”

Greg forced a smile, but all he could think of was that journey with Dale’s body. Could there be a witness somewhere, that might come forward, if Stephanie kept the investigation going?

A week had gone past, and Greg had almost forgotten about Stephanie, when Rebecca brought her right back into focus, with an invitation to dinner.

All through the meal, Greg shared in the conversation, which thankfully avoided all mention of Dale.

Then Rebecca said, "I don't want to upset you, Stephanie, but I've got to ask ... Is there any news on Dale?"

"No, nothing at all. And the police have closed the file."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. But I suppose it was to be expected ..."

Greg took a sip of his wine, beginning to relax. "Let's just hope that he's still alive somewhere, and one day might turn up."

Stephanie frowned. "Just because the police have given up, doesn't mean I have. In fact, I've been quite busy. There are thousands of isolated CCTV systems in the city, so wherever he went, there's a chance that he's visible on the footage of some of them. That's what I've been pursuing."

Rebecca said, "But do people keep the recordings?"

"Most don't, at least for this long. But I've found that some keep it for a year or more, and I've already tracked down eight CCTV systems where they've still got the recordings from the day Dale went missing. They've all agreed not to delete, at least for the time being."

Greg said, "So have you looked at any of this already?"

"No, I can't. The privacy laws mean they can't show them to me, without a court order."

"So what value are they then?"

"I've spoken to a lawyer about it. Basically, if I can put together a good case, and provide the funding, I can get the courts to compel the police to review the recordings. It just takes time."

Rebecca smiled. "I may be able to help. I've got contacts in the justice system, and I may be able to speed things up for you."

"Oh, that would be wonderful."

Rebecca stood up. "Let's go through to the lounge and have a glass of something."

Greg stood up too. "If you two don't mind, I've got a bit of a headache, so I need to lie down. If I don't see you before you go, Stephanie, —"

Rebecca interrupted, "Oh, didn't I tell you? Stephanie's staying the night."

It was nearly midnight before Greg heard them going to bed. And then the muffled sound of them chatting.

And after a while, sounds of laughing and giggling that he knew meant more than talk.

Any other time, it would have aroused him, thinking about what they might be doing, but his mind was on those CCTV recordings. Somewhere there could be a recording of Rebecca's car going by. If the police spotted that, there'd be real trouble.

Greg ordered coffees, then looked around. No one in earshot.

"Well, what's the new idea, Joe? You sounded hellish excited on the phone."

"I've thought of a way to close those clamps from the inside. And that means I can come after all. Look."

He opened a small sheet of paper, with some sketches on it.

"We know that the holes in the top of the clamps are smooth and round, so we can't fit anything like a key. But it doesn't mean we can't use friction. Do you see where I'm going with this?"

Greg studied the sketches.

"You're thinking we could jam something in enough to grip?"

"Exactly. From the photos, I can judge the diameter, so if we can get a steel bar the same size, we can just hammer it in. What do you think?"

"Those levers were stiff to move. If we did hammer something in, it would have to be tight, to get enough grip. And that means we have to find steel bars exactly the right diameter."

"But where you work, isn't there anything there you could get hold of?"

"Joe, I work with machinery and electronics. I don't have a selection of steel bars lying around. And anyway, how could we hammer the damn things? The noise would resonate through the train. And that would be too big a risk."

Joe looked despondent. "Then there's no hope of me going."

Greg kept his silence, and sipped his coffee, to let Joe calm down.

Joe said, "The surface weather's looking settled. Do you think you'll go soon?"

"I think so. There are problems at home, new ones, and I think I may want to leave fairly quickly. And as high pressure's moving in, with no storms forecast in the next few weeks, I have to grab the opportunity. Are you still okay about closing the hatch for me?"

"Of course I am. I desperately want to go, but I know I can't. But that doesn't stop me wanting to help you escape."

He reached into his pocket, and handed a memory card to Greg.
“It’s no use to me now, so best of luck with it.”

Greg wasn’t one to get emotional about anything, but he had to hold back tears.

