

The Mind of Mr. Crane
by Orion

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Chapter One

ARCHIE CRANE WAS fuming, yet again! Fighting with his wife was the cause, the exact same fight he'd had goodness knew how many times already. Not that the outcome was any different, it never was; nor did he ever learn. You'd think an intelligent man; *the* senior financial controller for *the* biggest bank in the country would eventually realize that nothing was going to change.

Lucille, that greedy, lazy good-for-nothing was always going to spend all the money she could, eat all the cake in the universe, and use her remaining time to make her long-suffering husband as miserable as possible. Quite an achievement when you realise that Lucille, not Lucy, *heavens no*, was still on the right side of thirty. Only just, but...

Archie was on the wrong side of forty. He was short and a little podgy, nondescript rather than ugly, balding and completely useless at sports. He did have a rich sense of humour, which he was mostly too shy to express; he could see the funny side of his predicament, exactly the same as his father's had been and exactly what he had promised himself would never happen to him! Five years ago, when he had fallen desperately in love with a sweet, voluptuous Lucy, she didn't mind him calling her Lucy then, he had been oblivious to the cautionary note sounded by his elder sister, and relied instead on his instincts, and his beloved's protestations.

Five years is a long time. Love is a very serious emotion. So is loyalty, or it should be. It took that long for Archie to come to terms with the fact that he had been duped, that Lucille's interest had only ever been his money, and the likelihood he would make much more the prime reason for their continued cohabitation. It never occurred to him to divorce her, he didn't think like that. He didn't know what to do.

Fortunately, Archie's financial instincts were more reliable, actually several orders of magnitude more reliable! Indeed, given his completely unprepossessing nature, it was only his unerring ability to correctly predict economic fluctuations, and make precisely the right decisions, that had allowed a chap like him to get where he was. His survival skills in the labyrinthine underworld of office politics were negligible, his agenda naively that of his employer's prosperity. Nobody really liked him, how could they, he was always right, though many were jealous, really jealous, of his uncanny, spooky infallibility.

It had taken nearly fifteen years for Archie to reach his present position, a consequence of his diffident personality sure, but mostly due to the succession of superiors stealing the credit for his brilliance while concealing its source. In the modern corporate world most executives channel the abilities of their underlings to their personal aggrandisement. Talent, particularly such a unique and priceless talent, will eventually proclaim itself, not least because those self-same executives seldom stay in the one place for long, and the right information can make a slick operator a lot of money. Indeed, during the past six years Archie had steadfastly steered *The Bank* through a gruelling recession, dotcom hysteria, international uncertainty and spiralling energy prices. The shareholders loved him, or rather the bank, a 1 for 2 bonus share dividend, unheard of in recent times, had seen to that. The directors grudgingly admired him; after all, he had made them very wealthy, and the envy of their peers, domestic and international! His true value, however, was measured by the enormous packages now on offer to tempt him to rival banking groups, and other financial entities. When the Treasurer, that's right, *that*

Treasurer approached his old school chum, Leonard McKenzie, a current director of the bank, to sound out the possibility of appointing Archie to the Chairmanship of the Reserve Bank, a very generous campaign contribution was required to make the offer go away before Archie got wind of it.

The latest offer, from a major American bank no less, which an astonished Archie had imprudently revealed to Lucille, was the cause of the current dispute. And that dispute was the cause of the accident. Actually, when a motorist hits a pedestrian, it's always the motorist's fault but sometimes it's hard not to feel sympathy for the hapless driver when it's the pedestrian who strides blindly into the face of oncoming traffic. Pity poor Valerie Harper then, just eighteen and driving her dad's hulking SUV for the first time. She hit Archie Crane dead on, barely getting a foot on the brake pedal before the thump of the collision sent Archie careering through the air and thence to Emergency, more dead than alive.

Both legs were broken, multiple fractures, his spleen was burst, his chest was crushed and a splintered rib pierced his left lung, his skull was fractured, he was in a coma, and a betting man could get 20 to 1 that he'd make it through the night.

By nightfall, the news of the calamity had reached all those who needed to know.

VALERIE HARPER, SITTING nerveless in a police interview room with her shocked parents ineffectually comforting her wasn't responding to a single question asked by a caring policewoman. Not that there was much to know. There were a dozen witness statements describing the pedestrian's culpability, and no contradictory testimony. It was unlikely even a Negligent Driving charge would be laid. Of course, when Mr. Crane passed away, as he was sure to do, there would have to be a coronial enquiry, and an autopsy.

THE BANK'S BOARD of Director's held an extraordinary meeting, which achieved nothing. Their terror was palpable! The unspoken consensus was to pray, pray very hard, that Archie would pull through. Six directors were physically present, including the chairman, Sir Colin Hampton. He was old, he had to be. He'd scraped in just under the wire. Family connections, a shrewish first wife's burning ambition, and generous political donations had been enough to elevate his very modest business achievements to sufficient pre-eminence to deserve recognition in the last Queen's Birthday Honours List before that wretched Labor government abolished royal gongs altogether. And wasn't that decision loathed by every society matron worth her salt! Perhaps those few among them whose spouses were already so honoured might have been discretely smug.

The remaining five directors were all present, courtesy of a very expensive video link-up. Marc Sanders, the youngest of the bunch at forty-five, had been dragged from a Swiss ski slope, turning deathly pale the instant he heard of the tragedy. There wasn't one among them who trusted the incumbent CEO, M. Elliot Riddle, to tie his shoelaces correctly. He was *that* Elliot Riddle, of the he's not a Riddle, he's a Joke fame! Until now it hadn't mattered. M. Elliot, pliable soul that he was, and son of the legendary corporate bloodhound, Elliot Snr., (which was why he had the job; no, that he looked like a hound had nothing to do with it) had never made a decision without first seeking someone's, usually Archie's, counsel. So, praying was what they fell back on! That and the services of the best physician's money could buy, wherever in the world they were.

ARCHIE'S SISTER THEE, a lifetime asthmatic, had died a year earlier, without husband or offspring. She was nearly ten years his elder, and had been his protector throughout much of his miserable childhood. He had mourned her passing deeply, far more so than his selfish mother who had never been comfortable with her progeny, particularly after the early demise of his father. No other immediate family existed.

LUCILLE RECEIVED THE news stoically. She was even able to stuff another slice of creamy chocolate cake into her mouth. The bemused police sergeant who called to break the tragic news wasn't offered any cake, it was not Lucille's nature to share, and it wasn't long before he was hustled out of the house with scarce a decent thank you for his trouble. Of course, Lucille's first concern was for the lost eight figure salary, lost before she had a chance to get her hands on it. But she wasn't sure she would like America anyway. There was, however, the consolation of a fifteen million dollar life insurance policy, and that helped the grieving process. To be sure, the grief was for the money, not *Archibald*. She drove to the hospital, scarcely bothering to run a brush through her straggly, dark hair. She saw no reason to change out of her jeans and sweatshirt, or to slip on decent shoes. She wanted to be sure he was at death's door!

Lucille found the sight of her battered, broken, tube-infested husband to be particularly distasteful. She couldn't bring herself to touch it. Actually, she'd always found his touch repulsive, so nothing much had changed. What a girl has to do for a little financial security! So America was definitely out of the question. Archibald, god bless him, was as good as dead, and good riddance!

Lucille kept these thoughts to herself, and made what she hoped passed for sounds of genuine sorrow. A senior physician took her outside, away from the Intensive Care Unit, and caringly explained the grim prognosis. It was a miracle Archie was still alive. His prospects were slim to non-existent with heavy emphasis on the non-existent. Life-support kept him going for the moment. Lucille wished there was some way she could suggest they pull the plug, right now, but couldn't think of it.

Proclaiming herself in a state of shock, the distraught wife returned home to the silent welcome of a half-eaten chocolate cake just waiting to be polished off. On went the television, off came her coat, up went her feet, and in went the cake. As soon as the creamy texture touched her tongue, she knew something was wrong. She spat it out with a snarl of disgust. Something must have spoiled it. She brought a second, smaller spoonful to her lips with more caution, and sniffed warily. The aroma was marvellous. In popped the morsel. The taste was disgusting. Lucille wiped her tongue on her sweatshirt, scrubbing hard to erase the foul, lingering tang.

Succumbing to an angry tantrum, Lucille threw the remains of the awful cake into the trash, and stomped back to watch her favourite soap. They were all her favourites, the soaps that is. The 24-hour Soap Channel was Lucille's one great joy in life, if you didn't count confectionary. She had never read a book, for pleasure, in her life! She couldn't quite get rid of that tainted after-taste, and it spoiled her evening. She went to bed early, promising to abuse the staff at the Patisserie first thing in the morning.

ARCHIE HAD OTHER visitors late that night. First were Leonard McKenzie and Stuart Osborne, directors both, fresh from their gloomy meeting, and clearly anxious to quiz the

specialists. Archie's prospects were bleak, and would get worse. Sagging jaws and hang-dog looks bespoke their despair. There was one positive note, a young doctor explained, anxious to find something upbeat to say. His elder colleagues had long since learned to muzzle any words of false hope. Four eyes brightened! There was an unusual amount of electrical activity going on inside Archie's swollen, bandaged head and that was always a good sign.

VALERIE HARPER, THE poor girl directly responsible for Archie's critical condition, would not be swayed in her determination to visit the victim of her carelessness. That the police had already confirmed no charges would be laid, that her still stunned parents begged her to come home with them, made no impact against her stubborn resolve. So she had her way and around midnight was allowed a brief visit with the unconscious patient. Her parents cooled their heels in the waiting room. In the end, a nurse had to fetch her, twenty minutes after the five she was allowed had expired. Tears streaked her blotchy cheeks, and she was inconsolable.

WHEN THE SENIOR night sister, Grace Williamson, went on duty at 2 am, she found a cluster of nurses mounting silent vigil at Archie's bedside. She shooed them away, realising only after were gone that every one of them was off duty. Their shifts had finished hours earlier. She was in no mood for any funny business. Overwork, inadequate pay, and a terrible roster had finally driven Grace to submit her resignation. Her shift finished at 10 am. The letter of resignation was in her bag and would be presented to the unfeeling management in the Admin block on her way out the door. That would be that!

Was it only coincidence that Grace spent so much time fussing over the terminal invalid? Must have been; there weren't too many patients that night.

Chapter Two

PROFESSOR CONRAD HARTMANN, *the* international authority on head trauma, caught an occasional glimpse of the city skyline. Mostly, he kept his weary eyes closed, slumping into the soft luxury of the limousine's plush interior. Air travel had never agreed with him and now, rising sixty, the displeasure had got worse, notwithstanding the comfort of a first class berth. Some adversities must be endured. The implausible sum of 250,000 Euros had been wired to his personal account with the Deutches Bank, in advance, for which all he was required to do was fly half-way around the world, immediately, examine a critically injured man, obviously a very important man, and make a prognosis.

That a figure twice the initial consultation fee had been mentioned were the Professor to work a miracle and return the patient to full mental vigour, even if nothing else, presented him with the most rewarding challenge of his career. A thick wad of X-rays, and MR.I scans, were in the briefcase at his feet, electronically conveyed to his office even before he'd boarded the aircraft. He had studied them very carefully during the flight. The damage was extensive. Alas, there was little likelihood he would claim the promised bonus.

Sitting beside him in the limo was an anxious Sir Colin Hampton. His presence at such an ungodly hour had just one purpose, as Professor Hartmann wryly perceived. They were headed straight for the hospital. The Professor didn't try to object. He could wait a few more hours for a bath and some proper sleep.

LUCILLE HAD SPENT a restless night, most unlike her, and here it was barely 5 am and she couldn't get back to sleep. There was something wrong with her bed, with the mattress. She just couldn't get really comfortable. Some day she was going to have to do something about her weight. Now what brought that errant thought into her head? That some day was still far in the future. Was it really forty pounds she had gained since her wedding? Maybe a less discriminating set of scales was the answer. Furthermore, that rank taste from last night still haunted her palate. She twisted and turned, this way and that, yet sleep eluded her. Finally, in exasperation, she pulled on a warm robe and stumbled into the living room. She almost found solace in a re-run of *One Life to Waste*. What a lambasting she planned for the Patisserie's manager!

VALERIE HARPER LIVED with her parents. Just as dawn was breaking, she slipped quietly away, clean, neatly dressed, long, ash-blonde hair shining in a neat pony-tail, and glowing with the bloom of youth. She had made her bed and genuinely tidied her room. That alone was enough to convince Greg and Marion, her long-suffering parents, that their daughter was not herself when they later discovered her surprise disappearance. They called the police immediately.

GRACE WILLIAMSON FOUND herself strangely reluctant to approach the Admin building. Maybe she was being selfish, after all. Those desperately ill patients relied on her skill, experience and dedication especially that poor Mr. Crane, clinging to life by the slenderest thread. What was she saying about herself if she wilfully chose to abandon them? Ashamed, she tore the letter into tiny pieces and threw the scraps into a trash

basket. She felt better about herself immediately. Even though her shift had ended, she walked back to the Intensive Care Unit to check on Mr. Crane, one last time.

TRUTH TO TELL, Professor Hartmann was surprised to find his patient still in the land of the living, a point the hastily assembled team of specialists with whom he had his first briefing around 9 am concurred. *Sehr tot* was more what he, and they, had expected. Sir Colin insisted on being included. The Professor's English was excellent, and that helped unruffle feathers fluffed up by the importation of a foreigner, and a Kraut at that, to head the team. Fresh X-rays, and another MR.I scan, showed no further deterioration in Mr. Crane's cranial condition (ignore the unintended pun) and the unexplained peaks of electrical activity showed no signs of weakening. Indeed, they were measurably stronger. Sir Colin's frequent interruptions soon grated on everybody. The poor man was oblivious to anything other than the survival of the Bank's guiding light!

The serious lumbar and abdominal injuries had been stabilised, and plans were afoot to do what could be done for Archie's mangled legs. Professor Hartmann gave the go ahead for the surgery only after a meticulous examination. *Herr* Crane's vital signs were holding up as well as could be expected. Neither his kidneys nor his liver had packed up. For the moment, there was nothing to be done for his head injuries, other than round the clock monitoring. The time to take drastic action would come when those vital signs deteriorated.

FOR THE FIRST time in her life, Lucille found herself looking critically at her reflection. For the first twenty-five years of her life, her spectacular, voluptuous figure had defied all her thoughtless attempts to wreck it. She flinched at the sight of her pale, flabby stomach and thighs. What a morbid way to start the day! There was that asshole at the Patisserie to punish, that thought made her feel better, and then on to the Evenstar Café where a huge platter of pancakes would wash away her current troubles. There's nothing wrong with sloppy-joe, jeans and sneakers she convinced herself, wondering why her usual choice of garb felt so unappealing this morning.

What happened inside the Patisserie was a disaster. There she was, worked up to a fine fury, and poised to express it the moment the hapless manager appeared in answer to her imperious summons. Inexplicably, she was tongue-tied! Not a single, vituperative word passed her fuming lips. She could stamp her foot, but it wasn't the same. Puzzlement turned to incredulity for the stunned pastry-maker as the silent pantomime continued, to be ended abruptly when his most obnoxious, albeit valuable, customer turned on her heel and slunk forlornly away, whatever she wanted to say unsaid.

Slumped behind the steering-wheel, tears of rage pouring down her cheeks, Lucille thrashed futilely against the windscreen. She had made such a fool of herself, and she was mortified. How could she ever go back to *that* shop again? She could not remember ever being so at a loss for words. She was sure she knew what she was going to say. So why hadn't she said it? She was sick, that was it. After breakfast, she would make an appointment with her psychologist. Dr. Clarke would tell her what to do!

IT HAD TAKEN Valerie more than an hour to reach the hospital; two buses and peak-hour traffic saw to that. The very sympathetic nurse on duty in the secure waiting area had allowed Valerie a few precious moments with the comatose Archie. Tremulously, she

had given one lifeless hand a tiny squeeze. The simple action made her heart race. Later, standing patiently in the waiting area, she witnessed the arrival of the grim-faced medical team; horde may have been a more apt description. Striding purposefully at their head, a grey-haired, steely-eyed man took her attention. His clipped moustache and lean frame, his posture and demeanour, made an immediate impression. Valerie had no idea why, but she was sure the poor man she had nearly killed was in good hands now.

Valerie slipped away to the cafeteria for twenty minutes to eat a healthy lunch, she had to keep her strength up, and nothing was going to interfere with her resolve to keep watch over Mr. Crane until he was fully recovered. The Hospitality course she enrolled in at the beginning of the year would be put on hold for the duration of the present crisis. Considering her lacklustre performance in her final school year, she had been lucky to secure even this mediocre enrolment. Come to think of it, she wasn't a very admirable girl at all. Why hadn't this realisation dawned earlier? She'd just have to make amends, that's all!

The chain of nurses who manned the reception station tried unsuccessfully to convince Valerie to go home and rest, or at least sit down. She ignored the well-meaning advice, but very politely. There was a lot on her mind. Around 5 pm, her duty done for the day, she went home where she was admonished by her panicked mother, who was worried half to death. Valerie calmly apologised for her thoughtlessness and did the same thing an hour later when her father came home, worn out from a day's fruitless searching for his errant daughter.

BOTH GREG AND Marion found their daughter's contrition a little unnerving. Used to her selfishness, and surliness, whenever her misdeeds were confronted, this unexpected display of genuine concern for her parent's feelings took the wind from their sails. She told them where she had been, and what she had been doing. When she told them she would be doing exactly the same thing for just as long as it took for Mr. Crane to recover, they had the sense to restrain their incredulity, and they'd talk about it later, and just be glad their daughter was safe. Dinner was subdued. Greg and Marion were mesmerised by their flighty daughter's composed assurance, and then amazed when she cleaned up thoroughly without a word needing to be said. Later that night, in bed together, Valerie's troubled parents tried to make sense of their daughter's transformation. Was it trauma? Was it shock? What? As soon as possible, they resolved to get Valerie in to see, what did they call them, a trauma counsellor.

LUCILLE HAD GOT scant comfort from her counselling session with Dr. Clarke. Meredith didn't seem to understand what was happening to her. She began with her most recent provocation, the tantrum in the Evenstar Café, where she had been expected to swallow some vile excrement instead of the fluffy pancakes she was so looking forward to. To make matters worse, she had to write a cash cheque for one thousand dollars to keep the irate owner from calling the police after she had thrown her plate into the wall, splattering two unsuspecting customers with pancakes and maple syrup. How dare they tell her there was nothing wrong with the taste? She knew what shit tasted like, didn't she! Actually, she didn't, but in her present state a more precise vocabulary failed her. Lucille's tirade went on and on, with Dr. Clarke unable to get a word in edgewise, until the full litany of Lucille's misfortunes had been spelled out in more detail than anyone

would want to hear. At least, Dr. Clarke rationalised, her distasteful client was paying premium rate.

What Lucille wanted from her psychologist was a panacea to make the miseries of the past 24 hours go away, and stay away. What she got was some foolish notion that grief over Archibald's tragic accident had affected her biochemistry, and her equanimity. Was that a joke! Furious, Lucille stormed out of the plush, high-rise office. The smartly dressed receptionist earned a daggering glare. How dare that slut look so nice when someone like her, someone important, someone about to have fifteen million dollars, looked so drab.

Exiting the parking station, she reversed into the tow bar of a mammoth SUV. The collision destroyed a tail-light assembly, hers, there wasn't a scratch on the tow bar. She railed against the system that allowed people to own cars *like that*, and sped away. That useless Meredith's mention of her husband sparked the idea that she needed to see him, to make sure he was dead or as good as! She entered the Intensive Care Unit around mid-afternoon, starving, harried and mad as a cut snake. Who was that blonde bimbo standing there, with the big tits?

The duty nurse took some convincing that Lucille was in a fit condition to visit her husband. Eventually, under supervision, she was allowed a brief moment. It was all Archibald's fault, of course! A huge weight seemed to descend over her. It felt like loathing, for what she wasn't sure. Muttering obscenities, she stomped out. When she ungraciously demanded to know where the cafeteria was, she was pointed in the wrong direction. Nobody likes to be spoken to like that!

DR. HARTMANN DIDN'T get that bath he wanted until almost midnight. The bath wasn't really big enough for his six foot frame, hotel baths seldom were, so his knees were scrunched up. For the moment, the pecuniary implications of this strange case were forgotten. Never in his long career had he seen a brain with so much damage exhibit so much activity. The skull was badly fractured, slivers had chipped off and flown in all directions, many of them lodged where no surgery, however delicate, could ever hope to penetrate.

Contrary to his earlier misgivings, Dr. Hartmann was no longer certain of his patient's imminent demise. Whether *Herr* Crane would emerge from the coma, with or without his wits, was another matter. Only time would tell. He called Gilda, his wife of twenty years, on the line reserved for their personal communication. A slow smile creased his lips as he listened to the sweet sound of his wife's earnest protestations of her feelings for him. He instructed her to join him immediately, and explained how an e-ticket and visa waiver was already waiting in his office. She asked if she should travel light and was told no, that wouldn't be necessary, they were likely to be away from home for some time. Her wistful sigh awoke the usual stirrings. He knew exactly what she was thinking, not that she would dare voice her embarrassment directly. They had been together a long time, and she knew better. Conrad understood perfectly just how challenging modern airport security could be for a woman in Gilda's circumstances. But what was that to him?

THIS WAS THE very worst day of Lucille's life! Exhausted, still starving, and now with a splitting headache, she finally slammed the door behind her and dropped onto the

living room sofa. What had happened to her tongue? Everything she tried to eat, even the tired sandwiches in the hospital cafeteria, when she finally found it, tasted terrible. Only a bottle of mineral water, bought in desperation to freshen her palate, offered any relief. She stared at the blank television screen, willing her fingers to grip the remote. They just couldn't do it. A flood of tears poured from her red, puffy eyes, self-pitying of course, as she tried to understand what had come over her, and what she could do to get her life back to normal. She had meant to speak to the doctors, why hadn't she done that, and tell them to turn off the life support or whatever it was they did to put someone out of their misery! The sooner she got her hands on that fifteen million, the better.

Later that night she tried a plain slice of bread and, thank goodness that went down without an upheaval. She couldn't taste it exactly, so she'd make an appointment in the morning to have her tongue, and her mouth, thoroughly examined. She felt a little better after a warm shower and some Panadol but there was still something wrong with the mattress. Whatever it was, she couldn't see it, even after pulling it off the base. Lucille was unused to such frustration, and handled it poorly. She took the comforter into the living room and tried curling up on the sofa. She couldn't get comfortable there either. In the end, she settled for the floor, the comforter pulled up over her to keep out the evening chill.

MR. CRANE WAS now the only patient in the head trauma section of the Intensive Care Unit, and that allowed Grace to devote almost all her attention to that poor man. Every time she looked into those stark, wide-open eyes, she was filled with an uplifting longing to do something, anything, to ease his suffering. Surreptitiously, she slipped her hand under the sheet and gently stroked the limp member, just once. The catheter, among a multitude of other medical paraphernalia, prevented anything more demonstrative. She smiled secretively. One of the many monitors wired to his vitals showed a tiny spike. Hang in there, Mr. Crane.