“You’re very gracious about it, Joe. I only wish there was something I could do in return. Maybe I should delay in case we think of something else.”

“Don’t do that. The high pressure system won’t last more than a few weeks, and then you might be stuck here for months. You must go.”

They both sat sipping coffee, in silence, for several minutes. Then Greg nearly choked on his coffee. “Pressure ... of course ...”

It was obvious, and so simple a solution.

“Joe, hold everything. We don’t need those clamps to be locked.”

“What are you talking about? If that hatch opens when we’re on the surface, we’ll be dead in seconds.”

“But it won’t open, ... because of the pressure difference. Once the train is on the surface, the pressure inside the compartment is going to hold that hatch down as if it was welded.”

Joe smiled. “Are you sure?”

“Of course I am. It’s basic science. With pressure inside, and near vacuum outside, the hatch will press against the seal. It would be impossible to open the hatch once we’re in transit.”

“So I can go! Do I need to prepare?”

“You bet. Have everything ready that you want to take, but keep it light. And be ready for me to call.”

The doorbell sounded, and Rebecca stood up. "Switch off the television. We've a visitor."

"I thought you were going out with the girls from your office?"

"I am."

She went off to the door, and Greg listened. He could tell from the voice straightaway, that it was Stephanie. Why the hell was she here?

When the two women entered the lounge, they were both giggling.

Greg said, "Okay, what's so amusing?"

Rebecca said, "I've a treat for you. I'm going out shortly, but I thought you might like some company. And Stephanie's often on her own, so I thought you two could have a nice evening together. And you're looking forward to it, aren't you, Stephanie?"

"I've been thinking about it all day. We can have some fun, can't we, Greg?"

"I guess so ..."

Rebecca said, "Now I must go. I don't want to be late."

"What time will you be back?"

"Oh, past midnight. It's a meal first, and then a club, and then you never know what happens after that."

"All right. I'll see you later then."

Rebecca put on her coat, helped by Stephanie. "By the way, Greg, I've given Stephanie my full permission and authority. You must obey her just as you obey me."

"But Rebecca —"

"And no arguing. It's the least I can do for Stephanie after all that's happened. I've told her she can do whatever she wants while I'm out, and that's final."

Greg looked at Stephanie. She was smiling, but there was something about her expression ...

Rebecca giggled, "And you'd better be good. I've told her where I keep the chastiser."

The first part of the evening went well, with Stephanie maybe drinking a little too much, and talking too much. But she was attractive, and Greg had the feeling that before long, something more interesting would be happening. And he was right. Without warning, she stood up.

“Come on then, Greg. Let’s have some fun. Let’s get naked.”

In the bedroom, they stripped off, and then she came close. “Do you like what you see?”

“Of course. You’re a beautiful and mysterious woman.”

“Then lie down on the bed, and you’ll maybe uncover the mystery.”

He got onto the bed, and lay back, ready for her.

“Greg, there’s one thing I like to do with my men. Put your hands up to the top of the bed. I want you restrained.”

“Do I have to?”

“If you want me to make love to you, yes.”

He put his hands up, and let her tie his wrists tight to the bed.

She sprayed him, and waited a few seconds, watching him. So Rebecca had given her that too, the bitch.

Then she was on him, kissing and stroking, and getting progressively more excited, until she pushed herself onto him, and started. It was great for a minute or two, but then she started biting him, and slapping him, while she carried on having sex.

He tried to protest, but she ignored everything, laughing and biting him again and again, almost in a frenzy. Then suddenly she’d had enough, and came off him, without a word.

He lay dazed, watching, while she put on her underwear.

She came back to the bed. “That was exciting, wasn’t it, Greg?”

“Yes, but you hurt me. I’m going to have marks all over.”

She leaned down, and slapped his face.

“Greg, that’s the least of your problems, believe me.”

She left the room, leaving him tied to the bed.

Greg lay there thinking about what she’d just said. It made no sense. He tried to move his wrists, but they were too tightly bound. Looking down at his body, he could see red marks, even teeth marks in places. And it all hurt like hell.