Chapter Three

VALERIE HARPER MADE sure to tell her parents she was headed for the hospital, and that she hoped to be home by 7 pm. Complicit with their plans of the previous evening, a tired Greg and Marion kept their thoughts to themselves, wished their beautiful daughter well, and prayed this odd obsession wouldn't last. With Valerie departed for the day, they looked blankly at each other. What had come over their little girl, their only daughter? Greg was flabbergasted by Valerie's appearance. She had never looked lovelier. Indeed, he couldn't remember ever seeing her take so much trouble to look pretty and feminine. Marion had seldom seen her daughter wearing hose, and never a pair of heels like these. Last October, for her eighteenth birthday, Marion had bought the stylish leather pumps with their four inch heels, and given them to Valerie in the hope they might stimulate an interest in feminine fashion. How that plan had flopped! So, seeing her daughter glide effortlessly out the front door atop the flashing heels, with only a rare misstep to mark her inexperience, was another astonishment to add to their rapidly expanding stock of shocks.

At 9 am precisely, Marion rang her physician to get a referral to a trauma counsellor. Two weeks hence was the earliest appointment she could make. She relayed the details to her husband and both of them wondered how they were ever going to have the patience to wait for the cavalry! Privately, Greg thought it could be worse. That morning, Valerie had cooked *Eggs Benedict* for him, and the taste was great.

PROFESSOR HARTMANN CALLED the assembly to order at 10 am, the scheduled time. Professor Hartmann was always on time and *Gott hilfe* anyone who kept him waiting. The medical team had grown, a full dozen respected experts now made up the force expected to revive the comatose guardian of the Bank's well-being. Supernumerary to them were a gaggle of gaunt directors. They had arrived in dribs and drabs, as the news of Archie's slowly improving prognosis spread. Hope is a powerful stimulant. They had nothing to contribute, of course, not that they could be kept quiet. They were paying the fees, after all, and very hefty fees they were. Their presence was tolerated, more or less.

A decision was made to treat the multiple fractures in Archie's legs, including scavenging some bone from his hip to rebuild a mangled knee-cap. His vital signs had improved and, while there was no indication of a change in his comatose condition, the electrical signature from his brain was continually gaining strength. Everyone regarded the latter development as promising, even if they were unsure of what it promised! There was something undeniably strange about Archie Crane's brain. When the briefing was over, an elated Sir Colin made a courtesy call to the patient's distraught wife to inform her of the good news. Perhaps she didn't hear him very well. It sounded as though she was very angry. Women in shock do funny things, he mused, putting down the receiver.

IT WAS THE last straw, Lucille screamed, flinging the cordless phone across the room. How could that flabby, puny wimp survive? He should be dead! Dead! Dead! Dead! The insurance policy specified death, not disability, how could a mistake like that happen, so did that mean no windfall, and no salary other than the pitiful pension the bank would provide now that their glamour boy was of no further use to them. That wouldn't be allowed to happen! She'd pull the plug herself on the pot-bellied bastard before that.

The hunger pangs of the past two days had given way to a dull, constant ache. Bread and water were the only things she could swallow, and not too much of the bread, either. Anything else sparked a mutiny with her taste buds and she would just have to spit it out. Her doctor would tell her what was wrong today, and prescribe whatever pill was necessary to get her back to normal. Adversity was not something Lucille was very good at dealing with.

She did get a prescription out of Dr. Mullany; she had demanded it, ignoring the doctor's diagnosis, and advice. Who did he think he was, telling her there was nothing physically wrong, that tablets wouldn't help, and that losing weight might. She went straight to the restroom in the Medical Centre, gobbled down a handful of pills, and then to a nearby bistro. Waiting for coffee and a modest slice of cheesecake, she became fearful. Did the pills need longer to take effect? To make matters worse, the problem with her taste buds hadn't affected her sense of smell at all. Maybe it was sharper! When the coffee and condiment did arrive, Lucille was shaking. Lifting the cup to her lips, and wasn't that aroma simply divine, her hand trembled so much the liquid sloshed over the rim. She hesitated for moment but the promise of that magical flavour drove her on.

Aarrgghhh! No! No! No! The cup crashed back into the saucer. It didn't break but the contents spilled all over her. Uncontrollable tears poured from Lucille's eyes, and she futilely pounded her little fists on the table. The startled waitress hastened to her side, to offer assistance, but there was nothing to be done. The untidy patron, clearly distraught, dropped fifty dollars, yes, fifty, and fled, cheesecake untouched. There surely were some strange people in the world.

Something was going to go right today, Lucille vowed bitterly, after the tears stopped. She found the restroom in the adjacent Mall, popped some more pills in the unlikely event that might make a difference, and promised herself she would wait at least three hours before trying to eat something other than dried bread. In the meantime, she would lay down the law to those snooty doctors. It was her decision, wasn't it, and she couldn't bear the thought of her poor, crippled, brain-damaged husband suffering for an instant longer. If she told them to discontinue the life support, they had to do it, right? Well, she was off to the hospital, right now, and good-bye Archibald, and good riddance!

What is that slut still doing here was the first thought in Lucille's head when she stormed into the Intensive Care reception area. And who did she think she was, dressing like that, looking pretty, looking so confident, and standing so still in those ridiculous heels? Lucille's peremptory demand to see the doctor in charge, immediately, was met with blank incredulity by the shocked duty nurse. Muttering abuse, she stalked the length of the waiting room while an angry nurse called security. No-one was going to talk to her like that!

Head down, seething, Lucille almost bumped into Valerie before realising the young girl blocked her path.

"You're a disgrace!"

Jaws agape, Lucille trembled before her haughty accuser, her rage unable to express itself, just as had happened in the Patisserie what seemed an age ago. Why was she cowering?

"I want to talk to you, Lucy, now! Follow me!"

In frustrated silence, Lucille just had to obey that order. Nobody calls me Lucy anymore, as that stupid Archibald found out the day after their wedding. Lucille couldn't

keep her eyes away from the clicking heels as she blindly followed the purposeful footsteps leading her heaven knew where. Consumed with fury impossible to release, heart racing and head spinning, Lucille was suddenly very frightened. What power was making her do this? Nobody talked to her like that without incurring her wrath; and these days nobody was game.

Finding a secluded nook in the hospital's convoluted passageways; Valerie pulled up and motioned for Lucille to do the same. For the longest time, Lucille endured the regal girl's piercing gaze, every moment of scrutiny adding to her unease, or was it real terror. Lucille lowered her eyes, unequal to the contest. The last time she remembered feelings of dread like this, she was five years old.

"I'm going to make you a better person."

A what!

"Put your car in for repairs." How did she know about the tail-light? "Go home. Leave the door open. Get undressed and scrub yourself clean. Stay in the bathroom. I may call on you later tonight."

Every word was ripe with menace, and overwhelmingly foreboding.

"Do you understand?"

Lucille nodded her unkempt head, utterly powerless to make any other response.

Just like that, Valerie turned on her heel and strode away, returning to her silent vigil. Lucille willed her leaden feet to rush after the unnerving apparition, so she could strike her, or at least scream into her ear that she could take her orders and stuff them you know where. In the end, she couldn't even *crawl* in that direction, so her intention to tell the doctors to terminate Archibald had failed again, as well. Everything she did now was a failure, she sobbed miserably. And here was a teenager telling her what to do, and here she was walking back to the car. This can't be happening!

VALERIE SPOKE TO the flustered nurse in the reception area, saying that Mrs. Crane had calmed down and was on her way home, and was very sorry for her rude behaviour. The sweet, mellifluous sound of Valerie's voice worked wonders on the nurse's strained nerves. The request for security was cancelled.

GILDA HARTMANN HAD butterflies in her stomach. She was a pretty woman, not much above five feet tall and you had to look closely to realise she was almost forty years old. She had a fine, full figure and the loveliest smile. She adored her husband, and had done so since the day she met him. Parading around in public however, dressed as she was, gawked at, embarrassed her terribly, notwithstanding her more than twenty years of similar adventures. If there was one downside to her devoted relationship with *Herr Doktor*, this was it. That he really enjoyed her mortified discomfiture did make her burden a little easier to bear, but she was always so glad when these humiliating experiences were over. International flights were among the worst, and not just because of the long exposure. Here she was again, at Frankfurt Airport, inching slowly towards the security station, and already blushing furiously red at the thought of what was about to happen.

Conrad liked to see her in pink, so that was the colour she always wore, in various shades and subtleties. For this trip she had bravely chosen one of his favourite outfits, after asking permission from Frau Heller first, of course. Unfortunately for Gilda, her

dear Conrad's criteria for appreciation had more to do with an ensemble's ability to restrict her mobility, promote discomfort and single her out as a curiosity rather than any rational notion of feminine fashion. Not that her costumes weren't feminine, if judged on the profusions of frills and bows incorporated into them.

Gilda's lush torso was remorselessly corseted down to sixteen inches, as it usually was for formal or important occasions. The perpetrator of this crushing compression was a steel-boned, full body corset which began as a rigid, choking collar around her throat and ended atop her broad hips where a pair of gouging Martingale straps burrowed either side of her fleshy, prominent labia to provide insurance that nothing was going to slip, no matter what. That the inflexible, punitive garment was beautifully camouflaged by a skin of embroidered satin brocade, in a rich shade of deep pink, almost cerise, went some way to disguise its dire impact. Gilda's impossible, hour-glass shape, however, was telling testimony that she was ruthlessly imprisoned.

The oppressive corset supported but did not enclose Gilda's prodigious breasts. This support took the form of maximising their apparent size, and squeezing them provocatively together, making them a principal focus of attention. Eight, taut, elasticised satin suspenders descended in perfect symmetry to meet an expensive pair of pink, seamed silk stockings about half way down her thighs where a fluffy satin garter, its colour complimenting the corset brocade, decorated the union. Gilda wore a calf-length skirt of delicate, pale pink silk, lined with a heavier fabric to preserve its flawless drape and to ensure that its principal function, that of hobbling her thighs, was dutifully performed. The clinging skirt flared briefly from the knee down, where a voluminous band of ruffled lace concealed the hem. From the rear, an artificial seam in the stretched fabric was attractively closed by a row of small satin bows in the same darker shade as the ruffled lace. Tucked into the waistband of Gilda's hobble skirt was a filmy silk blouse, again in the same shade as the ruffled lace. The blouse's frilly collar covered most of the gruelling neck corset and the bodice hugged her shapely torso, its translucency hinting at the darker corset beneath. The contrast with the full, loose sleeves was striking. A triangular opening, its apex at her throat and its base barely above her nipples, and rimmed with oodles of ruffled lace, this time in the paler shade of her skirt made a barely legal, if wanton, display of her spongy, puffed up breasts, thrusting them eagerly out from her waspishly corseted torso.

Gilda's arms were sheathed to the shoulder in pink, kidskin leather gloves, and buttoned so tightly that every wrinkle was erased, albeit at the cost of minimising the flexibility of her elbows and awkwardly constraining her fingers. The blouse's flounced sleeves hid all but Gilda's exposed hands which she kept demurely clasped beneath her heaving breasts whenever she could. The last, though certainly not the least, of her visible handicaps were the six-inch heeled, pink patent leather pumps into which she had resignedly squeezed her little feet nearly five hours previously. The fact that the pumps were a deliberate full size too small only emphasized the importance her Conrad placed on the daintiness of her feet. The thin ankle straps, buckled pitilessly tight to accommodate the solitary adjustment hole, would not be undone until her Conrad opened the miniature, gold-plated, stainless steel locks which she'd unwisely added in one of her frequent moments of longing for her husband.

A stylish shoulder bag, pink of course, hung from her right shoulder. It contained her travel documents, her makeup, a pen and a special item she never travelled without. Gilda

moved with a sensuous poise and grace, her head up, her gaze fixed straight ahead. A pink pill-box, set at a rakish angle, crowned her long, golden hair, piled into a formal bun for this occasion. The torpid pace of the serpentine queue gave Gilda the time to gather her strength for the impending humiliation she was destined to endure when her jewellery, all her jewellery, triggered the dreaded beep, beep, beep, from the menacing archway ahead. She sighed wistfully. In only twenty-four hours she would be re-united with the love of her life.

MARION HARPER WAS feeling awful, and guilty. After lunch, she had sneaked into her daughter's bedroom, hoping to find a clue to account for Valerie's weird, inexplicable behaviour. The search was fruitless, not even a hidden cigarette packet, and come to think of it, Marion couldn't remember smelling that foul odour around her daughter since before the accident. Smoking was the first subject she raised when her husband came home. Men are blind! Greg had no idea whether Valerie had stopped smoking. Ruefully, he confessed that he hadn't noticed.

When Greg suggested they call their son, a Rhodes Scholar half a world away no less, Marion picked up the phone immediately. Of course he had to be told of Valerie's terrible accident. Gavin listened to his mother without interruption. It was just the sort of thing his lazy, scatter-brained little sister would do. Gavin had no illusions about himself either. Short and skinny, ugly to boot, he knew full well he looked the archetypical nerd and, truth to tell, behaved like one. Almost all his energy was devoted to his love of classical literature, the original Latin and Ancient Greek texts, and the history that went with them of course. The little bit left over was reserved for his sexual fantasies. If there was one thing he knew for sure, those secret fantasies were going to stay secret forever. Remembering his manners, he asked his mother to pass on his condolences. Valerie would get over her unlikely grief just as soon as some new fad took her fancy. She always had to be the centre of attention!

Marion reluctantly allowed her son to hang up. It was so hard to hold a conversation with him, unless you wanted to talk about Thucydides or some other long forgotten writer. Modern crime thrillers were her kind of reading. Greg didn't even say hello to his son. So much for that relationship.

Valerie arrived home a little later, looking radiant, and gave both her parents a warm, affectionate kiss. Within minutes she had tied an apron around her waist and was helping with dinner. Marion was grateful for the assistance, though her daughter's cheerful co-operation made her feel worse about the earlier invasion of her privacy. Toward the end of dinner, out of the blue, Valerie advised her father to purchase as many shares in MagMinCorp as he could afford. He should buy them tomorrow, or not at all, and no, she would not tell him the source of her information. She smiled endearingly, pointing out that her dear Dad really didn't want to know either. After washing up unaided, she brought her parents a pot of freshly brewed coffee, poured for them and then asked her mum whether she could borrow her car for three hours, impishly adding that she promised not to run over anybody! Guilt over her trespassing, and relief at the return of her daughter's sense of humour, dismantled any reluctance she might have had and she handed over the keys without demur. Greg hardly heard a word of their polite conversation. He was thinking about MagMinCorp and wondering how in blazes his

daughter, his irresponsible daughter, could know something like that, and advise him with such calm certainty. Maybe he would take a flutter.

VALERIE EXCHANGED HER frock for a smart blouse and tailored skirt. Her wardrobe, she knew, was woefully short of suitable apparel now that she understood where her life's ambition would take her. That shortcoming, and several others, would be taken care of in good time. Indeed, she had already reversed her decision to postpone the Hospitality course. Laziness was unforgivable. She would have to work much harder! She said goodnight, promising not to be late, kissed her parents again and left. It took a moment for Marion to realise her daughter still wore the chic high heels, and had been doing so for the past twelve hours!

LUCILLE WAS SHIVERING naked in the bathroom. She stood listlessly, arms wrapped around her shoulders and teeth clattering. She had tearfully given up trying to will her wayward feet to march her into the bedroom and be done with this nonsense. It was as though she was nailed to the floor, her tired legs finding it more and more difficult to bear her weight and now, as the night's chill bore on, she was getting cold. Lucille hated the cold! Her mind would not let go of the afternoon's baleful events. Just as she was told by that *teenager*, Lucille had gone straight to her car and driven it to the garage, then walked, *walked*, home, unable to stop en route, even if only for a fresh loaf of bread. There was just one stale crust left at home. Her tears hadn't stopped for a moment, sometimes fuelled by fury, sometimes by bewilderment but mostly by self-pity. Why was this happening to her and why wouldn't somebody help?

Her heart sank when she found she couldn't even lock her front door. It was one disaster after another. Her fingers disobeyed her shrill commands and before she knew it, she was naked and under the shower. But why had she detoured to the laundry and collected the scrubbing brush. The explanation was not long in forthcoming. Those harsh bristles had not seen such vigorous use in years, if ever! Lucille scrubbed herself raw, every inch of her skin glowing red before her traitorous hands dropped the brush, and her feet finally obeyed her direction to flee the shower cubicle. Unfortunately, she got only a yard away before they went on strike again. So there she had been standing all this time, not able to reach for a towel, drip-drying, blubbing and, most of all, scared out of her wits. Hours passed!

Lucille jumped out of her skin the moment her tired eyes glanced up and saw her nemesis standing intimidatingly in the doorway. She scrunched up immediately, covering her nakedness as best she could. Her blubbing intensified.

"Stand up straight, Lucy!"

"... what... why... why are you... doing this to me...?"

Lucille was powerless to disobey the firm, implacable command and though her brain was furiously fighting the action of her limbs, the result was a clear visceral defeat. Lucille stood up straight as a toy soldier, legs pressed together, knees locked, arms by her sides, stomach in, chest out and head up.

"... Please..."

Valerie put a finger to her lips and Lucille's plea, whatever it was, was never uttered. Losing control of her vocal chords was the final nail. The look in Lucille's eyes was one of mortal terror, albeit a very rigid, attentive look. Terror became stark horror when

Valerie revealed a thick bamboo cane in her left hand. She jabbed the rounded tip into one of Lucille's large, sloppy, pallid boobs.

"You are a failure. Divorce papers will be prepared in due course, and you will sign them as instructed. Mr. Crane wants nothing more to do with you. Your greed and meanness have caused that sweet man nothing but heart-ache. You *will* pay for your sins! Get into the bedroom!"

Lucille ran the short distance. Valerie steadily pursued her.

"On tip-toe. Spread those legs. Clasp those hands behind that head. Poke that tongue out." Valerie's calm statements sounded more like requests than orders. Sound can be deceptive!

Lucille promptly complied with every request.

"What a waste! I can see I have my work cut out." To emphasize the importance of her words, Valerie prodded the thrusting tit flesh, not that she needed to. Lucille was entirely captivated!

"You are not to leave the premises without permission. I shall call again tomorrow evening, after eight. I expect to find you waiting for me exactly as you are now."

Valerie disappeared from Lucille's view to better examine the bedroom's contents.

"Idle hands get into mischief, so here's what you will do when I leave. Hold that position for precisely two hours. The present time is nine-thirty-five. For every minute you fall short of the requirement, you will earn one stroke of the cane. For every five minutes you exceed the requirement, you will earn one stroke of the cane. Every time either heel touches the floor, you will earn one stroke of the cane. The penalties are cumulative, and will be applied wherever I think they will do the most good. Open your mouth!"

Valerie jammed the ominous cane cross-wise between Lucille's chattering jaws.

"If you drop the cane, you will earn fifty strokes!"

Helplessly intimidated, Lucille teetered back involuntarily and, sure enough, both heels touched the ground for a fleeting instant.

"That's two," said Valerie, matter-of-factly.

Reaching the doorway, Valerie addressed the obscenely displayed, podgy prisoner for a final time.

"Sleep in the small closet, with the door closed."

Chapter Four

SOMETIME IN THE very early hours, Grace Williamson realised Mr. Crane was going to recover, and knew it with absolute certainty. His crippled body, however, would need full-time attention. A lapsed Catholic; Grace began praying for the first time in many years, praying that she might be considered for a position as his private nurse. It was the least she could do to devote her life to the welfare and comfort of such a wonderful man.

Grace was well aware of the extraordinary young woman who spent so much time keeping watch over her comatose patient. Diffidently, at the end of her shift, Grace approached the tranquil guardian, uncertain of why she felt so compelled to do so. She couldn't keep the good news to herself, so she whispered conspiratorially that she was sure Mr. Crane was going to recover all his mental faculties. There was a gleam in the young lady's eye that told Grace this wasn't news to her. So other people knew as well. Wonderful! When Miss Valerie, that was her name, asked for her help with several errands, Grace was thrilled to be of assistance and, although nothing was said, the eager nurse was sure her co-operation would count when it came time to put in her application for a full-time carer's post.

Her trusty Fiat, the little 1970 model, pattered up to the main entrance where Valerie was waiting for her. Self-conscious, Grace couldn't help but apologise for the inadequacy of her transportation. Valerie sympathetically reassured her agitated chauffeuse that all was well, that she was truly appreciative of Grace's willingness to surrender her day so that Mr. Crane's eventual rehabilitation might progress faster. As soon as Mr. Crane's welfare was mentioned, Grace flushed with joy. She would drive Miss Valerie to hell and back if that would make Mr. Crane's life more bearable!

Grace drove where she was told, waited where she was told, and did what she was told. It was the most satisfying day she could remember. Miss Valerie did not elaborate on her various appointments and, since they were none of Grace's business that was just fine with her. By day's end, Grace was full of admiration and respect for Miss Valerie, and for her exemplary resolve, determination and competence. Who said teenagers were useless?

By mid-afternoon, Miss Valerie was finished with her errands and Grace drove her back to the hospital. Grace was asked if she could make her chauffeuse services available for an hour this evening, and would she mind taking care of Miss Valerie's packages until that time. Grace couldn't accept these responsibilities quickly enough! A lump rose in Grace's throat. Miss Valerie's parting words reverberated in her brain. How did she know Grace's heart's desire? *I'm sure Mr. Crane will consider you a suitable applicant* were the words she spoke. *How I hope so!* Grace restrained her exhilaration until she was back in the car. She had jumped from the driver's seat to open the passenger door and assist Miss Valerie to alight. Later, a screech of pure joy drew the attention of the nearby security guard, notwithstanding the insulation of the car's body and her cupped hands. Grace smiled ruefully, apologetically, put the car in gear and drove away. To win the position of personal nurse to Mr. Crane, Grace knew exactly what she had to do. First, of course, she had to do something about her unprepossessing body shape. Then there was her woeful physical fitness. An anticipatory smile brightened her rosy face. She was going to wear her very special uniform with irrepressible style!

GILDA HARTMANN HEARD the pilot announce the call for all seat-belts to be fastened, and cabin crew to move to their landing stations. She wondered whether the sixteen hour, non-stop flight was finally almost over. Her English was so poor she hadn't understood a word. Whenever possible when she travelled alone, her Conrad would choose a non-Germanic airline just to add another subtle handicap to her many burdens. Gilda was desperately uncomfortable. Her poor bladder was fit to burst and there wasn't a bone or muscle in her body that didn't ache abominably. Then there were the incredulous stares of the First-Class cabin attendants, wondering why the bizarrely clad passenger in Seat 1A chose to sit on the very edge of her seat, why she never once attempted to recline into the soft, contoured backrest, or why she kept her lovely legs pressed so close together, her dainty toes daggering straight into the cabin floor. A little shudder coursed through her wasp-waisted body each time her thoughts returned to the agonising embarrassment of yet another humiliating experience with the German customs authorities.

She had never learned. After all these years, over twenty, she ruefully realised, she could not accustom herself to, or even prepare herself for, these dread encounters. It was almost bearable when her Conrad travelled with her, he took care of everything. Otherwise, it was a dismaying, heart-pounding ordeal. The stark beep, beep, beep still rang in her ears. Every eye was upon her. Was it just her imagination, or did the alarm ring more shrill when she passed beneath the ominous arch. Two heavily armed, female airport police escorted her and her shoulder bag to a bare interrogation room. There was a small table, and only one chair. A trembling, anxious Gilda stood rigid with apprehension where she was placed, facing the table and chair. Only the good manners she had been so painstakingly taught by her Conrad saved her from a complete funk. Her little hands, crushed in creaseless pink kidskin, fluttered nervously in the shadow of her prodigious bosom, which now heaved precociously as a result of her fretful state of mind.

The elder of the policewomen, short, stout figure and contemptuous scowl, emptied the contents of Gilda's bag onto the table, refusing to disguise her disgust as she carefully separated the divers items. That done, she retired behind the quaking suspect, joining her partner out of Gilda's sight. Imagining the eyes on her back hardly helped with her equanimity! Every minute she was kept waiting added to her humiliation, and her dread that she might miss the flight. The latter was unthinkable! Gilda always, and implicitly, obeyed her husband, and not just because of the punishment which would befall any short-coming. Obedience was in her nature, and her devotion was absolute!

A lean, grey-haired man entered the room, clearly a very senior officer to judge by the braid and emblems on his uniform. He sat down, crossed his legs and for the longest time didn't say anything. Poor Gilda's panting breasts made an even bigger spectacle of themselves. She was valiantly fighting back the tears that threatened to overwhelm her. Eventually Gilda was asked to explain why she had so excited the security scanner. The unexpected explicitness of the question stunned her and she gulped, swallowed, gulped in consternation. Her Conrad did not approve of prevarication of any sort, so Gilda steeled herself to describe all of the hidden jewellery adorning her body. She addressed the grim official in her sweet, tremulous, deeply respectful voice.

She described her nose ring, even though the thick golden circle through her septum was clearly visible. She similarly described her heavy, matching earrings. She described the solid golden barbell through the centre of her tender tongue, demurely parting her full, pink lips to discretely display it for her interrogator's edification. With cheeks as

pink as her notorious costume, Gilda described the golden rings piercing her nipples and how they were the same gauge as her nose ring. Her cheeks blushed full red when she described her hypo-allergenic grommets and how they were presently sealed with three, very snug, gold-plated stainless steel padlocks to which only her husband, the internationally renowned Professor Hartmann, had the keys. Finally, she described her golden thumb-rings, of which only a small, flexibly mounted O-ring emerged from the embrace of the clinging kidskin.

Her Conrad allowed her to use his name in situations like this, but only as a last resort to prevent a full body search. Gilda's costume had to be removed with great care to avoid damage and it was this damage her Conrad wanted to prevent. Her embarrassment, she acknowledged without resentment, was of no concern whatsoever to Professor Hartmann, nor should it be.

The official examined her documents, grunted once or twice and left the room, her passport in hand. Gilda resumed her motionless wait, trying to concentrate on the steadily growing pains in all her body parts rather than her acute humiliation. It was a game she often played, far more comfortable, if that's the right word, with physical distress than its emotional equivalent. How she hoped she wasn't going to miss the flight. She didn't dare voice her worry to the intimidating policewomen she supposed were still stationed behind her, her Conrad actively discouraged that kind of behaviour, preferring her to speak only when spoken to. Thank goodness her cramped toes, pressed tight together, were already terribly sore! That gave her something much easier to think about!

After what seemed an interminable wait, the official returned and resumed his seat. He put the passport to one side of the table, added her other documents, her make-up box and her fountain pen to that pile. That left the other item, the excruciatingly embarrassing item. Oh no, Gilda wailed internally, he was going to make her describe it, she just knew it! Sure enough, he pointed to the strange device, his penetrating eyes never leaving hers for an instant. Poor Gilda, her cheeks now burning crimson, told her interrogator that the gleaming object was in fact a gold-plated, stainless steel ring gag which had been designed to fit precisely behind her teeth, and stretch her jaws gaping wide when expanded, so that she couldn't mistakenly use her teeth while she gave her husband oral pleasure. Did she really hear a faint gasp from behind? It didn't matter. How she hoped the thin-lipped official was finished with her? Gilda despaired when his expression changed to a puzzled frown and she sinkingly knew she had to show him how it worked. That was what her Conrad would expect.

Gilda coughed discretely, and politely asked for permission to explain. A solitary nod was her signal to begin. So she told him what she had to do to fit the ring in place, and activate the powerful, compressed springs which wedged it remorselessly behind her teeth while opening her mouth so wide her lips were ready to split. He nodded again, inviting a quaking Gilda to demonstrate the device. She hobbled helplessly forward, her hands shaking so nervously she could scarcely pick it up. Her final words were a plea that because her husband would not allow her to remove the ring gag herself, no matter what the circumstances, would *Herr Inspektor* kindly take it out himself by depressing the tiny corner studs she identified.

Herr Inspektor kept his intentions to himself while poor Gilda slipped the gleaming brace into her mouth and with practised ease snapped the pins which rammed the brutal metal surfaces into her gums. The tiniest groan escaped her plainly punished mouth

though that was the only hint that the blushing Gilda was in any kind of discomfort. Her barbelled tongue rested provocatively on her lower lip, just as her Conrad liked to see it, wantonly inviting a trespasser.

An age later, the official returned the contents of Gilda's bag whence they came. He stood up slowly and draped the bag over her shoulder. He nodded to the security personnel and a moment later, with one upper arm in the grip of each policewoman, she was marched to the door. Gilda complied, as she always did when confronted by authority, though she was frantic inside. Was she really going to be made to take the flight ring-gagged for all to see?

To her immense relief, her escorts were halted just inside the doorway. The official, a thin smile on his lips at last, extracted the humiliating device from her mouth, wiped the saliva from it onto his handkerchief, and popped it into her bag. He nodded again, and Gilda was led to the gate, with two minutes to spare. Gilda committed his parting words to memory, so she could relay them to her husband. *Professor Hartmann is a lucky man.*

GREG HARPER WAS regretting his decision to risk so much of his hard-earned savings, their hard-earned savings, moments after making the decision to do so. He fretted all afternoon. What had come over him? Valerie was a vapid, thoughtless, selfish teenager, which was all you could expect these days, so what could have possibly made him take her advice and commit \$75,000 in such a speculative venture. Certainly something strange had happened to his daughter since the accident, but time would fix that and she would revert to type any day now.

Greg was mostly honest with his wife, and mostly faithful; more faithful, at any rate, than many of his colleagues. This investment, gamble more like, was made without consultation with Marion, and now he was pondering whether to tell her at all. In the end he decided she had to know, trying to explain what he had done after it had all turned to shit would be worse. Much to his surprise, the usually conservative Marion was supportive rather than critical. Greg didn't feel a whole lot better. MagMinCorp was a fly-by-night outfit! What was it with mothers and their daughters?

Valerie arrived home in time to help with dinner, once again. If anything, she looked more radiant than when she'd left that morning. Marion was thrilled with her daughter's switch from sloppy casual to feminine chic. Now all that remained was for her daughter to find a good job, a good husband and have some babies. Neither Greg nor Marion mentioned the shares over dinner. That was fine with Greg. He'd half expected Marion to confront him on the doorstep. The conversation was friendly, and forgettable. Valerie cleaned up for the third consecutive evening, her Dad hoping this would become a habit. Typically, Greg washed up. It was his least favourite chore, which meant he had a vested interest in encouraging his daughter's improved behaviour. And, he mused a little guiltily, she looked fabulous!

For the very first time, Valerie actually asked if she could phone her big brother, to thank him for his kind wishes. Valerie, who had never thanked her brother for anything, treated him like the loser and geek she knew he was; well... what was another surprise, more or less. Marion dumbfoundedly acquiesced. And what was it they talked about, so *sotto voce* she couldn't hear a word. They chatted for over an hour!

Valerie told her parents she had a visit to pay. She declined her mother's prompt offer of her car, explaining that a friend from the hospital was going to pick her up.

Marion restrained her curiosity, no easy thing, and watched her daughter depart with very mixed feelings. What was Valerie up to?

GAVIN DID HAVE one other interest aside from the afore-mentioned Classical literature and sex, and that was basketball. He wasn't a player, oh no, his stature and clumsiness precluded that. He was a fan. England is such a tiny country that Gavin had little trouble attending every game played by the London Lovelies, whether home or away. The object of his obsession was Miss Gwen Taylor, an ebony-skinned, statuesque Amazon, and the team's best player. Standing a full 6' 8" in height, Gwen was the tallest girl in the League. Less importantly from the game's point of view, her voluptuous figure beggared belief and if Gavin didn't spend every minute of every game mesmerised by her magnificent mammaries, it wasn't for want of trying.

Tonight was the forty-fourth time Gavin had watched her play, always from the back of the stadium. He was excruciatingly shy. So it had to be his imagination, didn't it? It seemed as though, tonight, Gwen couldn't take her eyes from him. Certainly, it was the worst game she'd ever played. Before the first quarter was done, she was benched. Her scrutiny unnerved him; surely it was nothing but a coincidence. Surely? He kept stealing surreptitious glances in her direction, and every time, there she was, gazing at him intently. Then a curious thing happened. Gavin stared back, doing his best to make his face a mask of imperturbability. He'd never had the spine to do anything like it before, ever! A few moments later, Gwen dropped her eyes demurely and if it weren't for the frequent glimpses she gave him throughout the remainder of the game, he would have been sure he was daydreaming.

A VERY CLEAN and naked Lucille scrunched up listlessly inside the tiny closet, her only company a small clock whose hands she followed with intense dread. She couldn't bring herself to lie on her bed, or the sofa, or even the floor. She couldn't leave the house, she couldn't get dressed and she couldn't use the phone. She was able to eat the stale bread crust, and drink some water. The sinister events of the previous evening were burned into her brain. How she had tried to break free of the spell, that's what it was – witchcraft – an awful spell used to usurp her free-will. Her tormentor was a demon sent from hell to destroy her. Why her? What had she done to deserve this? It was a mistake! The shocking, two-hour ordeal was the very worst of her life. Lost in her own misery, self-pity and discomfort, Lucille soon lost all track of time. Then she got cramp in both legs, not at the same time thankfully, and her heels involuntarily hit the floor a dozen times. Exhausted and aching all over, Lucille prayed her two hour detention was up, and collapsed. She raced to find a clock, only to discover she had broken position eighteen minutes too soon. A wail of despair burned her throat, and the cane slipped from her sore, stiff jaws. She had clenched the bamboo very tightly.

At ten minutes of eight o'clock, Lucille scrambled from the closet and went to the toilet. She did her best to put her feet in the exact same spot they were in the previous evening. Why had she spread her legs so far apart the first time? She gripped the evil cane between her teeth and clasped her hands behind her head. Up onto her toes she went, praying her tormentor, her demon, would arrive soon. Poor Lucille had already earned a terrifying thirty-seven strokes from the cane! Lucille's ears were peeled for the faintest sound, anything to forewarn her of the terrifying creature's arrival. It was almost a relief

when a medley of sounds from the kitchen filtered through to her. Was that the door closing? Lucille panicked, imagining she was left to pose like this for the rest of her life. The cane clattered to the ground, just as the demon walked through the doorway.

“That was a silly thing to do!”

Tears sprouted from Lucille’s eyes when she realised she had added another fifty, yes fifty, strokes to her punishment. It was so unfair! It was so cruel!

“Pick up the cane, Lucy, and bring it to me.” Lucille did as she was told, anxiously handing over the vicious instrument.

“Well...”

Lucille couldn’t bring herself to speak, she was sobbing so hard.

“Do stop that blubbering, Lucy.”

“... I... counted... ninety-three...” Did she really have to include the penalty for dropping the cane? Why couldn’t she lie? Lying had never been a problem for her in the past. Lucille, numbed with dread, watched the demon flex the cane and then flash it through the air in a couple of frightening, venomous practice swings. The shaking, panting victim knew she couldn’t bear a single stroke; she had almost never been struck in her entire life. Ninety-three would kill her, she was sure of it! Her mind was screaming to her vocal chords to protest the cruel, unjust punishment. What emerged from her gulping throat was nothing more than a pale, terrified croak. Her legs turned to jelly and she collapsed, curled into a foetal ball, and cried like a baby.

Lucille didn’t hear Valerie’s sigh of exasperation. She did feel the stinging agony of the first cut whistling pitilessly into her flabby bottom. A line of fire exploded across that mighty expanse of tender flesh and Lucille threshed like a fish out of water. She yelped plaintively.

“Stand up, Lucy,” Valerie instructed, standing aside to allow the shattered woman to clamber to her trembling feet.

The sinister smile on the demon’s lips crushed Lucille to the core.

“Ninety-two, I believe.”

All Lucille could do was clasp her little hands over her buttocks in a pathetic effort to protect the target, then close her eyes and tense for the next blow. Closing her eyes was a big mistake! The second blow laid a livid welt into her spongy, voluptuous tits, just above her thick nipples. The pain was excruciating and Lucille convulsed uncontrollably. Why couldn’t she scream properly, some distant part of her brain queried? Most of her brain was consumed with the indescribable impact. Her eyes stared wide in disbelief that her innocent breasts could deserve such cruelty.

“Ninety-one.”

Frantic with terror, Lucille’s nerveless arms dropped lifelessly to her sides, her head drooped and she quivered. The cane’s tip dug into her chin, and a gentle pressure compelled her to look straight into the eyes of the demon in human guise. How could anyone who looked so lovely be so evil? Lucille’s red-rimmed eyes were held prisoner in that steely gaze. The cane tapped her knuckles, one after the other, and the cowering captive clasped her hands behind her head once again, despite a hopeless plea from her brain to ignore the compulsion. A tap on her sore bottom startled her and her response was to provocatively thrust that flabby edifice out behind her. A series of manipulative taps made her body bend at the waist until her spine was almost parallel to the floor and her large boobs dangled pendulously like a pair of turgid sausages. Eye contact was no

longer possible but still Lucille found her neck stretched stiffly, eyes staring pleadingly ahead. A final tap on one ankle was all that it took to drive the petrified prisoner onto tip-toe. Lucille's breath came in irregular, panting gasps. Her short, shaggy hair fell barely to her chin, and wouldn't provide one iota of protection for her obscenely swaying tits.

"That's better." The demon was clearly satisfied with Lucille's prompt response to her directions. What was she doing like this? Waiting like a lamb for the slaughter! She was screaming inside!

The demon showed no mercy, and faithfully delivered every single stroke she had coming. Of course, Lucille often lost her balance, and occasionally collapsed, but every time the demon's power made her struggle back into position to accept the next blow. She was black and blue from the thrashing, consumed in a nightmare of pain and suffering.

The events that followed were surreal. Lucille signed a document, vaguely aware she was transferring the ownership of her precious Mercedes to the demon. Then she accepted some written instructions, promised to scrupulously observe them, and helped the demon to store away boxes and boxes of strange pills she knew were for herself. Lucille was in agony the whole time. Her buttocks, her breasts and even her poor pussy were swollen, bruised and battered. The brief glimpse she caught of the demon's handiwork as she passed a mirror was more than she could bear. She staggered more than walked, unable to raise even token resistance.

Towards midnight, the unending chain of instructions came to an end and Lucille thought she would be allowed to rest. Oh god, how she needed to rest! The makeshift bed in the closet loomed luxurious in her tattered mind. But no, there was no pity for Lucille. Back into her bedroom she was marched and despite her absolute exhaustion, the demon made her adopt the hated pose. She struggled just to find the strength to rise on tip-toe. In a deluge of despair, she opened her mouth to accept the proffered cane.

"Two hours precisely." The demon showed not a sign of emotion. Her beseeching eyes drew no sympathy whatsoever! She was damned!

How Lucille wished she had thought to put a clock where she could see it!

GREG HARPER HAD stayed awake to watch the first day's play in the Test Match happening half a world away. Valerie arrived home just as he was preparing for bed, well after midnight. She offered to get him a nightcap, which he declined. To his surprise, she told him not to worry about his investment, how she even knew he had made it, and even more to his surprise he found himself strangely reassured by her remarks. Nor was he to sell them until she advised him the time was right. He went to bed shaking his head.

As if that wasn't enough surprise for one day, Marion had patiently waited up for him wearing nothing but the slinky, shoulder-length, black velvet gloves he had bought for her ten years ago, and which she had never worn until now. Greg barely reached the side of the bed before this delightful vision embraced him, and slumped sensuously to her knees, gloved fingers working his trousers down to his ankles. Struck dumb, he handed control of the situation to the *Little Guy* who had risen to the occasion in spectacular fashion. He was vaguely aware of Marion's erotic red lipstick but once the *Little Guy* had been swallowed up, well, rational thought was beyond him. Blow jobs from his wife were so infrequent, and invariably marred by her poorly disguised distaste, that Greg was at a loss to account for this unexpected miracle. Marion actually encouraged him to plunge

his cock-head down her throat, working him over with her tongue and lips as if she really enjoyed it. It was no small wonder that the *Little Guy* was overwhelmed, and blasted an enormous load in a frenzied succession of violent thrusts. A groan of exquisite pleasure bubbled from Greg's twitching lips and his legs went to jelly. Indeed, only Marion's thoughtfulness kept him upright. Looking down at her glowing face, a trickle of cum drooling down her chin, he couldn't think of a word to say. His smile was idiotic! Hers was like the cat that got the canary!

Chapter Five

PROFESSOR HARTMANN ARRIVED at the airport in plenty of time to meet his wife's flight, the first flight in that morning. The limousine, and chauffeur, waited for them in the deserted VIP parking area. They were conveniently placed at his disposal for the duration of his stay. A word to Sir Colin had procured the privacy of a VIP reception, as well as the comfort of the largest suite in the downtown Monarch, complete with its private elevator and rooftop garden. Suffused with optimism now that Archie's eventual recovery was more than likely, nothing was too good for the Professor.

Eager as he was to be reunited with Gilda, the Professor's imperturbable veneer was impossible to crack. He prided himself on never showing emotion. A particular bonus of his predilection for pink was the ease with which he could spot Gilda in a crowd, or at great distance. He derived genuine pleasure from her travails and watching her mince daintily on towering heels was one of the most enjoyable.

Gilda emerged from the Customs barrier accompanied by a friendly porter wheeling the trolley loaded down with Gilda's two very heavy, very pink suitcases. He approved of his wife's baggage, the size of the suitcases demonstrated that Gilda had arrived with the clear intention of fulfilling her duties in an exemplary manner. Well, Frau Heller would have double-checked. Professor Hartmann acknowledged his wife's radiant smile with a curt nod; public displays of affection were not in his character. He was, however, pleased to note his adoring wife of twenty-two years hobbled after him with a spring in her step, and a jaunty sway to her hips. Bad manners were inexcusable, especially in public.

The chauffeur took charge of the baggage, and a tip for the porter. Professor Hartmann allowed himself the merest hint of a smile when the unsuspecting chauffeur tried and failed to lift the first of the suitcases into the trunk. He tried again, this time barely managing to manhandle the monster over the lip. The Professor stepped up and effortlessly placed the second suitcase on top of the first. At sixty, he still retained most of his youthful strength. He looked sternly at Gilda. Expecting the question, she immediately reached for the topmost trunk and pulled a glittering, tinkling chain, all sixteen inches of attractive, solid gold links, from a side pocket and deferentially handed it to her husband. His gruff acknowledgement drew another radiant, grateful smile.

Professor Hartmann opened the door and assisted his wife into the spacious interior. Rather than occupy one of the plush seats, Gilda sank to her knees on the floor, demurely crossing her aching ankles behind her and bending her pretty head submissively. The Professor entered the limo from the opposite side, immediately closing the privacy screen separating them from the driving compartment. He stroked her face affectionately and told her four days were a long time to wait. Gilda agreed unreservedly, hungrily opening her mouth and within a minute, the savage ring-gag propped her jaws gaping wide. She undid the first three buttons of her shimmering blouse, exposing the prodigious breast cups of her ferocious corset for her Conrad's convenience. Gilda's ringed nipples were teased through the stiff fabric until the golden rings popped out and the tender tissue behind them was captured in the fierce grip of the merciless material.

The Professor snapped one end of the slinky chain to Gilda's left nipple ring, and ran the other end through the heavy hoop piercing her left ear. Gilda twisted her snugly gloved arms behind her back, stuck her thumbs out and bent co-operatively forward as far as the wasping, oppressive corset allowed. Her Conrad expertly threaded the chain

through Gilda's left thumb ring, then the right thumb ring and finally her right earring. The six inch gap between chain's end and Gilda's right nipple ring was closed with a steady, relentless pull which saw her thumbs wrenched half-way up her spine, her earlobes stretched dangerously and her nipples subtly and seriously tormented. As always, Gilda was rendered suitably helpless to perform her fellatrix duties. She didn't make a sound.

Making sure Gilda's cute, pill-box hat stayed on, Professor Hartmann forced his wife's ring-gagged mouth onto his thick, gnarled penis, maintaining the pressure until he felt himself buried deep down her throat. Gilda was an enthusiastic and expert fellatrix, with thousands of similar experiences to her credit. Four days without an orgasm was an eternity for a man endowed since youth with a raging libido. The Professor did not masturbate, nor seek sexual solace in the arms of other women. He was intensely proud that his every ejaculation in the past 22 years had been in or on his devoted wife.

Gilda understood her husband's urgency and went straight to work with her barbeled tongue and practised throat, oblivious to her many discomforts. The limousine had barely reached the freeway before she was gratefully gulping down his first copious discharge. That out of the way, Gilda could now concentrate on a more tender, loving massage and for the next fifteen minutes teased, tickled, slurped, and sucked until her Conrad could take no more and rewarded her diligent, caring efforts with a second discharge of appreciation, and an affectionate pat on the back. With his help she struggled upright but remained contentedly on her knees. Her Conrad extracted the ring-gag and watched as she meticulously licked it clean. He put it back in her bag while she swallowed the last dregs. A stickler for order and symmetry, the Professor refastened the little buttons. He did not release her nipples, ears and thumbs from their bizarre bondage.

TODAY WAS GRACE Williamson's rostered day off which gave her an immediate opportunity to put her plans into action. Early morning and down to the gym she went, enrolling in the most strenuous exercise classes they offered. She returned home, if a tiny one bedroom flat qualified, sweaty, worn to a frazzle and delighted with her progress. And yes, this time she was going to stick to her diet. Dressing as smartly as her limited wardrobe allowed, Grace drove to the hospital with two purposes in mind: the first to get a referral to a cosmetic surgeon and the second to check on Mr. Crane. She took advantage of a fleeting opportunity to plant a kiss on his pallid cheek. The operations on his legs had gone as well as could be expected but the feeling was Mr. Crane was unlikely to walk unaided, even if he recovered from his dreadful head injuries. Grace stopped for a brief, convivial chat with Miss Valerie, sharing their optimistic hopes for Mr. Crane's future welfare. No mention was made of the visit to the patient's home, and the packages she had helped Miss Valerie take inside.

On her way back to the staff parking lot, Grace caught sight of Mr. Crane's medical team, or most of it. With years of experience reading doctors' expressions behind her, she recognised that gloom had been replaced with cautious optimism. Furthermore, the team leader, the stern Professor Hartmann, looked far more relaxed. She drove home as happy as she could remember being. Even the issue of her drab wardrobe failed to upset her. In the very near future, that and many other things would no longer be of concern. The realisation sent a shiver down her spine. A slow smile spread across her face. Grace was delighted she had time for a second visit to the gym.

GREG HARPER HAD the reputation as the most productive senior executive in the company. To look at him now, you'd never know it. He sat dazed behind his desk, pondering over the incredible events of the previous evening, and its equally amazing aftermath this morning. Around dawn he was woken by a surreptitious assault on the *Little Guy*, and those velvet sheathed fingers needed only a moment to get his full attention. His modest, conservative wife must have slept in those marvellous gloves, and nothing else, all night! Marion had wormed her way to the bottom of the bed and her head was nestled snugly between his thighs, under the covers. Like a thirsty dog, or should that be bitch, she lapped the *Little Guy* into a frenzy and kept on licking long after he had fired off every round in the chamber. He could only imagine the mess he had made of her face and was half expecting a tirade of abuse to accompany his syrupy outburst. All he heard were stifled moans that sounded suspiciously like pleasure.