It was a good twenty minutes before she returned. And she was holding the chastiser.

“What have you got that for?”

“I’m sorry I took so long. I had to have another drink, and calm down, ready for this.”

“Stephanie, you’ve had your fun. Can you let me go now?”

She came and sat on the side of the bed, next to him.

“I want to know about you and Dale.”

“What do you mean? There’s nothing to know.”

She put the chastiser electrodes against his chest, and pressed the button.

A jolt of electricity shot through him, and his body convulsed.

He shouted out, “Stop it. I told you there’s nothing to know. I’m telling the truth.”

“I don’t think so. In fact I’m fairly sure you’re the one he had the relationship with. The way he talked, I thought it was a woman he was talking about, but the more I think about it, I’m sure now it was a man. And the only man I know of that was close to him is you.”

She put the electrodes against his thigh. “So what happened to Dale?”

“Nothing, I tell you. He was here that day, but —”

His body convulsed again with the shock, and it was worse than last time. The bitch had turned up the intensity.

“Greg, I’m asking one last time.”

He watched as she turned it to the maximum.

“Please don’t do it, Stephanie. I honestly know nothing.”

She placed the electrodes on his thigh.

“Please —”

His body shook, and his vision blurred. He could smell his burned skin, and then nothing ...

He must have been unconscious, as when he opened his eyes, she was already dressed. She’d removed the bindings, but he could hardly move anyway, without a searing pain across his thighs and stomach.

She came to the side of the bed.

“Maybe I believe you, and maybe I don’t. But tomorrow I’m going to the police. I’ve got the court order now, and I’m going to get those

recordings processed. I'll give them my viewpoint, and see what they think. So if you are guilty of something, it's going to come out."

It was an hour before Greg could stand and walk. There was no choice now. He made the call.

“Joe, it has to be tonight.”

It took a while to get to the station. Rebecca had the car, but in any case it would have been risky leaving it near the station. So it was a couple of hours, and several bus journeys, before getting near the station. He walked the last part anyway, in case they tracked his bus journey later. He didn't know if they could stop the train once it had started, but he wasn't going to take the chance.

Joe was already by the doorway when he arrived, and they slipped inside, and closed the door.

Joe said, “What's happened? Why tonight?”

“It's something that happened, and it was unintentional. But there's a chance the police will want to see me tomorrow, and if they do, that'll be the end of my chance of getting out. Whatever happens, they'll probably put a watch on me. So it has to be tonight. But are you okay?”

Joe laughed. “Not exactly. I was sitting in comfort, watching late television, and here I am now in this awful place. It's all a bit sudden for me.”

“You don't have to come, you know.”

“I'm coming, don't doubt that. And I'm ready for anything now.”

“Then let's get to the train.”

It took two trips to get the suits and the rest of the stockpile to the train. Now it was all piled under the baggage compartment, ready to take with them.

“Are you ready, Joe?”

Joe nodded, and reached up to pull one of the hatch levers.

Then a noise from inside the compartment, and they froze.

There was the sound of boxes being thrown around, then a door slamming, and then silence.

Greg smiled. “Just as well we didn’t get here earlier. We might have gone up in the middle of them about to store stuff.”

“Shall we wait a bit longer?”

“No, if they closed the door, that must be all for now at least. Let’s get up there.”

They opened the levers, and Greg cautiously lifted the hatch. All was quiet. He opened the hatch all the way, and climbed up.

“Right, pass it all up. There’s a space in one of the corners away from the door, behind some cases. It’ll be perfect for us.”

By the time the stockpile was stowed, they were both exhausted.

Joe said, “Shall we put the survival suits on?”

“Not yet. We’ll get too hot in them now. The train leaves in two hours, so we’ll do it then. Let’s rest a while now, ready for that.”

Greg was in a half-sleep, when the noise woke him. The compartment door was being opened. Joe was wide awake and looking terrified. Greg smiled to look confident, but this was scary. That screen of packing cases suddenly didn’t seem so secure.

A load of boxes and parcels were dumped inside, and then the door slid close.

“Okay, Joe, it’s time to suit up.”

They’d got the suits on, and had settled back in the corner, lying on some parcels, when the whole car jolted.

The train moved slowly for a while, and then stopped, followed by the sound of air rushing.

Greg zipped up his survival suit, and got to his feet. "Come on, Joe, we need to get ready. We're already in the airlock. It's past midnight, and it's going to be damned cold when we leave the city."

"Like a freezer?"

"Not that bad. They'll not want to waste heat on the goods in here, but they can't afford to have things freeze. But it will feel all the worse with the pressure drop."

"I can feel that already. The air's so thin."

"So take it easy then. We'll get some more boxes and crates over to our corner, and build an enclosure. That should help keep the heat in."

They moved as quickly as they could, but both of them got slower as the low pressure and the cold kicked in. Finally it was done, and they climbed into the corner, and sat down next to each other, both taking deep breaths.

Greg said, "The temperature shouldn't drop any more. So my calculations were right. With these suits, we should be fine. Time for a last drink, and we'll get some sleep."

Joe sipped at his drink. "I can hardly believe this. In my whole life, I've never experienced this kind of excitement. I could never go back to the way it was."

"Well, you don't have to. If we get through this night, we've only two more to go, and then I'll be guiding you to a new life in Cassini."

"If we do get there, I'll be forever grateful ... But what happens when we do arrive? Will I have trouble with immigration?"

Greg laughed. "No way. We'll be sneaking past all that, the same way we got into the station at Utopia. And once we're there, I know someone who can create an identity for you. Now let's get some sleep."

They lay down, and pulled the thermal blankets over them. Greg couldn't sleep, for thinking about the future. He was going to be a free man again, and with those drug designs from Joe, he could end up better off than he'd ever been. He could hear the train picking up speed. So they'd reached the plateau.

“You know, Joe, we’re really on our way now, and there’s no going back.”

But Joe was already asleep.

Greg woke to find Joe already up, and doing something by the doorway.

Joe looked up. "I'm warming the drinks. They froze in the night, but the door is already warm, and I've got the containers against it."

Greg looked at his watch. "The sun's been up three hours, and the door's got the least insulation, so I suppose that's logical. And I sure am ready for breakfast."

He pulled off the covers, and climbed over the wall of crates, then pulled a couple down to use as seats.

Joe shook the drinks containers. "There's still ice in them, but there's enough liquid now. Should go well with the biscuits. Maybe I should give it a bit longer?"

Greg laughed. "You're quite the chef, but I'm starving. So grab a seat, and let's eat."

It wasn't the best breakfast Greg had had, but it was the most enjoyable. They were on their way to freedom, and had got through the first night without problems.

Joe said, "I wonder what's in these crates?"

"Maybe it's some of the drugs you helped make. I don't know what else Utopia exports."

Greg looked at the labels, just as the train started slowing.

Joe said, "What's happening? We can't be there yet."

"It might be diverting off for a train coming the other way. But it's probably a mining camp. The train I came on stopped at two of them to drop off passengers."

"But we'll be okay then?"

Greg stared at a label on the crate. "Damn. I hadn't thought of that. This crate's not going all the way. It's to be dropped off at a camp."

Joe went pale. "You mean they'll be coming in here?"

Greg jumped up. "Quick, Joe. We don't want any of these in our enclosure. I'll pull them out, and you stack them by the door. And see if you can find any more over there, and put them by the door too. We don't want them wandering around in here trying to find them."

The train was down to a crawl now, as they worked, shifting crates from their wall, and replacing them with others. Finally, they climbed back over, and waited, as the train came to a halt.

Joe was shivering. "They're going to find us, aren't they?"

"I doubt it. They'll want to unload as fast as they can, so as not to delay the train."

"But what if they do find us? Can we claim asylum?"

"I've no idea. It probably depends on what agreements they've got with Utopia. But stop worrying. You're making me nervous too."

Joe lay down and curled up, like a frightened child, still shivering.