His reverie was cut short by an interruption from his secretary, handing him a brief memo. His internet connections were down, yet again; the firm had to find a new ISP. Not that the internet or ISPs were on his mind today! It took minutes for Greg to focus, and when he did, his eyes bulged from their sockets. In an avalanche of trading, MagMinCorp stock had risen from a derisory 7 cents per share to 89 cents and was still rising. Greg was sorely tempted to sell immediately and realise a better than 1,200% profit, almost one million dollars! His daughter's quiet admonition, not to sell until so advised, stayed his hand. How had she known? Did she know of the spectacular rise in the share price? Greg didn't even know whether his daughter had a cell phone. Could he call the hospital, or the Intensive Care Unit? Perhaps he should call Marion to see if she knew how to contact their daughter? He certainly wanted to boast to her of their potential windfall. Marion worked three days at the Public Library, and this was one of them. Greg called her there, admittedly a little nervous. There wasn't a word spoken between them this morning, or last night for that matter. Indeed, Greg went to work leaving Marion buried at the bottom of their bed, still writhing and moaning. What do you say to your wife in circumstances like that?

It went far better than he expected. Marion was cheerful, called him darling, and congratulated him on his acumen, *his acumen*. Blind Freddie knew all the credit belonged to Valerie. Unfortunately, he was no closer to contacting his daughter. Valerie's cell phone had been idle for months. Marion had stopped paying for it. Greg tried his internet connection again, to no avail. He called a colleague, Tony Pierpont, down on the third floor to ask if he had a connection. He didn't. Greg's secretary, whose name just happened to be Marion as well, brought him a second memo. If only the girl could learn to smile, he mused, she would be quite attractive. Her sense of humour was non-existent, he remembered ruefully, thinking back to the time when he suggested she change her name to Molly or something like that, for his convenience, and to prevent confusion. He had not joked with her since!

Greg's mind was running widdershins. He snatched the memo from her hands, eyes transfixed by the figure written there. Two dollars 18 cents per share, and solid! His 1,070,000 shares were worth a fantastic 2.3 million dollars. He was a multi-millionaire overnight! He had to get in touch with Valerie. The hospital was the obvious place to start. Then the phone rang, startling him. First thing that morning, Greg had asked Marion (the secretary) to hold all his calls which accounted for his surprise, but not his delight

when the caller turned out to be his daughter. Her friendly *Hi Dad* was never more welcome. She cut short his protestations apologetically, explaining she was pressed for time but that he should put his shares on the market this afternoon, and not take a penny less than \$2.75 cents a share. Her *Bye Dad* rang in his ears before he could even thank her. She did offer to pick him up from work, around six, in her new car no less! Greg's SUV was still in the panel shop, awaiting a new bumper and headlight assembly. Stunned, and not really sure whether he was dreaming, more so because of the treatment meted out to the *Little Guy* over the past twenty-four hours, Greg called his broker and placed his sell instructions. He knew that conversation was real. His broker tried everything to get him to reveal how he had foreseen this windfall, especially in such a bearish market. Greg kept his secret. How would it look if he told his broker the advice came from his teen-age daughter? And where did Valerie get a new car from?

AT EXACTLY 10 AM Lucille swallowed the six pills prescribed in the printed instructions she had already memorised. She drank precisely one pint of water. Then she went into the spacious living room where she'd already moved some of the furniture to clear a wide space in the centre. Fully naked, she began to run on the spot, lifting her flabby thighs as best she could, and clasping her hands behind her head. It was hellish exercise and just minutes into it, Lucille was sobbing despairingly. How her brutally bruised bottom hurt her? How her poor, swollen, savagely caned breasts suffered with every flip-flop-slap they made, carried along by the momentum of her straining, aching legs. She had to keep up this punishing pace for fifty-five minutes, rest for five and then start all over again. All day! She was so hungry!

She had lost all control over her behaviour. It was impossible to disobey a single direction. Even the thought of disobedience had become unpleasant. Her own mind was conspiring against her, turning her into a brainless zombie. She couldn't let that happen. She just couldn't! Lucille knew what would happen to her if she wasn't able to confirm her compliance with all the onerous regulations imposed upon her. Knowing that last night she had already earned twenty-two strokes with the cane, four for holding her position sixteen minutes too long and another eighteen for allowing her heels to touch the ground, and that the targets for retribution were already tormented beyond belief, was in itself a driving incentive to please and obey. So she forced her leaden, throbbing legs to pick up the pace, frantically gulping air into her starved lungs. Would she ever escape this nightmare? Would she ever be rescued? The tears fell steadily.

VALERIE EMERGED FROM the brokerage office with a cashier's check in hand. Her 240,000 MagMinCorp shares had realised almost \$680,000. A branch of her bank was across the street, allowing her to deposit it immediately. Carl Reilly, the flamboyant broker with that terrible toupee, had explained that it was usual procedure to wait a day or two for a sale's proceeds to be credited to a client's account but for some reason he decided to pay out his newest customer immediately. Valerie suspected her appearance, or his curiosity, or both were responsible for the largesse. His efforts to pump her for the source of her information proved fruitless, but he wasn't going to complain. Over the years he had made a fair amount of money taking modest flyers on out-of-the-ordinary buy instructions from out-of-the-ordinary clients; a tidy \$85,000, thank you very much,

this time. He made a point of telling Valerie she was already on his A-list of clients, and that she could call him direct at any time.

Grandma's bequest had done sterling service, providing the wherewithal for Valerie's investment. She wasn't going to tell a direct lie to her parents, but her new-found wealth would help explain the almost new Mercedes. A mischievous smile brightened her face. Perhaps her new wardrobe would deflect their curiosity. That was the next item on her agenda, and one Valerie had been eagerly looking forward to since the traumatic day she had almost killed Mr. Crane. She was headed straight for the Madeleine Salon, the home of the most exclusive and feminine fashions in the country.

MARION'S (THE WIFE) glowing face had worn a guilty smile all day. What had come over her? What would her husband think of her, behaving like such a slut? She couldn't restrain a giggle. She knew what the *Little Guy* thought about her, but it wasn't the same. She had been too embarrassed to crawl out from under the covers, her face soaked in delicious spunk, until the coast was clear. Standing in front of the mirror, absorbed by her ravaged appearance, Marion was reluctant to wipe away the residue. It was so erotic! If she hadn't been rostered on at the library today, maybe she might have left it there? Whatever had sparked her wanton conduct, she wondered, but now that it was out there, she couldn't imagine why it had taken her so long, years, to discover her innermost feelings. To have denied herself for so long was incredulous. To have denied her poor husband his due was criminal. This last realisation brought a tear to her eye. She had been a bad wife, and she needed to be punished, and she needed to make amends!

ARCHIE CRANE'S EYES popped open at 5 pm. No-one was there to witness the miracle but spikes in the bank of screens monitoring his vitals soon brought a gaggle of excited medicos to his bedside. Professor Hartmann was among them, having returned for a second visit with his patient not ten minutes earlier. That he was conscious, and his lungs working, was clear from his adverse reaction to the tubes buried down his throat. The Professor made an instant decision to remove the lot and, sure enough, a gasping, very much alive Mr. Crane showed his appreciation by calming down and breathing steadily. The coughing would come later. The pallid patient looked all around, taking in what he could see of his surroundings. Perhaps he was trying to say something, his lips moved, but the only sound heard was a faint croak, understandable in the circumstances. Was that a smile on his lips? Everyone thought so. Archie's eyes blinked once or twice and then he closed them. A moment later he was asleep. Nurses were instructed to clean up.

The Professor kept a lid on the celebrations until the team were back in the waiting area. Even there, he did not permit more than a modest show of exuberance. *Bloody Krauts* thought several team members, although they wisely kept their opinions to themselves. Handshakes all round were made before the Professor used his complimentary cell phone to call Sir Colin. You might have guessed the patient chose the first day there wasn't a single director in the waiting room to make his return to the land of the living.

Sir Colin was ecstatic, refusing to be dampened by the Professor's cautious warning that full recovery wasn't yet certain, and in all likelihood the patient would be a cripple for the rest of his life. The promised fee would be paid first thing in the morning, Sir

Colin cried jubilantly, and rang off to inform his colleagues of the marvellous news. Professor Hartmann shook his head. Who was he to argue? Half-a-million Euros was an unheard of amount! There was nothing in the agreement about refunds.

BY CLOSE OF business, all of Greg's 1,070,000 MagMinCorp shares were sold at an average price of \$2.79, or so Arnold Harris, his broker, assured him. Greg fended off Arnold's increasingly insistent speculation with feigned nonchalance, creating more questions than answers for the bewildered broker. So far, the only people who knew of his sudden wealth were Marion (the wife) and Valerie. Marion (the secretary) probably suspected something, if his obsession with the stock market all day meant anything to her. And that was the way he planned to keep it. More than anything, at last he had the platform to take his grievances, and his ultimatum, to the board. His ambitions would be frustrated no more. Minutes earlier, he had secured an appointment with Jeff Cheedle, CEO and arsehole, first thing in the morning. He could hardly wait!

Shortly before six, Marion (the secretary) announced the arrival of his daughter. Her tone was subdued. Greg understood why as soon as Valerie entered his office. He was on his feet, on his way to the door to give his clever, very clever, daughter an enormous hug. He was stopped in his tracks by the vision of loveliness appearing in front of him. Were it anyone but his daughter, the *Little Guy* would have gone crazy. As it was, Greg reddened, praying the reflex stirrings down below escaped notice. Standing in front of him, posing more like, was a Valerie he had never seen before. Her breasts were bigger, her waist smaller and her heels higher. The outfit she wore hugged her superbly delineated figure, in several soft shades of aquamarine and was complimented by a pair of soft, cream kidskin gloves and matching patent leather pumps. Greg's eyes were drawn to the slender stilettos. They had to be at least five inches.

Valerie smiled coquettishly.

"Well, what do you think?"

"Fantastic! You look fantastic!"

What else was there to say? Arm in arm, father and daughter left the building. Greg did notice the look of incredulity on a shocked Marion's face as they strolled casually past the reception desk. On their way to the staff parking area, an animated Valerie told her Dad how she had used her inheritance to make more than half a million dollars, how that oily Carl Reilly (his TV advertisements were particularly obnoxious) had paid her out on the spot, and that she had already done her best to spend it! As soon as Greg realised the white Mercedes, a CL Coupe no less, was the car his daughter owned, he could believe it. Even second-hand, a CL cost a pretty penny.

Valerie invited her dad to drive, so after gallantly assisting his beautiful daughter into the passenger seat, he slid behind the wheel. The luxury overwhelmed him. The smell, the feel, the comfort assailed his senses. Of course, his own pipe dream, a Porsche 911 Carrera 4S Cabriolet was now within his means. Three million dollars, or just about, will buy a lot.

Valerie squeezed his hand.

"It's cool, isn't it?"

Greg grinned like a kid. "Who are you kidding?"

They drove home the long way, putting the racy coupé through its paces and hoping the city's police were their usual somnolent selves. It was an exhilarating ride. They

pulled into the driveway around seven, laughing themselves silly. Greg hoped his daughter's eye-popping outfit wouldn't disturb poor Marion (the wife) too much, and warned Valerie not to tease or goad her. Everyone got a shock that evening, except perhaps Valerie. Marion, as expected, was stunned by her daughter's appearance, but rather than disparage Valerie's new, adult, erotic look, or ignore it, she ooo'ed and aaa'ed admiringly. Mother hugged daughter, and commented approvingly on the severe corset which did so much for her shape, and the pencil, knee-length skirt which helped her achieve a truly feminine gait. And where, she gushed, did her daughter get those fabulous shoes?

Greg scratched his head. So that was it. A corset! He should have guessed. Figures like that don't come naturally. Speaking of figures, he couldn't remember the last time his wife looked so good. She was in heels as well, even if only a modest three inches. The pretty frock, the hose and her tasteful makeup produced an alluring image, and one in which the *Little Guy* was legitimately allowed to indulge. Greg kissed his wife passionately, and was both surprised and thrilled when she swooned in his arms. Valerie coughed discretely, mumbled something about bringing her packages in from the car, and left her parents alone to share a little romance.

Marion whispered nervously in her husband's ear.

"Would you like *me* to wear a corset?"

The jolt hit the *Little Guy* like a tidal wave. "Is the Pope Catholic!"

Everyone was dressed nicely for dinner, even Greg kept his tie and jacket on. Marion had taken a lot of trouble to prepare the meal, and all of them enjoyed it. Greg grandly announced the family was three million dollars richer, thanks to the brilliance of their wonderful daughter. Valerie blushed deprecatingly. Furthermore, Greg added, the first thing he was going to do when the money came in was give both his wife and his daughter a quarter-million dollars each to spend however they chose. Indeed, even his disappointment of a son would get a cut. The Harper's celebrated well into the night!

GILDA WASN'T ABLE to sleep. The excitement of the last thirty-six hours, and all the adrenalin pumped into her veins from the trials and tribulations of her long flight, conspired with her stringent bondage to keep her awake, and reflecting on the day's events. The limousine ride to the hotel had taken about thirty minutes so Gilda had her breath back when they alighted in what was thankfully an empty garage. Snuggling into her Conrad's shadow, thumbs still mercilessly twisted up her spine and chained through her earlobes to her tormented nipples, Gilda rested her pretty head against his shoulder, sighing sweetly and oh so relieved and happy to be reunited. Every minute apart was begrudged by the Professor's loyal, devoted spouse. The flabbergasted chauffeur, struggling to carry the suitcases into the private elevator, kept his thoughts to himself.

The suite of rooms her Conrad had provided for them was majestic. Indulgently, she was allowed to hobble around inspecting everything, including the fragrant, secluded rooftop garden with its magnificent view of the ocean and city skyline. The spa in the huge bathroom could accommodate a football team! What a wonderful holiday they were going to have! Indulgence over, Gilda stood perfectly still while her slinky hobble skirt was patiently removed, exposing her soft, silk-stockinged thighs and the golden glitter of the three heavy padlocks guarding her chastity. An anticipatory shudder coursed through her body. As soon as she received permission to do so, Gilda sashayed to the king-size

poster bed and squirmed her way onto it until she lay on her back, legs spread as obscenely wide as they would go. Of course, the unavoidable pressure on her gloved arms was very painful, and the pitiless padlocks resisted any attempt to stretch her labia, but those discomforts were trivial.

As each golden guardian was dismissed from duty, Gilda's excitement mounted, as evidenced by her shallow, panting breath, her quivering loins and her steamy, yearning pussy. It was her Conrad's habit to get straight to the point so within moments of unlocking the final padlock, he was upon her, pinning her to the bed, his impatient penis buried to the hilt in her spasming, thankful pussy. Gilda used all her sexual talents, as she always did, to maximize her Conrad's pleasure, even to the extent of minimising her own. After all, it was the least she could do express her devotion and loyalty. His purpose and pleasure achieved, the Professor peremptorily withdrew and headed for the bathroom to tidy up, leaving Gilda to writhe and twist in the sweet agony of yet another almost orgasm.

Her Conrad returned and released her nipple chains, and unlocked the tiny padlocks on the ankle straps of her tight, cramping, towering stilettos. Gilda undressed herself after that, carefully putting away her outrageous outfit. The first items she fossicked for were her ballet pointe slippers because her Conrad abhorred the sight of her heels touching the floor. The fluffy bows decorating them disguised their daggering profile. It was a tight, twisting squeeze to get each foot into the narrow confines but she persevered until they felt as if they were welded in place. It took a minute for Gilda to get her balance, and seek her Conrad's approval. Otherwise stark naked, she set to work putting away the suitcases' contents, and getting everything in perfect order, just as the Professor expected. They ate a late lunch together, enjoying the tranquillity of the leafy arbour. Perhaps Gilda may have enjoyed it more if she had not been so naked, or the weather so chilly. Afterwards, her Conrad announced he was due at the hospital shortly, and that Gilda should take a nap. So she scurried into the bathroom to clean herself thoroughly, inside and out, and then selected a suitable costume, one her adored Conrad was particularly fond of. She needed his help to put it on.

The first garment was a gleaming, pink kidskin arm binder, custom tailored to her exact measurements only one year ago. Much of her wardrobe was replaced regularly, to take advantage of the continual improvements in her posture and endurance. Gilda held her arms behind her back, palms pressed together and wriggled them co-operatively while her Conrad inched the demanding sheath all the way up to the top where a pair of narrow, gouging straps over shoulders crossed above her pendulous, heavy breasts to buckle back into the opposite rim. With practised skill, the Professor tugged and pulled at the sheath until he had it exactly right, and then began the steady, meticulous process of tightening the pink leather laces until he had reached his goal. As Gilda well knew, her Conrad would not be satisfied until the edges of the extreme sheath closed perfectly along every inch of their length, and the laces were symmetrically taut and neatly tied. She did her best not to disappoint him with anything more than the faintest moan to signal her agonised distress. Inside the cruel, oppressive sheath, her poor arms were ground against one another almost all the way to her shoulders! The strain was truly immense, warping and twisting her shoulders back so far they appeared to be disjointed. It was a sight her Conrad loved so Gilda bravely suppressed her urge to scream in agony, and forced a

simple smile to her lips when she turned around to quietly thank him for treating her like this.

Around her slender waist went a matching, pink kidskin demi-corset. There was no busk and the laces were to the front. It was as much a belt as a corset, if there's such a thing as an eight-inch wide belt. The deceptively strong leather was gradually cinched in until the stiff, opposite edges met along her mid-line and some seven inches was cut from her waist, compressing it down to a bizarre, intensely erotic sixteen inches, one of her Conrad's favourite numbers. Gilda gulped understandably as the laces were tied off, settling into the sharp, shallow breathing pattern the egregious demi-corset made her adopt.

Gilda sat on the edge of the bed while her Conrad worked the complimentary leg binder into place. Her hope that the Professor would fill her pussy and bum with vibrators came to nought. So she would struggle with the fires of unrequited lust yet again? If that was her Conrad's wish, then so be it! At least there was the consolation the Professor had taken off his trousers. The gleaming, pink kidskin sheath reached all the way to the top of her thighs. The lacing started at her toes, squeezed into one communal, extreme ballet pointe, and worked its way from there up her shins, past her knees and finally to the gates of her sex. It was an exacting process given the Professor's commitment to a perfect fit. It was a dreadfully punitive process for Gilda's shapely, defenceless legs, welded into a single, erotically pink appendage.

The next step in her preparation for a nap was one she really loved; one of her favourite times in the day. Left to her own devices, Gilda wormed, and wormed was a particularly apt word, her way to the middle of the bed and there struggled to her crushingly sheathed knees. The leg binder was far too tight to allow her to squat back on her ankles; about eight inches shy was the best she could do. Her Conrad joined her presently, and began to brush her long, flaxen hair with a firmness and patience she had grown to cherish. No matter how busy his schedule, the Professor never scrimped on this part of their ritual. It wasn't long before Gilda was sighing contentedly, her mercilessly intense bondage all but forgotten in the warm glow of her Conrad's tender ministrations. When it came time to fix her ponytail, Gilda realised with a start she had made a mistake in front of the immigration inspector. The golden stud embedded in the crown of her skull was the latest addition to her body jewellery, installed only in the last year, and she had forgotten, genuinely forgotten, to describe it to him. When next her Conrad invited her to confess her sins, she must remember to add that to the list. Try as hard as she might, it was always a very long list. The Professor's standards were challenging!

The golden clip used to bundle her lustrous tresses into a severe ponytail had been modified to snap directly onto the stud in her skull, not only ensuring it stayed in place but helping to prevent any of her tautly stretched hair from slipping back. The silky, flowing tress was expertly plaited, all twenty inches of it, and secured at the tip with a miniature version of the clip pressing fiercely into her skull. A gentle tug on the plaited tress was the signal for her to open her mouth. Into it went the ubiquitous ring-gag, splitting her jaws and tearing at her lips as soon as its high tensile springs were activated. Gilda kept as still as she could while her Conrad slipped the pink kidskin hood over her head, pulling her ponytail through its specialised recess, pushing the stiffened plugs into her nostrils and ears, and snapping the mating flange to the ring-gag, covering both her lips and her teeth. Preliminaries satisfactorily completed, the Professor started work on

the lacing, tugging away until Gilda's head was literally obliterated, crushed into an amorphous pink leather ovoid with only a gaping maw, two tiny nose valves and a beautiful golden tress to relieve the monotony of polished, pink, gleaming kidskin. He checked the nose valves. His Gilda was too precious to lose!

Gilda's collar was constructed of the stiffest cowhide, covered with a veneer of pink kidskin to blend in with the rest of her sleepwear. The Professor buckled it ferociously, chokingly tight, bolting Gilda's head to her shoulders and making the slightest movement of her neck impossible. It was excellent posture training! Though blind and deaf, and exquisitely bound, Gilda continued with the familiar ritual as though her senses were fully functional. On her knees, she straightened up before bending forward from the hips until her wasped torso was more or less at right angles to her crushed thighs and her precocious boobs dangled down like turgid sausages, ripe for abuse. It took a huge effort from her to hold that pose while her Conrad snuggled a thin, pink leather strap around the root of her left tit. He always worked on her left tit first. When buckled to its only hole, Gilda's helpless boob was inescapably collared, pressured into a swollen, engorged mass of sensitive flesh into which the biting strap had almost disappeared. As soon as her right tit had joined its mate in ballooned misery, Gilda wormed her way to the centre of the bed, rolling and wriggling until she lay flat on her back, straight as an arrow.

Each of Gilda's ringed nipples were clipped to a short length of golden chain, the nether ends of which reposed at either end of a wooden cylinder, five inches long and an inch in diameter. A thick lining of taut, pink kidskin covered the handlebar which lolled around directly beneath her puffy, bloated, root-cinched boobs. Her Conrad climbed aboard, kneeling astride her acutely corseted waist and rammed his throbbing penis into the tight channel between her mashed, overblown breasts. Grabbing the handlebar, he tugged deliberately and methodically in time to his vigorous thrusts, all the better to animate the slick, smooth channel. Gilda bucked and jerked as much as her helplessly bound state allowed, doing her part to make the Professor's ride as rewarding as possible, and disregarding the flaming pain in her savagely sheathed arms, the choking pressure around her throat and, of course, the agonising abuse of her strapped, swollen, erotically leashed tits.

The Professor, as always, rode like a man demented, helter-skelter, pounding away until the race was won and his mount worn to a frazzle. Sated, the rider dismounted and plonked his tumescent, slippery member into Gilda's gaping, steel stretched mouth, relishing the tender afterglow brought on by her passionate, inspired slurping. His cock diligently cleaned, the Professor withdrew, only to refill the humid cavity with an enormous penis gag that required a real effort to push all the way in, which he had to do if he hoped to lock it in place with a sharp, quarter-turn to the right. Just to be sure, the Professor checked that Gilda's nose valves were coping with the demands brought on by the switch to a total reliance on her nasal passages. He stroked her compressed, amorphous leather head with genuine affection, gratified to the core by her desperate, if ineffectual, efforts to return his tenderness. A familiar tap on the crown of her oppressively hooded head was all the hint Gilda needed to realise the moment of intimacy was over so, all unaided, she wriggled and squirmed her way to the side of the bed. Gravity did the rest. The Professor was already on his way to the door though the satisfying plonk of Gilda's exquisitely bound torso smacking into the floor etched a broad

grin across his face. Thoughtfully, he remembered to hang a *Do Not Disturb* sign from the door handle.