Then noises outside.

Greg said, "They'll be attaching the airlock, and then the door will open. And then we've got to keep perfectly still and be quiet until they've finished."

Minutes later, they heard the door slide open.

Then voices, and footsteps inside, and the scraping of crates along the floor.

Joe was shivering, and he started whimpering, very quietly. Greg put his finger to his mouth to remind him, and Joe seemed to understand, but continued to mumble. It wasn't loud, but it was too dangerous to let him carry on. Greg took hold of Joe, and put his hand over his mouth, and stared into his eyes. Joe nodded understanding, and Greg let go.

Then the door slammed shut, and they heard the airlock disconnect.

Greg took deep breaths. The emergency was over, and he'd hardly breathed throughout.

Joe said, "I'm sorry, Greg. I was scared, but I promise I won't let it happen again."

"It's okay, I was scared too. But the rest of the crates are for Cassini, so hopefully we won't be interrupted again."

"So what now?"

"We fill in time, that's all. I've a pack of cards, unless you want to read. I've a few novels on my reader, but I'm not in the mood, especially with women always in the lead roles."

“Cards sound good. And what about tonight? The same procedure?”

Next morning, Greg woke to see Joe sitting upright, and staring at him.

“What’s up, Joe?”

“I couldn’t sleep. I nearly ruined everything didn’t I?”

“We survived it. That’s all that matters.”

“If they’d heard me, we’d both be sent back, and —”

“But they didn’t hear you. So that’s an end to it. I couldn’t have got here without you, and I’ve no regrets about having you along. Now shall we have some breakfast?”

Joe smiled. “I’ve already warmed the drinks.”

The day passed without incident, and eventually it was time to think about their final night.

Greg said, “Let’s have a last drink before we settle down. It’s going to be a big day tomorrow, and we need all our strength. And you need a good night’s sleep.”

“Okay, ... But Greg, I’ve a question. When we get there, what exactly happens?”

“The key thing is to get out of the train before they open the door. Once we’re underneath, and sealed the hatch, we should be safe enough. Then we’ll use the same engineering route we used at Utopia. And we’ll be out.”

“And then what? Do we have to avoid the police?”

“It’s not essential, but I think it might be wise to keep a low profile initially. I’ve still got a bank account that Nicole never knew about, and there’s enough in there for us to get started with accommodation and food, and to get you some identity documents. Then we need to get jobs.”

“I can’t wait. And what about the drug designs?”

“That needs to be handled with care. Let’s get settled first, and then we’ll investigate.”

“And you think it’ll be worth a lot of money?”

“I’m certain of it. Now let’s get down in the corner. It’s already getting cold.”

It was midnight when Greg woke. The suit was keeping him warm enough, but the air was freezing. He pulled the covers over their heads, and tried to get back to sleep.

But something was wrong. It was way colder tonight, and next to him Joe was shivering and muttering. The survival suit was barely keeping the cold out.

Joe stuttered, "I don't think I can stand it any longer, Greg. Why is it so cold?"

"It's down to minus forty, so it looks like the idiots forgot to turn the heating on. We'll just have to hang on until morning."

"I don't think I can. I think we're going to die."

Greg lied. "No one dies of these temperatures. We'll survive it, no question. It's just going to be one hell of an unpleasant few hours before sunrise."

Greg pulled the covers tighter and curled up against Joe.

Lying there, and getting colder, it seemed impossible to sleep. Greg thought back to what he had left behind.

He had everything to hope for in getting back to Cassini, but it had meant leaving behind the only two women that he'd ever really loved.

Both Nicole and Rebecca had been corrupted by the environment of Utopia, but underneath that they were still the same outgoing and attractive women that he'd been drawn to.

And now he would never see them again. Unless of course they came to Cassini. Not permanently, but maybe a visit. Though it was bitterly cold now, and his cheeks felt frozen, he couldn't help a smile flicker over his face. Which of them would he most want back? He'd become infatuated with Rebecca, he knew that, but in spite of everything, he still loved Nicole too. None of this was likely of course. They both seemed content with their lives there, and they'd hardly want the cost and trouble of coming to Cassini just to visit him.