Chapter Six

GREG HARPER WAS stunned by the success of his ultimatum. He'd gone up to Jeff Cheedle's ivory tower on the morning following the MagMinCorp triumph and laid out the case for his immediate promotion, for an employment contract at least as good as the one he threw on the table, and for inclusion in all key management sessions. Jeff didn't get a word in until everything was off Greg's chest. Even then, Greg dismissed the protestations that the decision was not Jeff's to make, that the board resented this kind of assertiveness and that 10 am tomorrow was too early for a decision. He just smiled, repeated that it was 10 am or his resignation, and went back to work. Nothing was said all day. Actually, no-one even spoke to him, so something had to be going on behind his back. So what! All the office knives in the world were blunt against his three million dollar back-plate.

Even Marion (the secretary) was unusually brusque. Not that brusque behaviour was much different from normal. He did notice his drab secretary was a little less drab, and wearing heels for the first time, nothing like his daughter's amazing footwear, but one heck of a lot better than those dreary flats. Recent events at home had certainly made him more aware. By day's end, he was sure there was something troubling his secretary. He caught her staring several times, anger and resentment focussed at him. He had no idea what he'd done. Then the bombshell struck that put everything else to the back of his mind. A beaming Jeff Cheedle poked his head into Greg's modest office and asked for a minute of his time. Expansively, Greg waved him to the one empty chair in the room. There was a lot of waffle about how valuable an employee Greg was, how the company would hate to lose him, and how times were tight before Jeff cut to the chase and told him that his proposal, not ultimatum, was acceptable to the Board, that he as CEO supported it 110%, but that no contract could be prepared until close of business tomorrow. Without demur, Greg told Jeff that was fine and he'd hold back his letter of resignation until then.

What a turn of events that was! Greg had been almost certain this was his last day at Excalibur Enterprises. Acting on a spur of the moment, he left work early and took a cab to the only Porsche dealership in the downtown area. To his chagrin, there was a minimum four month wait for delivery on all of the current models. The one consolation was a fifteen minute test drive along the Airport Freeway and back again. A non-refundable \$10,000 deposit was required to be added to the waiting list. He'd waited all his life; what was \$10,000, or another four months?

Would he go back to the office, or go home? His cell phone saved him the decision. The caller was Marion (the wife) and she was downtown herself, and would Greg like to have an early dinner with her, and then go to the movies? It was a great idea. Marion's affectionate and titillating behaviour in recent days had rekindled all his youthful passion, and there was no-one, right now, he would rather spend an evening with than her. They agreed to meet in front of the Obelisk.

It took the longest time for Greg to realise the exquisitely beautiful creature standing patiently beside the stone edifice was actually his wife. She was dressed to kill in a blatantly erotic black dress, deliciously soft and feminine and emphasizing her astonishing, hour-glass figure. Her promise to wear a corset for him was obviously genuine. Marion had never looked so desirable, at least from the *Little Guy's* limited

perspective. Closer inspection revealed a pair of elbow length, black patent leather gloves moulded creaselessly over her dainty limbs and a pair of black, seamed silk stockings disappearing provocatively above her knees. Her adorable feet were stunningly shod in polished, black patent leather pumps, their precipitate six-inch stiletto heels gracefully forcing her insteps into line with her shins. Above each ankle, a wire thin leather strap provided some stability and security, although from where Greg stood he couldn't see why they needed to be buckled so tight. A moment later, the *Little Guy* gave him a full explanation!

Every eye in the square seemed to be upon her, though she was inured to them all until she spied her husband's casual approach. Like a shot she darted to him taking tiny steps, gloved arms flapping for balance. It was a memorable sight and almost made Greg ignore the fact they were the centre of attention for a bunch of complete strangers. Marion embraced him joyfully, hugging him with a warmth he could scarcely remember. Experimentally, he wrapped his arms around his wife's miniscule waist, and felt the unyielding stiffness in the corset fabric so at odds with her outward appearance. He kissed her very tenderly, inhaling her delicate fragrance, rubbing his nose lightly across her soft red hair, and whispering in her ear that she had never looked so ravishing. Marion pouted coquettishly, clearly thrilled with her husband's reaction. Surprised and pleased his wife hadn't mentioned a word about his being twenty minutes late, usually the first thing she did, Greg asked her if she had been waiting long, as a sort of precursor to his apology. Oh no, she beamed, only fifty minutes, and she was so relieved she hadn't kept him waiting! Greg looked hard for the telltale signs of sarcasm, he knew them by rote, but her cheerful demeanour belied any part of it. For a moment he imagined Marion waiting for him, as he had first seen her, standing like a sentry. Could she have been standing there for nearly an hour? The *Little Guy* surely hoped so!

Arm in arm, they walked slowly up the slight gradient towards the glitzy, inner city mall where they would have dinner within spitting distance of the cinema. Marion told him all about her marvellous day; how she had gone shopping with Valerie, and all the wonderful clothes and things they had bought with his generosity. She told him how well they had got on with each other, and how happy that made her. She told him, squeezing his arm fondly, how clever he was, how happy she was to be his wife, and how happy it made her to look attractive for him. Greg listened to her excited babble with only half an ear. He was more concerned with the embarrassing activity stirring below the belt-line, especially with all the attention they drew. Actually, Marion drew the attention. He just happened to be in the firing line. He squirmed awkwardly. The *Little Guy* hadn't been exposed to such benevolence for years, if ever!

Since Valerie had ploughed into that silly old bugger, Greg's world had turned upside down, and the view was decidedly better from this angle. Not to push his luck, the SUV would go as soon as he took delivery of the red, yes red, Porsche. The Toyota behemoth was still at the panel-beaters waiting for the arrival of a new bumper and headlight assembly.

Inside the mall complex now, Greg tuned in again to Marion's endless chatter. She was telling him something about Valerie and that Archie Crane fellow, was he out of the coma now? Good news of course, maybe Valerie would move on with her life. Maybe she would have another stock market tip? Marion wasn't expecting him to respond, aside from the occasional, practised grunt, and she prattled on. A small terrier crossed their

path, on a leash, and Greg instantly recognised the pup's elaborate collar for what it was. Its owner, an elderly matron, was clearly fed up with the yapping and had cured the problem with an electronic device capable of both detecting the unwanted noise and dispensing a salutary shock to discourage it. Greg looked at it longingly, turning his head as the ideal solution for a perennial annoyance crossed his path, and he wistfully muttered something about dogs, horses and women. Marion stopped in her tracks and looked hard at her husband. Her expression of puzzlement suddenly changed to one of complete understanding. Oh shit! He'd ruined the evening with one stupid, unguarded, sexist remark. How often had that happened in the past! Then why was she smiling, and why did she gaze so adoringly into his bewildered eyes?

Before he had time to resolve the dilemma, or formulate an apology, Marion had dashed off in pursuit of the meandering matron, a delicious sight in those marvellous heels, catching up with her not twenty yards away. The view from the rear was every bit as engrossing as the front-on one. Marion's callipygious buttocks jiggled and swayed atop her long, shapely legs. Stop that! Greg tried to get his mind back on the apology. He would need a good one to repair the damage caused by his incautious slip. The conversation was brief. Marion strutted back to him, proud as a peacock. She clung intimately to his arm and they continued their stroll as though nothing had happened. Greg wasn't sure whether he had dodged a bullet, or let his imagination run away with him. Just enjoy the evening, you idiot, you multi-millionaire idiot! The smell, the sight, and the feel of her close fitting leather gloves drove him wild!

He thought of protesting when she gently led him in the wrong direction, but they had plenty of time so what did it matter. He wasn't very hungry anyway. Greg's curiosity was peaked the moment they entered the huge Blanchard Emporium, the premier retail premises in the Southern Hemisphere. They rode the escalators up to the third floor and were half-way down a wide aisle when the butterflies began fluttering in his stomach. Greg could put two and two together better than most. His ingenuous admiration of the terrier's collar, plus Marion's mysterious conversation, plus the unexpected detour straight to this huge pet products department had him wondering seriously about his sanity. First the shares, now this! She asked him sweetly, throatily, beguilingly, would he mind if she did a bit more shopping. She promised she wouldn't keep him waiting long. If this was a script, Greg was about two pages behind, and falling further back. Mesmerised, he watched Marion mince provocatively in the direction of a young store assistant. Even with the distance separating them, he could see the look of stunned disbelief on the poor lad's face the moment he realised what he was in for. Greg couldn't help but sympathise with him.

One thing was certain! This wasn't the Marion he'd married, more's the pity. How long would it be before this gorgeous, remarkable creature reverted to type? Had she concocted some weird plan, alone or with their daughter, to make a fool of him? She'd done that once, when she was angry. Greg fidgeted, rocking from one foot to another, looking this way and that, but unable to keep eyes away from his wife for more than a few seconds. Marion, with the hapless sales assistant in tow, was clear across the other side of the floor and *something* had her attention. He didn't need to be a rocket scientist to guess what she was shopping for. She couldn't be! What was going on? And if she was, he wasn't sure whether to be pleased or worried. He was certainly embarrassed. The only constant was the *Little Guy*. He was thrilled!

Greg's first instinct was to hide when Marion came strutting towards him, packages in hand, and looking for all the world as if she actually enjoyed the experience of walking six inches taller, heedless of the cause. In the background, the poor kid leaned against a display stand, scratching his head. Marion showed Greg a selection of three shock collars, asking him with a sheepish smile which one would be best for an incorrigible chatter-box like herself. The *Little Guy* made an immediate, visceral decision. She acknowledged his choice with an impish thank you sir, her sincerity confirmed by the erotic shudder coursing through her superbly shaped body. The musk of arousal was unmistakable. Greg's legs turned to jelly when she looked up at him in wide eyed innocence and asked if he wanted her to wear it right now. In a daze, he shook his head. What would people think? He was hardly comfortable escorting this fabulously erotic vision as it was. Bemused and rueful, he watched that fantastic bum undulate all the way to the cashier. Would Marion have really worn it out of the store? How would he know? The Marion he used to know wouldn't have done any of the things this wonderful woman was doing. Except the chatter!

Marion sat across the table and gazed lovingly at him throughout the meal. Greg didn't eat much, and Marion ate nothing. Yet again, they were the centre of attention, and while it seemed his wife couldn't care less about the inquisitive eyes, they sure made Greg uneasy. Too much British blood, that's what it was. Marion sat very straight, deliberately flaunting her show-stopping figure, and her more than liberal décolletage. She kept her exquisitely gloved hands on the table, clearly aware of Greg's fascination, and clearly keen to pander to it. For his part, Greg concentrated on chewing and swallowing, simple things to occupy him while he tried to come to terms with the evening's amazing events. Marion prattled ever on, indefatigable was as apt a word as incorrigible, and out of habit he supplied the ritual grunts which were his usual contribution to their conversation.

Greg's eyes were repeatedly drawn to Marion's pale, slender throat, and her full, red, babbling lips. Both husband and wife stole an occasional, anticipatory glance at the ominous package, intentionally placed between them by a mischievous Marion. The chemistry was electric.

"I'm sure I have dozens of other bad habits, darling. I hope you will take whatever measures you think are necessary to break them."

Those inviting, enticing words were the last straw! Bugger the neighbours! Greg reached purposefully for the shopping bag, pulled out the box with its graphic illustrations, and extracted the gleaming, black patent leather device.

What was something like this doing in a store like that! What did it matter!

God, how he loved leather! Greg was amazed by how stiff and thick it was. Understandable, really, when you realised the electronic circuitry and batteries were hidden within it and two, close-spaced rows of metal contacts were embedded into the inner surface. The buckle was a solid, chromed steel affair, very erotic. Greg puzzled over the buckle's strange tine. He'd never seen one with an eyelet at the tip. It was Marion who discovered the purpose, pointing out that the small, stainless steel padlock included was exactly the right size to fit through the eyelet. So, only the key holder could remove the collar. He'd better be careful!

Urged on by the rampant *Little Guy*, Greg rose unsteadily to his feet, the deadly collar in one shaking hand. Too late to turn back now! Scarcely five feet away a middle-

aged couple, mouths agape, watched his every move. He had no idea of how many more distant eyes were fixed on them. The cosy restaurant was packed with a typical pre-movie crowd. Greg winked conspiratorially, snapping the sticky-beaks out of their trance. Flustered, the couple looked away. Emboldened, Greg resolutely cast his eyes around the restaurant and, sure enough, nearly every sticky-beak looked away. He grinned malevolently. Well, that's what he was aiming at. In reality, the grin probably looked more foolish than wicked.

Meanwhile, a suddenly silent Marion had lifted her soft, shoulder-length red hair, baring her slender neck submissively. A vision came to Greg of that Scots Queen, a sword and a white throat. Acting on instinct, he slipped the gleaming, chrome studded leather collar around Marion's docile neck, fastening the buckle at what he thought was the right tension. It was snug, but not oppressively so, but the gaps between the adjustment holes were so great he wasn't game to chance the next one. Marion twisted her head from side to side, seating the three-inch collar on top of her collar-bones and under her jaw line. There was precious little of her neck to be seen. Greg was half-way back to his seat.

"Darling, I think my collar has to be tighter if you want all those metal plates to make proper contact with my throat."

That softly spoken statement stopped Greg dead in his tracks. *My* collar, not *the* collar! Right now he could think of nothing he'd rather do! Marion cleared her hair out of the way again, allowing unimpeded access to the polished buckle at the nape of her neck. The eyeleted tine was harder to manipulate than a regular tine, and the distance to the next hole was considerable, so Greg had to tug hard to make the necessary advance. He could feel the stiff leather squeezing her throat, and he heard her very faint whimpers, even before he slid the tyne home. He stroked her head reassuringly, excited and overwhelmed by her courage to endure what had to be extreme, choking compression. He sat down again, and they stared into each other's eyes, oblivious to all around them. The collar looked magnificent, as if it had been made for her. At the front, a stylish, gleaming, chromed steel D-ring was stitched into the polished leather below an embedded, embossed, blank name-plate. Marion's face was flushed, no doubt mainly due to the relentless constriction of her windpipe. Gingerly, her little leather gloved fingers danced over the studded leather, exploring the details of her oppressive imprisonment. An occasional splutter gurgled in her throat. Her lips quivered and her eyelids fluttered. Her hands strayed to the buckle, caressing it as one would a piece of priceless porcelain. When Marion spoke, her voice was a high-pitched squeak.

"Aren't you going to use the padlock, darling?" There was mischief in her eyes, and in her hint of a smile. "I wouldn't trust a girl like me."

Greg didn't need a second invitation! Palming the padlock, he was on his feet again, walked behind Marion, and nonchalantly slipped the open hasp through the expectant eyelet. The padlock snapped audibly shut. Greg rearranged his wife's silky hair to more or less conceal the inescapable locking mechanism. Another stern sweep of the restaurant's patrons sent inquisitive faces packing. Greg resumed his seat, calmly pulled the remote from its Styrofoam bed, and inserted a pair of AAA batteries to activate it. The long-life batteries providing the electric current were sealed inside the collar's thick interior, and would not need replacing for five years, or fifty hours continuous use, or so the instructions said. If he got five *minutes* use from the collar before Marion came to her

senses and refused to have her throat crushed like that a moment longer, the experience would be unforgettable.

Between mouthfuls of desert, Greg's favourite part of any meal, he read quietly to her from the manual, enlightening them both to the bizarre collar's capabilities. In addition to the primary purpose for which it was bought, a secondary function, available separately or in conjunction, enabled the operator to set a specified distance from the remote beyond which electric current would flow to encourage the collar's captive to remain within bounds. Greg explained the various settings, admitting he had no idea what effect they would have, and wouldn't until he'd tried them all out on his little guinea pig. Marion swallowed uncomfortably, her bright eyes squeezed shut, clearly caught in an erotic dilemma, or so Greg imagined. If only he knew the truth!

Arm in arm again, they began a slow stroll towards the cinemas. This time Marion leaned heavily on him for support. The touch of her leather gloved hands drove him crazy. So when she stopped abruptly in front of an engraving booth, it took a full minute for his bemused brain to realise what she had in mind. Marion hadn't said a word since he'd snapped the lock closed, even though she knew the choking collar had not been armed. She didn't break her silence now, only raised a forefinger and rubbed it against the blank name-plate.

What a splendid idea! A good thing one of them had some sense. Greg signalled his appreciation for Marion's not so subtle suggestion with a passionate embrace. He fumbled for the key, panicking until he found the right pocket. Off came the padlock, and a sharp tug or two later, off came the collar. They were just in time. The booth was about to close. Greg produced a crisp, one-hundred dollar note so the proprietor's reluctance was swiftly turned to jovial enthusiasm. Asked what he wished inscribed, Greg spelled his wife's name and watched while the craftsman got his tools ready. The germ of an idea entered his frazzled mind. He gripped his beautiful wife's shoulders and gazed fiercely into her wide eyes.

"I don't think Marion is a suitable name to put on a collar like this, do you?"

Marion shook her head deferentially. Suddenly she seemed so small and vulnerable, despite the towering stiletto heels. Perhaps the red marks encircling her throat contributed to the image.

Greg informed the engraver of the change in name, selected the font, then watched as the work was completed. The *Little Guy* was doing his best to explain he wasn't interested in a movie, no matter how many big tits were on the screen, and Greg had to concede he was in agreement. Collar and padlock back where they belonged, Marion's eyes lit up when she learned they were headed home, and she was headed for a ravishing! Sitting side by side in a taxi, one hand lingering over a silky thigh, Greg noticed for the first time his wife was wearing proper stockings, not those hated pantyhose, and that old-fashioned suspenders were holding them up. He couldn't wait to get her dress off!

Marion wasn't finished with him yet, as he was about to find out. Greg heard a tinkling sound emanating from his wife's handbag, that secret territory off-limits to men, and shifted his eyes to see her fishing around inside, handicapped no doubt by her snug, crimping gloves. Inch by inch, she withdrew a shining, stainless steel chain leash, one end capped with a soft, black kidskin grip and the other with a sturdy spring-clip. The price tag was still attached to a link in the chain. Words failed him, again, so he simply nodded his head. Guided by touch alone, Marion needed a moment to clip the leash to the

collar's D-ring. She promptly placed the leather grip in Greg's shaking hand, showed him a satisfied smile and inhaled deeply.

Sometime soon Greg knew he would have to review this evening's events. Normal women didn't do this, didn't do anything like this! He would get to the bottom of the mystery eventually, but not until after the *Little Guy* had slaked his thirst, he wouldn't. Greg forsook his usual parsimony and tipped the cabbie the best part of twenty dollars. Dusk had almost given way to night so there was little likelihood that his neighbours would see what he was up to. Sauntering up to his front door, a leashed and collared wife in tow was an experience he would never forget, and an experience he prayed the gods would allow him to repeat.

Oh shit! The first thing Greg saw inside the house was a stunningly dressed Valerie. Oh shit! Her car was in the garage, idiot! Not seeing it in the driveway, he'd assumed she was out. How could he possibly explain this? Even the *Little Guy* panicked and slunk back into his cave. He looked hopefully at Marion, but she was no help at all, standing very still, hands clasped behind her back and eyes lowered, the spitting image of a naughty school-girl if you discount the choking collar and dangling leash. Valerie's cheery Hi Dad, Hi Mum, were completely incongruous, given the circumstances. She gave her mother the once over, curious rather than disgusted. The shock collar, in particular, attracted her attention. Valerie fastidiously removed the price tag from Marion's leash, then beamed her dad a sympathetic smile.

"Wow," she applauded. *Applauded?* "Gee, Dad, that's cute! I guess you've found a way to keep Missy's mouth shut."

Greg expected an outburst from his daughter; outrage, anger, shock, shame, any of those things, or a dozen others besides. Of all the astonishing events that had happened to him this evening, this one shook him the most. His discomfiture wasn't helped when Valerie gave him a warm, endearing hug, and then did the same for her mother.

"I suppose I'll have to be careful what I say from now on," she chuckled, mischievously touching her throat. Poor Greg spluttered like an imbecile. His daughter had said that!

"Only joking! I won't be out too late. Have a great time, you guys."

She was out the door in a flash, pleated skirt swishing, high heels flashing. What on earth had happened to the women in his house?

LUCILLE HAD LOST all track of time. Her life had been reduced to a simple regimen of exercise, more exercise, sleep and more exercise, punctuated by frequent floggings! The demon visited her regularly, dispensed the punishment she had accrued with heartless efficiency, and checked on her progress. Once or twice she was made to sign some papers, and wasn't one set of documents a filing for divorce? How could a comatose cripple start proceedings? Lucille recognised she was finding it more and more difficult to think clearly about anything other than the immediate tasks she was driven to complete. She wasn't really sure what a Power of Attorney was when she signed that wad of papers. Were the pills doing that? Pills can do anything, can't they? Only occasionally now did she contemplate escape, either staring at the closed door or the shuttered windows. Except that escape was impossible!

Just as Lucille had come to terms with being constantly famished, pills do not satisfy hunger pangs, she was made to confront the frustration of lingering, unfulfilled sexual

yearning. The pills, she supposed, were responsible for that too. Forbidden to gratify herself, just as she was forbidden to satisfy her stomach, Lucille struggled through every exhausting, demanding day continually beset by the twin devils of lust and hunger. She was scarcely aware there was method in the demon's madness; scarcely aware that her fitness and strength were improving rapidly, and her weight falling. The steadily increasing intensity of the gruelling exercise program kept Lucille on the brink of collapse, kept her muscles and sinews taxed to the limit, and her lungs working overtime to keep up the necessary supply of oxygen.

She could not remember the last time she wore clothes, or understand why in the last day or so, her hair had begun to fall out. This morning, in the shower, huge handfuls had actually blocked the drain. The mirror showed some bald spots, and there was thinning everywhere. Where were her eyebrows? Something was very wrong! Everything was very wrong! But she couldn't dawdle. Out of the bathroom she ran, counted out her pill ration, measured a tumbler of water, consumed them both, and then back into the living room where she ran another stationary mile, legs pumping like pistons, muscles clearly defined.

VALERIE WAS ALLOWED to spend as much time as she liked alone with Mr. Crane. Of all people, she was the only one to whom he always responded. He was fully conscious a lot of the time, but seldom spoke to anyone but her. It seemed they had developed a special rapport. Hour after hour she sat with him, holding his hand and talking quietly. That goofy smile of his, the one that had caused so much grief in his childhood, that had earned him such ridicule, hardly left his face. For Valerie, that smile was a pure delight.

The hospital staff had grown accustomed to her extreme, feminine fashions, and it was abundantly clear the recovering patient, now transferred to an exclusive private ward, heartily approved of his bedside companion's choice of apparel. Even the dour Professor Hartmann tolerated her excesses and, much to everyone's astonishment, encouraged the young girl in her efforts to rehabilitate the crippled patient.

SIR COLIN DROPPED by at least once a day, usually in company with the puppy-eyed CEO, Elliot Riddle, and one or two nervous directors. How their spirits soared the morning Archie advised them the US Dollar was headed for a brief, precipitate fall, that the Euro would hold and the British Pound, of all things, was on for a sustained, if modest, rise for at least a month. How their spirits *really* soared that night when news of the surprise fall in the Greenback reached local shores and Sir Colin could look at his fellow directors and gloat. The bank had sold US currency all day, and around midnight began buying it back, applying the 1.8 billion dollar profit to the purchase of British Sterling.

The Board was reconciled to the knowledge that Archie would be working at home from now on. That's what he wanted, he told them, so that's what he'd get. Actually, Archie never *told* anybody anything! He had politely asked Sir Colin if it was possible for him to set up a home office now it was clear he would likely be a cripple for the rest of his life, and from there communicate electronically with the Bank's various agencies. Of course it was, Sir Colin enthused, satisfied that Archie's vital contribution would not be substantially diminished by the change in venue. It was business as usual again, thank god, and unanimous agreement was reached on several issues. One, a proposal to offer

Professor Hartmann another quarter-of-a-million Euros to extend his stay until dear Archie was absolutely out of the woods. Two, a plan to ensure Archie never went near a road again without an escort, or anywhere else dangerous for that matter. Three, better security set up to detect and ward off attempts at poaching their golden-egg-laying hen. Four, a performance bonus of five million dollars for Archie, and a similar one for themselves of course; they'd all earned it. And five, a hefty bonus dividend to keep the shareholders happy; that always worked!

Chapter Seven

GRACE WILLIAMSON SUBMITTED her resignation the day she was told Mr. Crane was scheduled to leave hospital at the end of the month, provided his condition continued to improve. He would need home care for the foreseeable future, and she was overjoyed to be chosen to fill the position of Personal Nurse to such an extraordinary, important and wonderful man. Furthermore, she gave notice to her landlord and made arrangements to dispose of all her possessions. There was just one focus in her life now, Mr. Crane of course, so why would she want to complicate her life with anything that might detract from her ability to devote her full attention to his welfare? She would be on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and, thankfully, she wouldn't have to take holidays, or even a day off.

Rigorous exercise, strict adherence to her diet and a genuine commitment to shape up to Mr. Crane's expectation of the ideal Personal Nurse had produced a startling change in Grace's appearance and attitude. Miss Valerie's understanding and invaluable assistance were of great benefit, explaining the special circumstances of her employment, and suggesting things she might do to better prepare for a famous beginning. Not since her first days as a practising nurse, before disillusion and cynicism set in, did she remember having such purpose and meaning in her life.

As the days counted down, and her excitement grew apace with the sloughing off of her incidental cares, Grace welcomed the serenity and peace-of-mind that came with single-minded dedication. One week before the anticipated call to duty, and coinciding with the disposal of her last possession, Grace reported to the Clinic which had been given the responsibility for her makeover. She used the last of her money to take a taxi out to that new industrial park, the one that had caused such a furore when approval was so suddenly granted to develop it. From the first moment she entered the brand-new, three-storey building, she was impressed by the efficiency and professionalism of the staff. It took only minutes to process the paperwork, and sign the waivers and indemnities. Of course, the Oracle Clinic wouldn't be responsible if something went wrong! A short walk through a series of corridors escorted by a smartly uniformed technician, then a below-ground elevator ride, led Grace to what was clearly a shower facility, if a particularly elaborate one, complete with massage table and all sorts of strange paraphernalia. She obeyed his instruction to undress without the least hesitation, stripping off the last link to her previous life with no regret. She was more than a little proud of her new, shapely self, not at all embarrassed by the size of her voluptuous breasts, and couldn't help the urge to flaunt for the benefit of this kind young man. That he liked what he saw was evident and gratifying. A friendly smile accompanied his instruction for her to lie on the table, on her back and not to move her head while he fitted protective contact lenses over her eyes. Grace wasn't quite sure why the lenses had to be opaque, consigning her to Stygian gloom, but she didn't think it was her place to enquire, and certainly not to complain.

The technician helped her to her feet and guided her in the direction of what turned out to be a spacious cleansing cubicle. She paid careful attention to his admonitions to stand still, keep her arms spread out from her sides, and her legs split, and not to panic if any of the immersions she was about to undergo caused her discomfort. It was all part of the procedure. Grace was grateful for the advice. She found it very disconcerting to be

completely sightless. The technician's reassurance calmed her anxiety, especially through those periods where her naked body was battered by high pressure blasts of chemical cocktails even her medical experience couldn't identify. During those times it was all she could do to hold her vulnerable pose. Only two or three of the various rinses applied to her skin were irritants, and these were always followed by a gentle soak with a soothing emollient. Grace maintained her almost motionless, spread-eagled pose long after the treatment appeared to be over. She wasn't told to do anything else. Not until the creeping cold made her shiver did she lower her arms, wrapping her bare shoulders in their protective embrace.

She was rescued eventually and assisted back to the massage table, only this time it wasn't the same massage table but something wider and more complex. Covered in goose bumps and helplessly blind, she offered no resistance whatsoever when her arms were squeezed through what seemed to be circular openings in the table's surface. Nor did she impede the technician, or whoever it was attending her, when her elbows were bent one at a time and strapped by wrist and forearm to the underside of the table, or projections attached to it; it was hard to tell. She wondered if she should ask them to loosen the buckles, they were so terribly tight and she was a willing participant. Miss Valerie's warning advice that Mr. Crane expected her to undergo her specialised and costly conditioning in the best spirit was uppermost in her mind and the reason she chose to keep her discomfort to herself. She tried to smile.

Grace's legs were the next to receive the technician's attention. Each foot was worked into an opening lower down on the table, and pulled through as far as the knee. Her resolve was tested to the limit the moment she realised the next development involved bending her calves back underneath her thighs, albeit below the table. A gasp of pain escaped her pursed lips and the futile squirm was instinctive. Her kneecaps were on fire and her thighs and calves were placed under tremendous strain by tautly buckled straps. If only she could see what was happening. A pre-formed pad was slipped under skull, cradling her neck and tilting her head back. A wide strap buckled across her forehead, welding her into the cradle. Suddenly she couldn't move her head at all. The crushing pressure was awful. A stab of genuine fear shook her. Had she come to the right place? A pitiful groan reverberated from her throat. Fortunately, the technician, no, this was a female voice, calmed her down with a soothing *Mr. Crane will be very proud of you*. It was all the reassurance Grace needed. Just knowing that Mr. Crane would appreciate her cooperation made all the difference. Someone pushed something into her mouth, something hard and cold which methodically expanded until her jaws ached and threatened to split. She could scarcely croak. An involuntary shudder wracked her helplessly bound and exposed body. Through her pain, she imagined Mr. Crane smiling approvingly at her behaviour.

Consoling visions of her life as Mr. Crane's devoted nurse helped her through the exacting, confusing ordeal. Something uncomfortable was pressed into her right ear, and wriggled right up against her eardrum. When a similar device penetrated her left ear, and every trace of background noise vanished at the same instant, Grace knew she was deaf as well as blind. The grating sound of grinding gears signalled the start of another gruelling trial, this time the incremental extension of the bizarre operating table, stretching Grace's limbs to the very limit of their endurance. Strung taut as a bow, she

even lost the ability to squirm. A needle pricked her thigh and her last thought before unconsciousness overwhelmed her was a simple question; why didn't they drug her first?

POMPOUS EMMA MILFORD, a partner at last, didn't usually see clients before 11 am and never without an appointment. So she was miffed when the senior partner, that lecher Devereau, virtually ordered her to assist some precocious teenager with a trivial divorce matter, when she had important business of her own, requiring urgent attention. Her bad temper showed in the way she ordered her long-suffering secretary to send in the said teenager, while she prepared a winning line in cold contempt. That line went unsaid. Indeed, Emma said nothing at all, transfixed in the gaze of the most luminous eyes she had ever seen. She couldn't remember the last time she had *wanted* to apologise to anyone, let alone an apology in advance!

The exquisitely dressed young lady took charge immediately, choosing a comfortable chair, and opening her briefcase to extract a sheaf of documents. Emma hovered at her side, dismayed by the confusing jumble of emotions flooding her overloaded senses. Miss Valerie Harper, as she identified herself, explained her purpose, and the services she hoped Emma would provide for her benefactor, as she identified Mr. Crane. Providing these services in an exemplary manner became an instant obsession. Her urgent business, whatever it was, was forgotten. Emma reviewed the paperwork with single-minded concentration, making an occasional minor correction, before declaring everything was in order and only Mr. Crane's signature was needed to make the settlements legal, and ready for lodgement. Emma offered to convey the documents herself, if that would be helpful, and was thrilled when Miss Valerie accepted her offer, going so far as to suggest they use her car, parked conveniently in front of the building.

The white Mercedes standing in the No Standing Zone had drawn the attention of a plump parking ranger. Emma looked at Miss Valerie and was surprised by her lack of reaction. Nobody likes getting a ticket! She was more than surprised to see the friendly smile on the ranger's face and catch Miss Valerie's kind *thank you, Carmela* as she toggled the door locks. The ranger looked as pleased as punch. Had she been standing sentry over the gleaming Mercedes? Emma was relegated to carrying the briefcase, something she normally resented, but then there was nothing normal about the way this day was working out.

A security detail guarded the entrance to Mr. Crane's private ward, the largest and most luxurious the hospital had to offer, and the ward usually occupied by celebrities, VIPs, or no-one at all. The polite greeting from both officers demonstrated Miss Valerie's authority, not that Emma doubted it, and they were allowed to enter the sumptuous sanctuary without hindrance. Beset with awed jealousy, Emma observed the interaction between a pallid Mr. Crane and his youthful, beautiful admirer. It stirred her soul with its intimacy and intensity. Her heart ached with the knowledge that she would never know that kind of relationship. She wasn't worthy of it.

Miss Valerie rushed to her smiling benefactor, tenderly stroked his worn face, kissed his cracked lips and whispered something endearing into his ear. It was more than Emma could bear and tears welled, opening her eyes in an instant to the emptiness and shallowness of her selfish life. She tried to stifle a heart-wrenching moan. Her pitiful mewling eventually drew the attention of the clearly devoted lovers. Mr. Crane didn't say anything directly to her but Miss Valerie did, telling her not to worry, that Mr. Crane

would help her, but that first they needed to sign and witness the documents in the briefcase. Buoyed by a faint ray of hope, Emma recovered her professionalism and took Mr. Crane through each document, summarising its contents, and pointing out where he had to sign. The pen trembled in his hand each time he scratched his signature. Miss Valerie provided constant support and encouragement, but it was evident even this modest effort drained his energy. He collapsed back into the profusion of soft pillows supporting him. Smiling weakly, Mr. Crane graciously thanked the forlorn lawyer, apologised for his debilitated condition and hoped she would excuse him for closing his eyes and taking a nap. He was still so tired, he told her. Miss Valerie caught her eye and Emma responded immediately, telling this extraordinary man she was honoured to be of service and expressing her sincerest hopes for his recovery, before bundling up the paperwork and leaving the strange couple for a moment of privacy.

Actually, the moment was nearly thirty minutes. When Miss Valerie finally emerged, still perfectly groomed, Emma was waiting for her, standing patiently out of everyone's way. All the way to the Family Court building, Emma kept hoping for some words of guidance from Miss Valerie. None were forthcoming. They drove in silence with Emma becoming increasingly despondent. She meekly accepted Miss Valerie's direction to lodge the documents while the intimidating young lady waited in the car. At last! Emma's spirits soared on the drive back to her office. Miss Valerie had carefully explained exactly what she had to do to bring meaning and happiness back into her life, that she had to get started right away, and that the sooner she had tidied up her affairs, the sooner she could take up the position of Mr. Crane's personal attorney, and chauffeuse. An instant image formed in her mind, of the picture she would present when costumed in her exclusive uniform, and the feeling associated with the image was the most rewarding Emma could recall. How she wanted to embrace Miss Valerie, to express her gratitude for her salvation, but a curious timidity restrained her affection, limiting her to a purely vocal effusion of thanks.

Arrived at her downtown office, Emma dashed from the car so eager was she to embark on the long voyage to deliverance. She stopped at the florist and purchased a huge bouquet of white roses, then went to the confectionery where she bought the largest box of imported Belgian chocolates they had. Feeling better already, Emma handed both gifts to her stunned secretary, along with a genuine, fulsome apology for five years of thoughtlessness and condescension. Requesting an astonished Carol to hold all calls, she retired to her office and began drawing up a list of what she needed to do to straighten out her life. As the planning progressed, so did her excitement.

EXCITEMENT WAS NOT a word in Lucille's current vocabulary. Every day heralded a new torment for her, some worse than others, but all of them calculated to reinforce her transformation from person to thing, or so she believed with her steadily failing intelligence. Despair at the utter hopelessness of her situation swamped every moment of her day, almost as much as the constant physical torture she did not have the willpower to resist. A lifetime ago, or was it yesterday, Miss Valerie (the demon had a name now) had added an order of magnitude to her suffering. As if it wasn't enough to be consigned to the basement with its concrete floor, lack of heating and primitive bathing facilities. The high pressure shower head was not connected to the hot water system. She slept on a steel grate, or tried to. Continually beset with hunger, lust and numbing cold, the rough steel

grid cutting into her soft flesh took a modest place beside her more pressing grievances. All her hair was gone now, or so she suspected. Certainly her limbs and torso, and especially her puffy pussy, were perfectly bald. There was no mirror in the basement, but the tactile touch of hand on scalp was balefully convincing. Why?

There was always a long list of infractions for which she was compelled to confess whenever Miss Valerie decided to check on her progress. Freezing cold only aggravated the punitive power of the cane. It had no effect whatsoever on the intensity with which it was applied. Lucille's bum, boobs and pussy lips were constantly blue, bruised and swollen. From time to time a new pill was introduced to her chemical diet, more rarely one was deleted. A wall cabinet which had housed the previous owner's tools served as Lucille's pantry while a portable water fountain set up nearby dispensed the carefully measured quantities prescribed. Such was the Spartan world in which she suffered.

Lucille had foolishly imagined that her gruelling exercise program could not get much worse. How wrong she was! The morning Miss Valerie arrived with the ominous package, was it just two days ago, was burned in her memory. As always, she was viciously caned. An ancient trapeze swung from the ceiling, now adjusted to the height where Lucille could just grasp the bar with her legs spread wide, on tip-toe. She had earned sixty-eight cuts for various infringements and bore them with agonised resignation, swaying slightly, sobbing piteously, with each resounding impact. The basement absorbed most of the sound generated within it; certainly Lucille's despairing moans went unheard outside.

Miss Valerie almost never spoke to Lucille, confining her instructions to gestures. That morning was no exception. Lucille squeezed her long, shapely legs together, not really aware of the enormous changes made to her figure since her husband's hospitalisation. She clung grimly to the trapeze when she was made to balance on one foot. Miss Valerie carefully wiped clean the proffered foot, smeared both it and her calf muscle with a sour smelling ointment and, while Lucille looked on with goggle-eyed disbelief, proceeded to force a strange and terrifying black, patent leather boot onto her. Lucille had never seen anything like it, nor ever felt her poor foot so bent, squeezed and strained. Her crushed toes were pointing straight down, her instep in line with her shin, and a glittering, daggering, eight-inch stiletto confirmed the diabolical misshapeness of her warped and twisted foot. Gougingly tight leather straps welded the bizarre boot into her flesh, first at her ankles and then just below her knees. Lucille's arms tensed with the strain of taking as much weight off her aching, abused toes as she could. All the while her other foot was being prepared for equal jeopardy, Lucille struggled to face reality. Surely no-one could expect her to stand, let alone walk, in torture boots like these. If only her voice would obey her, if only she could explain to Miss Valerie there was a mistake. The boots were too small, her toes too cramped and the heels too high. Lucille was vaguely aware Miss Valerie had distanced herself to better observe her captive's anguished plight. Tears poured down Lucille's pain-wracked face as she hung onto the trapeze for all her worth. The look in her nemesis' eyes was implacable. In dire misery, Lucille gingerly lifted one agony boot after the other, stepping as lightly as she could while relying on her straining arms for all the assistance they could provide.

Miss Valerie's unnerving gaze never wavered and, caught in its compelling glare, Lucille had to lift her knees higher and higher, and go faster and faster, which increased her pain and distress proportionately, in spite of a heroic effort by her aching arms to

minimise her misery. Feet screaming and legs afire, Lucille began pounding her tortured, steel-tipped toes into the concrete in a desperate effort to deflect the galling gaze intimidating her. Miss Valerie's critical attention was unbearable. Eventually Lucille's efforts met the expected standard and Miss Valerie released the panting performer from enthrallment. Not that Lucille relaxed her exertions one iota, she didn't dare, but at least she could scrunch her eyes closed, and try to isolate her dulled brain from the torrent of bitter complaint pouring in from almost everywhere. When next Lucille opened her eyes, Miss Valerie was gone. Lucille pranced on, driving herself to the ever expanding limits of her endurance.

That morning was somewhere in the past now, of course, the torture boots were part of Lucille's present, and had been ever since the first moment they were forced onto her poor feet. She had learned to walk unsupported, albeit at terrible cost, even learned to endure a freezing shower poised agonisingly in the centre of the primitive stall. She learned, how she learned, to complete every one of her onerous responsibilities under the fiendish handicap of her terrible footwear. After that first day, she was prohibited from using her hands for support or balance, how could she when they were clasped behind her neck, even during those nightmare hours she pounded through the impossible exercise program. Sitting down, or even falling down, were out of the question. A twenty stroke penalty applied for each such infringement and after the morning when she'd earned a frightening one hundred forty-eight cuts, nothing could induce her to lose concentration, unclasp her fingers, or succumb to exhaustion.

The sight of a second package sent a chill down Lucille's very erect spine the moment she saw it. What horror was in store for her now? All through her regular morning thrashing, agonisingly dancing on tortured tip-toe, Lucille could not get the package out of her mind. Miss Valerie lost no time revealing Lucille's newest burden. It was a gleaming, black patent leather corset. She might have guessed, was her mind not so jellied and her focus not so limited. Miss Valerie prided herself on a wasp-like figure, and never appeared with a waist-line greater than eighteen inches. Lucille was allowed to cling to the trapeze while Miss Valerie positioned the heady, aromatic garment around her trembling waist and fastened the busk, apparently unimpeded by her skin-tight, brown, kidskin gloves. Lucille knew nothing whatsoever about corsets, didn't understand the significance of the reinforced steel stays, and most especially didn't realise this outrageous garment had been custom crafted to crush her particular waist to a miniscule, unbearable sixteen inches. Miss Valerie persevered for the longest time, working the leather laces patiently, gradually bringing the reinforced edges together along her stiffly arched spine. Lucille gasped and spluttered, her ballet toed feet pounded out a lively tattoo, but all through the agonising ordeal she clung obediently to the trapeze, dangling down, and unable to find the courage or resolve to resist yet another addition to her dreadful suffering.

Miss Valerie succeeded in her ambition to compress and squeeze Lucille's waist to the desired size before tying off all the laces and adding a resounding slap to her lushly protruding buttocks. The wasping corset had an amazing effect on the shape of Lucille's boobs and hips, emphasising their expansiveness at the same time as bending her back until her spine felt ready to snap, crushing her rib-cage until her every breath was a desperate fight for life and threatening to slice her in two so pitilessly narrow is a genuine sixteen-inch waist. Lucille was frantic! Air rushed in and out of her crushed lungs,

shallow and staccato, and never quite enough to satisfy her needs. For a moment, the enduring torture meted out by her cruel ballet boots was almost forgotten in the shroud of soul-consuming fear brought on by the impossible demands placed on her respiratory system.

Lucille had the sinking knowledge she was expected to continue her exercise program as though nothing had happened, and she was right! There was no respite whatsoever, and under the spell of Miss Valerie's unwavering gaze she had to relinquish her grip on the trapeze, find her balance all over again and begin another round of the endless prancing in place it was her lot to perform. In a tone of cold, quiet authority, Lucille learned the penalty for taking the weight off her feet was now increased by fifty percent to thirty strokes per offence. Except for just six hours a day, when she was allowed to curl up on the concrete floor, she was compelled to stay on her tortured feet, hands locked behind her neck, and now put under the terrifying stress of fighting fiercely for every breath. It was almost easy to ignore her twin companions of hunger and sexual frustration. She no longer noticed, or really cared, that she was completely bald. More important miseries crowded her consciousness. Even when she swallowed her pills, or drank her ration of water, or took a frigid shower, she was forbidden to use her arms for support or balance, with the slightest infraction of this edict qualifying as an offence meriting a full thirty cuts from the cane. No matter how hard she tried, something always went wrong, a stumble, a slip, a cramp would bring about her undoing and consequential punishment.

The day Lucille was laced into the wasping corset was unusual for another reason. Miss Valerie paid an afternoon visit, this time in the company of a young woman provocatively clad in a tight, revealing pair of white overalls. She had a tool-box with her and was soon hard at work, as confirmed by the jumble of sounds. Lucille, of course, didn't interrupt her exhausting, high-stepping prance until one of those looks from Miss Valerie told her to. A second gesture had Lucille hanging from the trapeze again, her bouncing boobs coming to rest at last. A wail of anguish boiled in her throat. Stark terror gripped her racing heart. That morning's evil package wasn't empty! A miniature, black patent leather cincher, similar in style to her crushing, fiendish corset was destined, she knew with helpless horror, to oppress her neck just as mercilessly as its unbearable big sister tormented her torso. Swallowing, gulping, wishing there was some way, any way, to ward off what would be certain suffocation, a hysterical Lucille was reduced to another flood of tears, the only obvious outward manifestation of her blind terror.

So fixated was the petrified Lucille on her impending asphyxiation that she failed to notice the supple, black kidskin hood held out in plain sight in Miss Valerie's other hand. Quaking uncontrollably, her abject fear writ large, Lucille submitted to the imposition of the painfully snug hood, her objections limited to a pitiful nasal whine and a steady flow of hopeless sobs. From forehead to chin, her cute features were exposed by the open-face leather hood. Her ears were not so lucky, flattened against her bald skull. Almost immediately, Lucille realised her hearing was greatly reduced. The steady drone of building activity quietened to a purr.

The gleaming, leather posture collar fitted Lucille perfectly, if by perfectly you mean her neck was bent back to the limit to prevent as much as a trace of independent movement, with her windpipe under such pressure that in combination with the murderous corset, the helpless captive would hover on the brink of asphyxiation until

some unlikely circumstance rescued her. No such rescue was in sight! Lucille was unable to clasp her hands behind her neck anymore, the meticulously, venomously laced collar saw to that, so she used the back of her bald, hooded head instead. Miss Valerie's stern gaze brooked no delay and within seconds of her throat being put under extreme duress, Lucille lifted one ballet-toed foot after the other until she was properly in stride, prancing like a demented pony. Only when the sounds of departure reached her ears did Lucille think about the strangely erotic handywoman. It never occurred to her to question the reason for her presence. Lucille pranced desperately on, certain that at any moment suffocation would claim her.

PROFESSOR HARTMANN ACCEPTED the supplementary offer to remain in attendance on the remarkable Mr. Crane with undisguised satisfaction. The fee was unheard of, at least in his world, and all the more so because, for the life of him, Conrad couldn't see how he could take the credit for the unexpected recovery. He hadn't actually done anything out of the ordinary, as well the rest of the team knew, and it surprised him that such successful businessmen could be so poorly informed. Sir Colin knew his world, as did several of the other directors he had met, even if the amiable CEO, Mr. Joke, seemed hopelessly out of his depth. It had taken a moment for Conrad to appreciate the humour in the fellow's name, but now that he did, well, Mr. Joke it was.

The unprepossessing Mr. Crane had won the Professor's respect, no mean achievement, both for his unfailingly cheerful demeanour and for the relationship he had developed with the well-mannered young lady whose constant vigil at his bedside was probably more responsible for the financial whiz's recovery than all the medicos put together. The Professor was little given to sentimentality, and certainly never in public, but he had to admit the sight of such an exquisitely dressed creature brightened his day, and all the more so when temporarily separated from his beloved Gilda. From his own experiences, Conrad understood the real nature of the relationship developing between Mr. Crane and his adoring admirer, and thoroughly approved of it. In many ways it reminded him of the early days with Gilda, and the care he had taken to direct her infatuation, devotion and unconditional loyalty for his emotional and sexual gratification. Girls like Gilda were hard to find, treasures beyond price.