And there was no way he'd ever risk going back there. Not with Dale's body rotting away in the station, and that crazy sister and her suspicions.

Greg shivered. Maybe it was safer to stay awake in the cold of the night, but he was so tired ...

Greg had been dreaming, and had maybe been half-awake for a while, but it was the sudden sound of machinery that woke him.

The train wasn't moving, and the air was warm and no longer thin. He took a deep breath.

He leaned over to Joe, and shook him. "Wake up. We've arrived in Cassini."

But Joe didn't respond. Greg pulled the covers back. Joe's eyes were closed in a permanent sleep, and his face was frozen to the touch.

Then noises outside. They were about to open the door.

Greg dragged the covers off, and clambered over the crates to the hatch. The voices outside were getting louder.

He opened the hatch, dropped down, and pulled the hatch down behind him, just as the door started sliding open.

Smoothly and quietly, he moved the levers to secure the hatch, then crouched down to wait.

After some noises of crates being dragged around, a shout, and then more shouting, with what sounded like a dozen people up above all talking. It hadn't taken them long to find Joe's body.

It was hours later before the activity had subsided. It had gone quiet after an hour, but then picked up again. No doubt the police, and then the removal of the body.

Greg felt guilty about smiling when poor Joe had just been carried off, but he couldn't help it. Up above they'd have had no idea that there was a second stowaway. Just Joe, case closed.

But it was time to move. He checked that no one was around, and headed for the engineering door.

He tried sliding it, but it was stuck firm. He knew there was no lock, but the thing had rusted up, just like in Utopia. And here he had no iron bar to lever it. His only tool was his pocket knife.

He started scraping the blade down the edge of the door where it met the wall. Rust was flying everywhere. So he carried on all around the door. Now to try sliding the door again.

This time it moved a little, enough to loosen some rust, so another round of the knife, and then he tried again.

This time the gap was wide enough to get his hand in, and give him a better grip. And it moved further. Another scraping with the knife, and he gripped it and pushed. This time it moved more easily, until it was wide enough for him to crawl through.

Once inside, he closed the door. Now he was in familiar territory. He took off the survival suit, and headed along the twisting corridors, stopping only once, to hide the suit.

At the exit door, he checked his watch. Early evening. Perfect. He opened the door, looked up and down the deserted street, and then stepped through, and closed it behind him.

He felt like running, but he didn't want to draw attention. So he dropped down two levels, and walked steadily, until he arrived at a street busy with bars and restaurants. And more important, a cash machine.

As he tapped in his password, and put his eye against the sensor, he held his breath.

There seemed too long a delay, and he felt like running. But to where?

Then the machine spit out a cash card, and displayed his updated account balance.

He looked around. First a good meal, and then find somewhere to stay.

Then tomorrow he'd start on finding out what Joe's memory card was worth.

EPILOGUE

It had been a month since he'd got back, and Greg double-checked his account balance. Those drug designs had proven to be valuable, and he had more than a year's salary in there already, with plenty more to come in royalties.

He looked around the room. A nice apartment, and some of the good things in life. Tomorrow he'd be starting work again, but today was a time to reflect on his good fortune. He sipped his beer, and gave a silent toast to Adam and Joe.

The videophone buzzed.

So who the hell would be calling him here? And a number he didn't recognize.

He did a quick search on the number. And then he realized.

It had an inter-city prefix.

Someone was calling him from Utopia.

* * *

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Rebecca is drawn into a new life when she moves to Utopia. A city where women rule and men obey.

Her diary follows the events in her life, exercising her new-found rights to dominate and control men, not least her mother's partner Greg.

But does she go too far, when she turns her fantasies into reality? When she makes Greg fight another man, to have sex with her. And with punishment the price of failure.

When Greg and the other man disappear, she's confused and bitter, and is determined to track down and recapture them.