For all practical purposes, the Professor was on holiday. No university lectures, no regular patients and no demanding, draining, surgical procedures. Living in the lap of luxury, pampered by Gilda's loving attention to his every need, he wryly appreciated this was as close to heaven a sinner like himself could hope to aspire. As he had confided to Gilda, he intended to make the most of the opportunity. Aside from the two short visits he made each day to his one patient, the second visit only at Sir Colin's insistence, his time was his own with the proviso he remain on call and within a reasonable distance of the hospital. They were hardly onerous restrictions. Gilda had adapted to her new surroundings with her usual diligence and aplomb, assuming responsibility for all domestic matters save only the laundry. The arrangements were as perfect as he could hope for.

Sir Colin made a habit of joining the Professor for his morning round, even at the unlikely hour of 8 am. Most mornings young Valerie would already be there, on her high-heeled feet and bending intimately over the crippled patient's bed. Conrad had never seen her sit down, he noticed such things, and approved of them. Even Sir Colin was affected

by the splendid sight of such mouth-watering pulchritude. The Professor kept a straight face. Valerie would typically relinquish her place and stand quietly to one side while Conrad examined his patient. Within a week of moving into the private ward, the Professor was sure Mr. Crane had fully recovered his senses, that whatever damage had been done to his brain was either repaired or inconsequential, and that in his opinion, the patient was ready for discharge. For the extraordinary electrical activity still evident, he had no explanation whatsoever! He'd need a wheelchair, of course, for several months, perhaps indefinitely. His legs had been savagely mangled. The professor held to a high standard of professional ethics so he advised Sir Colin there was no serious reason to keep Mr. Crane in hospital any longer. His own observations, he explained, led him to believe the patient was more likely to thrive in the comfort and security of his home, surrounded by loved-ones.

Sir Colin was clearly reluctant to heed advice of that sort. The little he knew of Mrs. Crane would hardly qualify her as a loved-one. Mr. Crane deferred to the wishes of his employer, however, genially agreeing to a compromise which would keep him in hospital for one more week, just to be sure. For some time now, Archie had enjoyed complete access to the financial markets via the network of laptops surrounding his bed. Examination over, Sir Colin would insist on a few minutes of privacy, gauging the weather, he called it. Judging by the good humour Sir Colin exuded after these brief conferences, it was clear the patient was the vital cog in the Bank's decision making processes. Conrad had insufficient experience of the big business world to know whether Sir Colin's refusal to rely on more distant means of communication with his financial expert was usual practice or paranoia. It didn't really matter. Sir Colin had button-holed him immediately after the discharge date had been set, anxious to confirm that the Professor would make the necessary home visits. Conrad took advantage of the opportunity to limit these future calls to one a day, and none at all on weekends. Somewhat reluctantly, he added that he must return to his teaching duties by the start of the next semester, less than three months away.

Call concluded Conrad relaxed in the comfort of his chauffeured limousine for the short ride back to the penthouse. By the time he opened the door, permanently defended by a *Do Not Disturb* sign, thoughts of businessmen, patients, and students were dismissed in favour of his wonderful wife, at this very moment playing the hungry caterpillar game as though her life depended on it. Conrad knew he would find Gilda in the garden, that's where he'd left her, and she was incapable of opening the sliding door separating the little arboretum from the rest of the suite. He checked on her immediately, taking all the time in the world to savour her exquisite predicament. Encased in all the glory of her deliciously pink, leather slumber ensemble, minus just the expedient boob handle, Gilda was worming her way around the garden, and sometimes through it, blindly searching for the tiny morsels of bacon and toast he had scattered there before leaving for the hospital. Forward motion was a demanding, two-stage process. First, Gilda would anchor her ballooned, root-cinched boobs in the ground as best she could, sometimes able to use her amorphous, leather sheathed head for extra purchase, and then strain to draw the single, leather melded appendage, which had once been her legs, up towards her tormented tits. She always tried to do this as gracefully as possible, so that the sight of her provocatively undulating bottom would excite her adored Conrad as it elevated upwards to its highest

point. The second stage involved transferring the bulk of her weight to her scrunched up knees, and then slithering forward, essentially on her nipples and tits alone.

Fortunately for Gilda, the rooftop garden lacked the undergrowth which characterised the spacious grounds of their home in Leipzig. The chance of snagging one or both of her nipple rings was much lower. Gilda's silky, plaited ponytail was tied back upon itself, a fluffy, wide pink ribbon did that, keeping it out of the dirt, and inadvertently preventing it from inconveniencing her. Sealed lifelessly along her spine in the fiendish, pink leather sheath, her numb, deadened arms were completely useless. Denied sight and sound, Gilda relied on her three remaining senses to locate the casually strewn crumbs. The bacon bits were the easiest, their tell-tale aroma acting as a magnet. Of course, finding each scrap was only half the battle. Jacked agonisingly apart by the pitiless steel ring gag, Gilda's aching jaws were stretched wide open so that she had to poke her barbelled tongue out as far as she could, feel around with it, and then flick the tit-bit into her throat and hope not too much dirt or gravel came with it. At least this little garden was free of worms and grubs! And it was little! Gilda had already made a mental map of its features, including the ornamental fountain and the shallow, in-ground fish pond. It had taken years for her to memorise the layout of their grounds in Leipzig, but then there were a full acre of them. She was still terrified of the broad pond there, it was almost a lake. It was deep and dangerous, and twice she had fallen in, threshing helplessly, only to be rescued at the eleventh hour.

Her Conrad had given permission to drink as much of the fresh, spring water as she wished, and that helped wash down the dry, inedible detritus that inevitably wound up tickling her throat. Gilda knew she would be playing the caterpillar game until her Conrad called a halt. A keen gardener, her beloved doctor regularly spent an entire Sunday pottering around his ornamentals so Gilda knew exactly what it was like to worm away for periods of ten to twelve hours straight. She also knew how disappointed he would be if she allowed a lack of effort or enthusiasm on her part to spoil the spectacle she made. She was well aware that her Conrad often left her to forage alone while he attended to one or another of his many responsibilities. She wouldn't dream of slackening her zeal just because she might be unobserved. Gilda was loathe to disappoint her husband, no matter what the circumstances, so she patrolled the garden relentlessly, tongue whipping in and out, doing her very best to be a blind, deaf and very hungry caterpillar.

THE VIEW FROM the fifty-fourth floor, from his spacious office no less, was magnificent. Greg Harper spent the first ten minutes or so of each morning standing by the window watching the bustling water traffic all the way from the harbour side quay out to the distant headlands. His previous office didn't have a window, let alone a view. Here he was, a *bona-fide* Vice President at forty, albeit along with a dozen others, and with a six figure salary to boot. The money was not as important as it used to be. Barely a week after the MagMinCorp windfall, Valerie had advised him of another investment. Cortigane was a small, independent pharmaceutical research group. Greg had heard of them, which was more than he could say about MagMinCorp. The only question in his mind was how much risk was he prepared to accept. Something sensible, he concluded, he wasn't about to jeopardise his Porsche. In the end, he decided he could afford a half million dollar gamble. How quickly do relativities change? Half-a-million dollars! So, at

around one dollar 15 cents each, he finished up with 440,000 fully paid up shares. He'd placed the order with one of his broker's minions, the great man himself being unavoidably delayed. Later that morning, he lost count of the number of times he refused to return Arnold's urgent calls. That's what Vice President's do!

His musings were interrupted by his secretary's request for a moment of his time. What was it now! Marion (the secretary) had become an enigma, as if there weren't enough of those in his life nowadays. On the positive side, her work performance had improved enormously, she made him coffee without having to be asked and other little things like that, and she dressed to thrill every single day. Greg knew from the snide comments he was meant to overhear that he was the envy of every male executive in the ivory tower, even the brilliant IT director, Toby Tuppence. How could anyone give a kid a name like that! On the downside was an atmosphere of constant resentment, maybe frustration, Greg couldn't be sure. After all, he hadn't forced the girl to accompany him up the ladder. Indeed, she had pleaded with him to keep her position, promising never to be late again and to work much harder. Greg hadn't asked for her assurances, he had few genuine complaints with her performance anyway, and didn't know what to say. Marion had been on the verge of tears throughout the sorry episode, and that embarrassed him into gruffly curtailing the conversation without alleviating any of her concerns.

Greg certainly hadn't forced the silly girl to change her wardrobe for his benefit; he hadn't even suggested it, though he couldn't help himself from enjoying the fruits. The first day in the new office, he was greeted by an erotic vision of loveliness, spoiled only by a sour, despondent expression. Marion was obviously breathtakingly corseted, were these delicious devices back in fashion, surely not, and minced toward him on slender, six-inch stilettos. Her stiff, pencil-style skirt hampered her stride just as effectively as a proper hobble, at the same time as outlining the curvaceous shape of her lush buttocks. It took Greg a moment to regain his concentration. Had Marion's boobs undergone a growth spurt? Or was the delectable size and shape of her tender mammaries due to the effects of cunning foundation garments? Did it matter? Safe inside a soft, frilly cream blouse, they made a perfect focus for any man's attention. So why the glum visage? Greg had no idea, or chose to ignore it, welcomed Marion to the ivory tower, and finally entered the precincts of his vice presidential domain. Every day since, more or less, the pattern was repeated. Marion came to work early, decked out in one fantastic, feminine, uncomfortable outfit after another. Did she spend every cent of her modest salary on clothes and shoes? She worked diligently all day, even when there was nothing to do, made sure his coffee pot was full and fresh, and had taken to cleaning his office whenever he was out. He had to admit it was spotless.

Greg's solution to the problem was to ignore it as best he could. He spoke to Marion only when absolutely necessary, afraid that every time he did so, she was likely to burst into tears. That sort of helped, and anyway, Marion's moodiness was a small price to pay for the daily pleasure of being in close company with such stirring, sexy beauty. Beauty was all around him these days, and didn't that make his world a better place! Money had made the difference, Greg had at last concluded, at a loss for a better explanation for the astounding change in his secretary's behaviour. He knew he was stretching the deduction to account for the even more startling turn of events in his home life. But nothing else made sense! Money equals power! The morning he took a call from Valerie, the morning after the purchase of the shock collar; how could he forget, he'd listened stunned to his

daughter's words? Fucking amazing! Fucking wonderful! Greg didn't swear much, but *fucking wonderful* was exactly the right expression!

Back to Greg's broken reverie, and what was it this time! Marion shuffled shyly towards him, there was quite a distance between the door and his prestigious walnut desk, and her knee length, grey silk skirt was as tight as anything he had ever seen her wear. And those towering, stiletto pumps couldn't possibly be the right size. No-one has feet that small! He stood up, bracing himself for another difficult episode.

"There!" she squeaked. Greg hadn't really noticed how much her voice had changed until now. It was melodiously sweet, even in her presently agitated state. "That's done! You made me do it!"

"Christ on a crutch, Marion," Greg groaned, overcome by exasperation. "Made you do what?"

"This!" Marion angrily thrust a sheet of paper at him.

Wearily, Greg took the document and dropped it on the table.

"Aren't you going to say anything?"

Greg realised he'd better take a look at what was troubling her. It took a minute or two to realise the significance of the document. What had the silly girl done? Then he remembered his lame jest. Greg was staring at a document from the Department of Births, Deaths and Marriages which confirmed that Marion Margaret Courtland had changed her name by Deed Poll to Molly. What happened to the Courtland? He slumped back into his plush, executive chair. He had no idea what he was supposed to say. Marion stamped a superbly shod foot in frustrated temper, impatient for a response.

"Well?"

"Well, Molly," Greg said gently, "I suppose you could pour me a cup of coffee."

"Oh..." Something seemed to pass across her eyes. Her demeanour changed in the blink of an eye. "Oh... yes, sir!" This time her voice had a totally different tone to it. Was that a tiny smile he saw, marvelling once again how swiftly a woman's mood could change? Once again, he had no idea why! He was glad to be off the hook. So he just enjoyed the coffee.

MARION HARPER HAD taken to her new lifestyle like a duck to water. If only someone had set her on the right path all those years ago when she first met Greg, it wasn't too late, was it? She was only thirty-eight, after all. Marion groaned. Who was she kidding? She'd wasted her life up until now, that was the fact of the matter, call a spade a spade. Times like these, reflecting on her failures and especially her ingratitude, made her cry. Blessed with marriage to the most wonderful man in the world, she had done nothing but cynically abuse her good fortune ever since. There was so much she had to make up for, and so little time to do it, she despaired of ever redressing the wrongs she had done. It was amazing that Greg had been so tolerant, and so forgiving. It was the measure of the man, she knew, more evidence of his sweet, benevolent nature and fine character. A lesser man would have contemptuously spurned her. She certainly deserved such a fate. It didn't bear thinking about.

Something had removed the blinkers from her eyes, she didn't know what, but now that she could see things clearly for what they were, she was consumed with a burning urgency to set the record straight, to atone for her wickedness, and to bring as much joy into Greg's life as she possibly could. That wonderful evening, the evening Greg had

buckled the shock collar around her throat for the very first time, was a watershed. There in the kitchen, just a few minutes after Valerie had gone out, he had tested the efficacy of his purchase. Marion could remember the terrible pain with cherished clarity. Her knees had buckled and she slumped to the floor like a rag doll. She remembered the look of worry on his face, how like him to be so concerned for her welfare. She remembered how she had crawled to his feet and bestowed a flurry of tender, loving kisses everywhere over the polished shoe leather, before looking up adoringly at his handsome face, proclaiming her unconditional love.

Her immediate reward was an unexpected opportunity to reverently wrap her soft lips around Greg's suddenly very active manhood. Thrilled by such an undeserved privilege, she went to work with passion, diligence and an overwhelming desire to gratify her husband's need without thought of her own. She slurped and sucked with delicate frenzy, her salivating tongue caressing the length and breadth of the massive pole pounding into the back of her throat, all the while hoping she stayed conscious long enough to complete her labour of love. The torrent of warm cum jetting into her stomach revived her just at the moment of asphyxiation, allowing her the chance to gulp air against the relentless pressure of the uncomfortable, choking collar while simultaneously cleaning the now tumescent organ until it fairly glowed.

To her secret delight, Greg kept her on her knees, dragging her up to the bedroom by dint of the tautly stretched leash. Keeping her eyes downcast, and her voice meek and submissive, she begged her husband for permission to wear her corset, gloves and collar while she slept, explaining that she needed the practice. She couldn't see Greg's expression, but did hear his snort of astonishment which she happily took for a yes. Even more promising was his jocular remark that he supposed she'd like to sleep on the floor as well. Marion concealed her glee at such a suggestion, and instantly resolved to take it literally when the opportunity arose.

Marion was ready and willing for the vigorous ravishing which followed shortly afterwards and, although there was no doubt Greg had thoroughly enjoyed the experience, she felt terribly guilty. Her own blinding orgasm had betrayed her and for a few unpardonable moments she had allowed her need for sexual release to rise above her obligation to pander exclusively to her husband's pleasures. Later, snuggling up against his hard body, patiently waiting for Greg to fall asleep, she resolved to find a practical solution which would curb her disagreeable lust once and for all. As soon as Marion was sure her husband was really sleeping, she snuck out of the bed with her pillow, tip-toed around to his side, and curled up on the carpet after putting the leather grip from her leash oh so carefully underneath an exposed hand.

The next day Marion asked Greg for permission to quit her job. She expected some justifiable annoyance, after all she was the one who had insisted on taking it in the first place, but no, he left the decision up to her. Perhaps his distant, lackadaisical response was due to the fact that Marion had waited until her husband's semen covered her pretty face before making the suggestion. Then again, perhaps his surprise at finding a shivering wife curled up on the floor beside him was responsible. Marion expressed her gratitude by immediately offering an encore performance which Greg reluctantly declined, pointing to the clock. Anxious to begin on the right note, Marion jumped to her feet, and dashed into the bathroom to wipe off the precious residue. Clothed only in a constricting, breath-taking corset, and still handicapped by the snug leather gloves and the awkward,

choking shock collar, she slipped into a gorgeous, diaphanous, black lace robe purchased only yesterday. A thoughtful Valerie must have hung it for her, along with all the other new garments. Of course, her frilly, erotic outfit wouldn't be complete without hose and heels. Indeed, Marion put on such a wanton, shameless show, fastening the stocking tops to the suspenders that a distracted Greg eventually told her to stop it, and get downstairs and make his breakfast.

That was more like it! Following orders, Greg's orders, was so thoroughly satisfying. What a stupid woman she was, taking so long to understand so simple a principle. There was some consolation in the knowledge she would never forget it. Valerie was already up and dressed beautifully which Marion complimented her on immediately. Her daughter was an awe-inspiring sight, outfitted this morning in a lavender, pencil-line silk skirt and matching jacket over a white organdie blouse. Weeks of relentless training had paid off in a seventeen-inch waist-line and the poise and grace needed to master the difficulties of six-inch stiletto heels. It was quite a humbling experience for Marion to realise her daughter's obvious maturity. She had reached that conclusion yesterday, after listening to her daughter's plans for the future, including her impending marriage to Mr. Crane which would take place just as soon as she had trained her waist down to a genuine fifteen inches, and his divorce to that horrible woman was finalised. Marion was thrilled by the news, even more so when Valerie asked her to be the matron of honour. It was to be their little secret. Dad would be told soon enough. Mother and daughter shared many confidences over the course of their famous shopping expedition, but that was the highlight.

They worked well together, preparing breakfast for the man of the house and a little something for themselves. Marion turned to her daughter for advice, explaining she planned to resign from her position at the library so she could devote herself full-time to her husband's well-being. She was desperate to make a good impression, to keep their lovely home spotless, to pander shamelessly to his sexual pleasure, but more than that, she confided guiltily, she had almost twenty years of selfishness to atone for, and penance must be done. Valerie comforted her guilt-stricken mother, soothing her agitation, and promising to help.

"Well! What devilry are you pair of minx's cooking up?"

Marion was about to answer honestly. She was never going to mislead her husband, not ever again!

"Never you mind, Dad. It's secret woman's business."

One stern look from Valerie was enough to keep Marion quiet. Now that her daughter had taken charge of her penance, a great weight had slipped from her shoulders. She smiled agreeably at her marvellous husband, and served his breakfast. That he grinned boyishly the whole time, and fondled her bottom whenever it was in range, put goose bumps on her skin and brought joy to her heart. The kiss he bestowed on her quivering lips as he left the house was the sweetest she had ever known. She hungered in vain for more. Valerie whispered an instruction, and gave her mother a big hug, before following her father out of the house.

Marion raced through her domestic duties, without removing her corset or gloves, mind you, nor her demanding stilettos. It took longer to get things done, dressed like that, but the results were far more fulfilling. Of course, she couldn't remove the grinding shock collar, even had she wanted to. She had no idea where Greg had put the key, and

she hadn't thought to ask him, nor was it her place to do so. Everything shipshape, she called the library and politely tendered her resignation, citing unexpected domestic responsibilities as the reason. Smiling to herself, she realised it was perfectly true.

Marion had been told to wait for her daughter outside the Town Hall at 1 pm. She was in position with half an hour to spare, and dressed in the height of erotic, feminine, uncomfortable fashion. The gleaming, studded leather shock collar did strike an odd note, particularly as Marion had done nothing to disguise it. Indeed, her choice of wardrobe made it clear she was far from embarrassed to be seen wearing it in public. She had detached the leash, but it was safe in her shoulder bag just in case someone in authority wanted to use it. Over a spare lunch, girls squashed inside mercilessly laced corsets don't eat much, Marion did her best to explain why she must do penance for her years of selfishness, and Valerie understandingly concurred, agreeing that only through suffering could her mother earn the forgiveness she so desperately yearned for. And, her daughter added authoritatively, the more extreme the suffering, the more her suffering aroused her husband, then the more deserving she would be of forgiveness! Valerie's counsel was exactly what Marion wanted to hear. What she needed to know now was how to start. And she was eager to start immediately. Thank goodness she had Valerie for support. Her *leave it to me, mum* were the most soothing words Marion could remember hearing.

First stop was an exclusive beauty parlour, *the* place in town and where appointments must be made three months in advance. Marion hardly balked when she was introduced as Missy, a very naughty slut who was here to have every vestige of hair permanently removed from her body, save only her scalp. Marion was even more surprised that her introduction drew no reaction from the staff beyond the ordinary. Indeed, Marion did feel deliciously naughty and wicked as the two assistants undressed her, even so far as unbuckling her collar. Somehow, Valerie must have had the key. Not a single comment was made about her crushing corset with its brutal Martindale strap, nor her outrageous stilettos. Completely naked, she was directed to a massage table, a shower cap snuggled over her hair and then for the next thirty minutes a mildly astringent cream was rubbed thoroughly into every exposed surface of her body. Marion simply relaxed while the treatment was meted out to her. It was hardly gruelling, embarrassment didn't enter into it, and though she had no idea of the purpose behind her depilation, she knew it was something that had to be done if her penance was to be genuine. That Valerie supervised the entire process was wonderfully reassuring.

A full hour later, Marion was dressed again for the next stage of her journey. She had her daughter's vigilance to thank for the bone-crushing tightness of her corset, and the severity with which the Martindale straps had been drawn up between her freshly denuded labia. Valerie herself undertook the task of restoring Marion's shock collar to its oppressive best, snapping the padlock through the tine to forbid the possibility of unauthorised tampering. It came as no surprise that Valerie was in possession of the controlling remote for her collar, she had the key after all, nor did she think of objecting when her daughter activated the yapping inhibitor, and wisely set the pain threshold to the maximum. Her *Dad's been far too lenient with you* remark hit a sensitive nerve, and Marion could do nought but try to nod her head in agreement. That was the simple fact of the matter; she had unconscionably abused her kind, considerate husband's patience and tolerance and now the debt must be paid, and the penance done. She blinked furiously, trying to hold back the tears.

Valerie found the leash in Marion's shoulder bag and clipped it to the D-ring below the prominent name-plate on her shock collar. She was Missy to the world now. Did that mean she should no longer think of herself as Marion? Of course! Marion had been a terrible wife. Missy would be a perfect wife. So it was Missy who obeyed Valerie's instruction to place her leather gloved hands behind her back, and accepted the imposition of a pair of gougingly tight handcuffs without demur, instinctively appreciating this was the type of handling she really deserved. Old habits die hard! Missy made the mistake of attempting to thank the staff as they left the premises, only to have her well-meaning intention rewarded with a numbing, savage burst of electrical agony which felled her on the spot. She collapsed like a pricked balloon and, as luck would have it, landed flat on her face, distributing the impact equally between her knees, her extruded breasts and her forehead. Dazed, and shuddering from the violence of her extreme agony, she looked up at the faces above her, all four wearing identical expressions. What a silly girl she was, forgetting so soon she was forbidden to make a sound! She only had herself to blame! Missy gulped ineffectually against the pressure from her omnipotent collar, and struggled to her stiletto-heeled feet, all without the slightest assistance from the disapproving audience. Valerie brushed Missy down, shaking her head in bemusement, making her presentable again. This time, Valerie thanked everyone.

Missy wriggled around in the passenger seat of her daughter's Mercedes, trying to find somewhere to put her bound arms as well as ease the relentless discomfort directed at her groin by the invasive strap cutting through it. Valerie's admonition to stop fidgeting put an end to that and Missy didn't move another muscle until they reached their next destination; that same, brand-new building which had earlier accepted Grace Williamson for her makeover. The park was a new development, a very new development with only one large building. There was some construction going on nearby. Certainly, Missy had never been there before. There was a surprisingly long walk from the car-park to the entrance so Missy was profoundly grateful for the support of the tautly stretched leash to counter the handicaps of her hobbling skirt, towering heels and useless arms. Inside at last, she did her best to get her breath back while waiting for Valerie to deal with the receptionist. It wasn't long before a mature, slender, elegantly dressed woman greeted Valerie convivially. They chatted briefly, totally ignoring Missy. Indeed, so austere was Miss Lorna Tompkins' appearance that Missy was thoroughly and immediately intimidated. Her daughter, however, handled herself with aplomb, shook hands professionally, and accepted the surprisingly pleasant invitation to follow, bringing her baggage along as well.