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Where women take control, and men have to seek new pleasures

Jack and Paul are dominant and aggressive in their marriages, until their wives Lisa and Vicky talk them into luxurious communal living with multi-millionaire Troy.

Lisa and Vicky develop a sexual relationship with Troy, and persuade him to use violence to force their husbands into being more respectful and even submissive.

In a moment of weakness, Jack and Paul agree to dress as women, to be judged by Troy. But then they find that their wives become obsessed with making them more feminine and ever more submissive to them and to Troy.

As the men change in their behavior, and in their feelings for each other and for Troy, Lisa and Vicky start to bond in their own new lesbian relationship.

Then an event occurs involving Troy, that threatens everything about their new lifestyle.

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From Submission to Dominance

A journey of obsession and sexual deviation

We follow the increasingly bizarre relationship and role-reversal of Grant, proud of his physique and his strength, with April, seemingly a delicate, submissive young woman.

A chance meeting on vacation leads to marriage, but Grant soon realizes that April is not what she seemed, as she becomes increasingly dominant in taking control of their lives, and their sexual relationships.

And then he has her family to contend with. A domineering and mysterious mother, a sister who desires him for herself, and a brother, who seems strangely protective of April.

When April is openly unfaithful, Grant drifts into affairs of his own, not least with April's sister. But what he doesn't realize is that the sisters have bizarre plans for each other, and even more so for their husbands.

Against this background, Grant becomes confused about his own sexuality, not realizing that the two sisters are taking pleasure in manipulating him.

But then he shows an interest in the family background, and it starts off a chain of events, leading to questions about the past, involving April's father, and which ultimately put Grant's life in peril ...

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With a Lesbian Detective Agency

Ellen knew that when Donna invited her to join the agency, she might want more than a business relationship. And Ellen decided to take a chance, anyway.

After all, she'd had enough disappointment with men.

In working together, sometimes on dangerous assignments, they become close, but Donna seems to want no more than the occasional kiss.

As Ellen's feelings for Donna grow stronger, she realizes that she wants more than this.

A lot more ...

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A Woman's Journey through Eroticism and Bisexuality

In her 40's, with romance all but gone from her marriage, Holly dreams of finding a new and passionate romance, on an exotic Caribbean island.

On the island, she finds herself in a world of corruption, vice and even voodoo, that threatens to weaken her resolve.

But she's determined to pursue her dream of a new life, and finds romance and sexual excitement, with three very different men. But none of them offer her the long-term loving relationship she dreamed of.

Then unexpectedly, there's the possibility of a different kind of romance, uncovering totally new emotions. It's a relationship that she couldn't have anticipated, and it's certainly not what she dreamed of ...

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Erotica: Women Who Win

A collection of erotic short stories.

“He Dared to Trick me” tells the story of a desperate housewife in despair of her husband’s lack of libido. She agrees to a sex game in return for a promise of playing her own game next time. But afterwards, he only wants more of the same, and reveals that his promise meant nothing.

She’s bitter about being tricked, but she took pleasure from the game too, ... so she agrees to continue.

But little does he realize how far she plans to take this little game ... and get her revenge.

“The Prostitute” asks the question: When does friendship become an affair?

Louise struggles to develop a more intense relationship with a man who says his principles and his marriage prevent him going further.

But these principles don't apparently preclude using prostitutes ...

Louise takes the only step she can see to take the relationship forward.

But is it a step that she'll regret?

In **“Becoming a Woman: The Secret Male Desire”** an advert suggests more than the usual transvestite experience, with a suggestion of something more complex and intriguing, ...

It promises a long weekend where a man could not only be made to look like a woman, but would feel like one, and behave like one.

It’s a promise he can’t resist.

But does he really understand what he’s committing to?

In **“Seducing Susan: For Love and Money”**, can the opportunity to seduce be sometimes too good to be true?

Russell has lusted after Susan ever since he moved into the street. But Susan is married to Kevin, and is seemingly faithful to him.

And then a bizarre situation presents itself. Finally, there's an opportunity to seduce her, and even to make money at the same time.

But is everything as it seems ...?

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