Missy looked around in awe. The salon was a complete contrast to the corridors leading into it. From floor to ceiling, including the ceiling, a vast array of photographs and illustrations pictured every conceivable tattoo, or so it seemed, as well as images of women wearing a bewildering assortment of rings, bars, bells and baubles in the most intimate places. Neither Valerie nor Lorna paid any attention to Missy, who was tethered by the simple expedient of hitching her leash to a coat-hook by the doorway. The whispered conference concluded; Valerie approached her mother while Lorna made ready her tools and paraphernalia. A tingling combination of anticipation and anxiety coursed through Missy's body while Valerie undressed her once again, this time leaving the pitiless shock collar where it was. Was she going to be tattooed, or pierced, or both?

Valerie would know what was best for her. Missy rubbed her wrists to restore her circulation. The handcuffs had been very tight.

Once Missy was secured to the hard table, the plethora of egregiously buckled straps rendering her rigid, even her skull, Valerie gave her mother a timely lecture on the virtue of Stoicism, explaining this was one of the criteria by which the sincerity of her repentance would be measured. To that end, her shock collar would remain active, and no anaesthetic would be administered. Valerie kissed her mother's cheek reassuringly, promising to return and collect her as soon as her other business was dealt with. The departure of her daughter added to Missy's anxiety. The anticipatory gloat on Lorna's looming face was somewhat disconcerting, as much so as the thick, glinting needle poised menacingly above her. Missy steeled herself for the imminent assault, squeezing her eyes closed, gritting her teeth, and praying for the fortitude to endure the ordeal in silence.

She didn't quite succeed, bringing on three, fiery rebukes from her vigilant shock collar throughout the long course of her treatment, a number far less than an astonished Lorna was expecting. Missy's septum was bored through, the 3/16 inch tunnel sealed with a hypoallergenic, stainless steel eyelet cemented together from both sides to create a permanent fixture for whatever her husband might choose to hang from it, or hang it from. The same procedure was used on her tongue, after it had been stretched and clamped to allow Lorna unimpeded access. The plug punched out from the centre of her tongue, just back from the tip, was a full one-quarter inch in diameter. The violation of that tender organ brought on the first admonition from Missy's shock collar, overwhelming the helpless woman with twin agonies. Thank goodness there was a thirty second lag counter built into the circuitry! Even after the hypoallergenic eyelet was permanently affixed to Missy's tender, bruised flesh, Lorna refused to lessen the tension so cruelly stretching her punctured tongue.

All through her adult life, the old Marion had been ashamed of, and embarrassed by, the freakish size of her nipples. Her abnormally large clit was another matter altogether. Her brother, they'd been estranged for ten years or more, had once called her nipples beer taps! Thank goodness he'd never found out about her clit! Lorna stroked Missy's prodigious nipples to full arousal, never all that difficult anyway, prompting a suddenly changed perception of their value. Though a little the worse for wear, Missy was able to appreciate just what ripe candidates they were for the kind of treatment already meted out to her nose and tongue. Steeling herself not to repeat the involuntary scream, she waited for the inevitable attack. So thick were Missy's turgid nipples that Lorna was easily able to punch out a 1/8 inch slug along a lateral line. Hypoallergenic eyelets, with more of the ubiquitous antiseptic protection, sealed the wounded flesh. Through the befuddling haze of pain, which she had heroically endured with only the faintest of whimpers, Missy realised something was being threaded through her nipple eyelets. Her suspicions were confirmed when a steady, heavenward tug on each slowly turned to excruciating agony, and remained at that level after her eyeleted nipples were tied off to distant shackles. The immobilising strapping stopped Missy from lifting her torso to alleviate any of the strain, not that she didn't try to. Pain responses are universal.

Missy's vision was obscured by her tortured, straining tongue and the device which imprisoned it so she couldn't see the full extent to which her enormous nipples had been stretched. Between eyelet and nipple-tip was a half-inch of dark, twitching, puckered

nubbin, while the distance from each eyelet to the edge of her pale, taut tits was a full inch of glossy, smooth, elongated nipple tissue clearly showing the strain under which it laboured. Missy imagined for a moment her nipples had been distended for the same reason her tongue had been, whatever that was. She was completely unprepared for what happened next! Beautifully embossed, miniature bands of gleaming stainless steel were wrapped around the tensioned segment of each helpless nipple, between eyelet and boob proper. What felt like tickling pin-pricks became fiery streaks of blistering pain when a crimping tool was used to weld the pitiless, barbed nipple collars firmly into her flesh, one after the other. Missy screamed shrilly, she couldn't help it, adding another blinding electric shock to her travail. Her entire body stiffened, tight as a drum.

Lorna brushed Missy's cheek with unexpected tenderness, telling her what a brave girl she was, and how striking her permanent nipple collars looked. She didn't, however, relieve any of the tension on Missy's nipples or tongue. As soon as the pinioned butterfly had calmed down, or at least resigned herself to her suffering, Lorna went to work on her clit and labia. Four separate slugs were punched out of each labium, in a neat row from front to rear, and sealed with stainless steel eyelets. Missy shuddered when a caressing touch so easily aroused her precocious clit, encouraging it to peep out from the false safety of her denuded, punctured labia. This time a 3/32 inch tunnel was drilled through the trembling shred, eyeleted with finality, and then stretched skyward with a familiarity which reminded Missy all too well of what would probably happen next. If her throbbing nipples were suitable targets for eyeleting and collaring, then her freshly punctured clit could expect a matching collar any minute now. Actually, the expectation became a reality in less than a minute! Missy barely had time to savour the strange satisfaction she felt from the Stoic silence she maintained while her sensitive clit was pierced and eyeleted, before the tell-tale pin-pricks heralded the imminent application of a permanent clit collar. Missy almost kept her agonised wail below the critical threshold! A cheery Lorna did allow her patient a few minutes to recover, dispensing more of her encouraging, if banal, advice. All of Missy's various wounds were carefully swabbed with a cool, soothing lotion, and then sprayed with an odourless fluid which somehow eased the sharpness of her agony. She had to wait nearly thirty minutes before Lorna relaxed the tension on her tongue, nipples and clit.

When Valerie returned to collect her, Missy was on her feet again, naked, viciously handcuffed and tethered to the coat-hook. The bewildered recipient of so much intimately implanted stainless steel waited patiently, uncertain in her grogginess what she had done wrong to make Lorna apply the cuffs so cruelly. Her sigh of relief when Valerie arrived was inaudible! Daughter examined mother with clinical detachment, turning her this way and that, making her spread her legs, and open her mouth, before pronouncing herself satisfied and congratulating Miss Tompkins on a job well done. Maybe Missy hadn't done anything wrong after all. Her daughter was considerate and comforting when she examined the biting steel cutting into her wrists, yet chose to do nothing about it. Perhaps that was how they were meant to be worn? Explaining that they were behind schedule already, Valerie draped a gorgeous, full-length cloak of midnight blue velvet over Missy's shoulders and encouraged her to step into her six-inch-heeled, black patent leather stilettos. The rest of Missy's wardrobe was already safe inside a large carry-bag. The folds of the svelte cloak rubbed against Missy's abused nipples, tormenting them with an addictive mixture of pain and pleasure. It was a novel, irresistible sensation, and

Missy found herself unable to defy the urge which kept her wriggling, trying hard to maintain the stimulus.

Missy had a ridiculous thought. No Tattoos? Yet? Frightfully sore though she was, Missy was genuinely thrilled to be that much closer to her husband's ideal of a perfect wife, whatever that might prove to be. Valerie's praise of her courage gave a much needed lift to her self-esteem. How she needed to rub her wanton, punished nipples against the tantalising touch of the velvet cloak! Led on a leash, Missy focused her attention on keeping up with her daughter. They really were behind schedule, she realised, chagrined by the knowledge it was her fault. Missy was oblivious to her surroundings, noticing little as the pristine elevator took them to the top of the three-storey building. Panting heavily, and by now highly aroused from the continual friction between the cloak and her enormous, helplessly collared nipples, Missy was thankful for the brief respite.

Another smartly dressed businesswoman greeted them, or rather greeted Valerie. Missy was understandably ignored. Missy responded to the renewed tug on her leash, following the ladies into a spacious office. Valerie removed the cloak, revealing all her mother's enhanced charms. Courtesy of a small mirror, Missy glimpsed the visual impact for the first time of her collared, eyeleted nipples. What an impact it was! It was barbaric, in the old-fashioned sense of the word, making her tormented nubbins swell and stand out as never before. Even her engorged, enlarged, collared clit was on display, poking out past her eyeleted labia like a nosy neighbour. Everyone had a good look at her before Beverley invited Valerie to sit down and relax. Missy didn't expect a similar invitation but she was truly surprised when a steel cable descended from the ceiling directly above her and the snap-catch on the end of it was clipped through her septum eyelet. Without further ado, the cable withdrew the way it came until a stunned Missy was hauled onto stretched tip-toes, the daggering points of her stiletto heels actually off the carpet. Half her weight, at least, must be hanging from her screaming nose! Thank goodness she kept her self-control throughout the shock! Valerie applauded her mother's willpower, and that was some consolation. Missy's useless arms strained involuntarily against the brutal strength of the gouging handcuffs, achieving nothing but more suffering. Eventually, she realised the futility of her struggle and accepted there was no choice but to stand as straight as possible, legs squeezed together like Siamese twins, her head tilted up as far as the choking shock collar allowed, and try to calm down. She wasn't going anywhere until Valerie said so, and that was that!

For the next half-hour Missy was vaguely aware of the activity and conversation going on around her. Her daughter and the middle-aged executive drank coffee brought in by an unseen underling, and wasn't that the most wonderful aroma in the world. Missy tried hard to concentrate, she was the topic under discussion most of the time, but the enormous effort needed to stand straight and still sometimes overwhelmed her. Was the word uniform mentioned? Missy's uniform? A shiver of genuine excitement shot down her straining spine. Try as she might, the details escaped her.

Valerie's throaty chuckle signalled the end of the conference.

"Rest assured, Miss Harper... unauthorised sexual relief will be absolutely out of the question!"

That, at least, was something Missy could understand. Her responsibility was to give sexual pleasure; given the unpardonable nature of her crimes, she had no right to expect

to get any in return. A myriad of thoughts swirled through her mind, imagining her future. Everyone was going to extraordinary lengths to help her prepare for a life of atonement, especially her beautiful daughter. Without Valerie's selfless advice and leadership, Missy would have never known where to start. Naked, her sensitive tissues all thoroughly prepared to contribute to her penance, her nipples and clit painfully and permanently collared and eyeleted, and stretched like a bow-string by her eyeleted nose, Missy prayed for the strength of character to be worthy of their efforts.

Chapter Eight

IN MOMENTS LIKE these, alone in the early morning, Archie was convinced he must be insane or dead. Insanity was the more likely explanation. Sometimes he would push these thoughts away, tuning in to the world of international finance, the only world he really understood. It had taken many years for Archie to realise that those around him, colleagues and superiors both, did not have the same instinctive appreciation for the forces which drove currencies and markets with such predictability. It was still a source of amazement to him, that a fellow like himself had such a talent, that no-one else seemed to have it and that this talent impressed so many important people.

Sometimes, though, it took longer to shake off the melancholy, and that the wonderful thing that had happened to him was nought but a crazy man's delusion. When Valerie was with him, there were no fears at all. He was sublimely content to bask in her beauty. She was the epitome of his erotic daydreaming, the vision that had captured his imagination ever since his unhappy adolescence. The probability that such a perfect creature would walk into his life was so remote that only madness could account for it. It had gone on too long, too steadily, to be a nightmare.

He remembered there was a time when he had hoped Lucy might be that elusive prize. How quickly that dream had collapsed in ruin! Was he on the same roller-coaster again, now that Lucy had filed for divorce? Was lovely Valerie cut from the same cloth? His thoughts rambled all over the place. They often did in the solitude of this luxury prison. What would his life be like, when and if he ever left the hospital? What would it be like to spend the rest of his life in a wheel-chair? He could laugh at that image. He'd spent most of his life sitting down. His useless legs troubled him from time to time, and the medication didn't always ease the pain.

Archie thought it strange that Lucy hadn't asked for more than a fair share of his wealth. Her obsessive greed had dominated their relationship, and driven him to despair. What Valerie had told him yesterday, showing him the actual transactions, had astonished him. Lucy had transferred every cent of her settlement back into his personal account! She had kept absolutely nothing for herself! How was she going to live? If anything was necessary to convince him that he had skipped into the world of the insane that was it!

No, there was far more pressing evidence of his flight to Never-Never Land. His marriage proposal, for one! Intoxicated by the intimacy of Valerie's presence, and with one hand caressing her erotically slender, corseted waist while the other stroked her willowy neck, Archie had foolishly voiced his cherished, persistent daydream. Valerie's immediate response to his stuttering request was to swoon all over him, kissing him tenderly, passionately, thanking him over and over again, and vowing to devote her life to his welfare, forever and ever! Archie couldn't get a word in for ages, swamped by her vibrant excitement and enthusiasm. His first thought was she had misunderstood his question. Why on earth would a precious young thing like Valerie, with so much to look forward to, take up with an aging, crippled weakling? Was wealth so important? That thought made him sad, he'd been down that road once already, but what other explanation was there?

Valerie had picked up on his anxiety in an instant, cradling his pallid, sunken face in her tiny, delicate hands. Love and compassion sparkled in her eyes, overwhelming Archie with its heart-wrenching sincerity. He blinked furiously, ashamed of so petty a doubt in

the face of such genuine loyalty and affection. Valerie caressed his dry lips with the sweetest, softest kiss he had ever known. Tears welled in his eyes, as they did in hers. Punctuated by many more of those marvellous kisses, Valerie confided that she wanted her waist squeezed down to fifteen inches before the wedding ceremony, promising she would never let him see her again with a waist even a fraction larger than that. She promised other things besides, every one of them culled from the dark recesses of his mind, and his heart pounded fit to burst. Archie was speechless and embarrassed as Valerie poured out her heart for him, speechless and paralysed when she pulled back the covers and nuzzled her pretty head down there, and speechless and exhausted when she finally emerged, licking her rosy lips and thanking him, *thanking him*, for the privilege. He had quite forgotten the pain in his legs.

Lucy had rarely done that for him, even during their courtship, and never without making her sacrifice plain. After the marriage, her lips had kept well away from that region. The contrast between Lucy's distaste and Valerie's unquenchable eagerness to please him could not have been more vivid. Not once did his stunning fiancé make a derogatory remark about his manhood, to the contrary she seemed passionately attached to it, often literally. Lucy, of course, usually justified her disinterest in his advances with cutting comments about microscopes or magnifying glasses.

Valerie fussed over him constantly, ever solicitous that he want for nothing. It was Archie's first experience of being genuinely loved, and it thrilled him. Being mad or delusional, or both, he supposed, was a small price to pay for such sweet contentment. Valerie spent so much time at his side, caring for him, comforting him, bestowing upon him the most exquisite sexual pleasure he had ever imagined, that the rational part of his brain, blurred though it might be, kept trying to convince him the experiences were real, and why not take them at face value until evidence to the contrary arose. The bank statements in his hands were real, he could touch them, read them, and they told him beyond doubt that \$1,640,000, the full cash value of Lucy's settlement, was credited to his account. It really had happened. Just as real as the daily advice he gave to Sir Colin; just as real as the five million dollar bonus, even if half of it would go in tax. Sir Colin just shook his head in bewilderment when Archie explained that, no, he didn't want to use any of the myriad schemes cooked up by the Bank's accounting team to minimise, avoid or outright evade his tax obligations.

Well, Archie would wait and see. He was scheduled for discharge tomorrow. Would he be home, or in a lunatic asylum? Valerie had assured him everything had been taken care of, and all of his needs catered for. Sir Colin had been equally reassuring. Professor Hartmann had added his encouragement. He had already practiced with his wheelchair, physiotherapy they called it. It felt more like the dodgem car rides he remembered with his big sister when he was little, back before she left home, changing Archie's life for the worse. Sir Colin had seen to it that he was provided with the very latest in wheelchair technology, fully motorised, computerised, and with a revolutionary feature enabling its occupant to traverse all but the narrowest steps without assistance. Archie had a lot of fun, learning how it worked, spurred on by Valerie's bubbling encouragement. Even the staff joined in; applauding enthusiastically whenever he swept by them. Madmen didn't do this, did they?

GREG RECEIVED THE news of his daughter's upcoming marriage with very mixed feelings. Not least of which was concern over the timing. A divorce took at least a year, didn't it? Greg was sure the prospective bridegroom was married at the time of the accident. Valerie was just eighteen, for Christ's sake, though these days you'd never know. His amazing daughter displayed the maturity a woman twice her age would envy. All the women in his life had gone off their rockers! The wedding announcement came with the added revelation that his daughter had decided to move in with her crippled fiancé as soon as he left hospital. Greg kept his temper as best he could, trying to get through to Valerie that she was taking her guilt too far. Sure, it was a terrible thing she had run over the poor bastard, but marriage was hardly an appropriate apology. Archie was older than he was himself, for Christ's sake! Valerie had listened patiently to his expostulations, her cheerful smile completely disarming him, so by the time he had finished with his lecture it no longer sounded convincing, even to the lecturer. These days Greg was awkward about embracing his daughter, she was always so erotically feminine, but Valerie persisted, pressing an affectionate hug and whispering into his ear how much she loved him and appreciated his advice, but this time she must go where her heart led her. What could he say in the face of that determined, if considerate, resolve? What did he want to say? The notion of having the house to himself and Missy, how he loved using that name, was very attractive. Valerie's presence inhibited him, and these days the last thing he wanted to be was inhibited!

One month ago he had walked into the middle of his favourite fantasy. In all his years with Marion he had never done more than leave a hint of his strange desires, so how had she known? Greg had never shared his secrets, not those kind of secrets anyway, with anyone. Home from work later than usual, he found Valerie in the kitchen, putting the finishing touches to his dinner. When did she learn to cook? An enquiring glance produced the information that Mum was in the bedroom. A headache no doubt, Greg imagined, brought on by the extraordinary events of the previous evening. Marion had come to her senses at last! So why was Valerie wearing such a conspiratorial, impish grin? Did he have time for a quick shower, he asked? He took his daughter's giggle for a yes. Something was up! What would it be this time? Greg dropped his briefcase in the study, and trudged up the stairs. The bedroom door was closed so it wasn't until he pushed it open that he saw the reason for Valerie's amusement. What had got into his daughter? Marion's predicament was hardly amusing. She was on her knees, thighs open, naked except for a pair of astonishing, black patent leather stilettos, the shock collar, and a snug, black velvet bag over her head, tied at the neck with a silken drawstring. There was no reaction to his initial gasp of astonishment, or the subsequent noises he made when it dawned on him that not only were his wife's nipples and clit made perfectly adorable by the dainty steel bands collaring them so intensely, but that ample provision had been made to use those delicate nubbins for any number of devilish purposes. The reason he could hardly see her arms at all was revealed as soon as he began circling her. Cruelly tight handcuffs imprisoned her wrists with almost no distance between the separate cuffs at all. His first impulse was to rush to Marion's aid. The *Little Guy's* first impulse was to check that thought before it bore fruit! So Greg's momentum was stalled immediately. Marion and Valerie had cooked this up between them!

Marion's breasts were heaving steadily, her nipple collars twinkling he couldn't help but notice, but otherwise there was no evidence she was aware of his presence. He'd

made enough noise to wake the dead so either she was acting, or she was deaf. The *Little Guy* was hoping for the latter explanation! He tried a little experiment. Speaking in a firm, but not too loud, voice, he told Marion, no Missy, to stand up immediately, and not dare to disobey him! It was splendid to talk like that! Nothing happened, confirming that something underneath the velvet bag was plugging her ears. Well, he wasn't going to get anything out of Marion!

"What's going on?" Greg couldn't keep the agitation out of his voice, or the hint of excitement. He had trouble keeping his eyes off his daughter's superb figure as well. What was it about women with hour glass figures in tight skirts and high heels that excited a man so? None of that!

Valerie's friendly, gushing smile had its usual effect.

"Mum wanted to surprise you."

Greg gaped!

"It was all her idea. We've been running around all day, trying to get everything done in time. Thank goodness you were late. Mum's only been waiting for you for an hour."

"Marion's idea?" Greg blinked furiously. "Where did she get an idea like that?"

"I've no idea." Valerie's innocent reply was far too innocent. This was getting nowhere. "Mum wants to be a better wife, that's all."

"That's all! Valerie! That's not all! Women don't go around having their bodies disfigured just to be better wives!"

"That's hardly fair, Dad. Mum doesn't think she's been disfigured. She wants to make herself especially beautiful for you." Valerie's tone was soft and conciliatory. "I think she's very sweet."

Greg slumped into a convenient chair, elbow on the table and rested his troubled forehead in the palm of his hand. Valerie stroked his hair.

"Please, Dad, don't spoil it for Mum. She's so excited. She really wants to spend the rest of her life making you happy. I think she's finally realised how selfish she's been."

"Really?"

"Of course, really! And the best way to make her happy in return is to enjoy yourself."

Greg stared at Valerie, dumbfounded. Her rationalisation sounded so reasonable, the tone anyway. In fact, it was preposterous! The *Little Guy* begged to differ!

"I hope you like it." Valerie placed a steaming plate in front of him. It smelled delicious. "It's the first time I've cooked anything so fancy... cooking is such fun."

"Thanks." Greg's reply was automatic.

"There's some strawberries and cream in the fridge."

Valerie removed her pretty apron, folded it tidily and pulled on her skin-tight kidskin gloves with practised style. Greg averted his eyes, finding refuge in what was really a very tasty dinner which was some sort of chicken dish. How could he eat at a time like this? Silly question!

"Oh! Before I forget Mum wanted me to tell you she has some presents for you. They're in a box beside your bed."

Greg didn't remember any box, but then his attention was directed elsewhere. "That reminds me. She didn't seem to hear a thing I said."

There was that infectious Valerie giggle again. “Of course not! Those are industrial grade plugs filling her ears. They’re a bugger to squash in, excuse the French.”

“Oh...”

“Have fun, you two,” Valerie carolled, twirling her car keys, and swishing provocatively through the door. “Don’t wait up on my account.”

Greg pushed his plate away. What was he going to do? Upstairs, Marion waited for him, parcelled up for his pleasure and here he was, feeling anxious and guilty. Was it just that he had been conditioned for so long? Why shouldn’t he make the most of it, while it lasted? He was a Vice President now, and about to be the owner of a Porsche.

Greg took his time. Marion wasn’t going anywhere, was she? He found his digital camera in the study and took it with him up to the bedroom. Marion hadn’t moved an inch in his absence. He snapped away from several angles, preserving the memories in the probable event that wife and daughter were temporarily batty, and this would be his only opportunity. There was a box on the floor, beautifully gift-wrapped, and accompanied by a small card. Greg plucked the card from the ribbon. *Darling, I’m so sorry I’ve been such a bad wife. Please forgive me. I adore you. Missy.* Greg had to read the message twice to be sure his eyes weren’t playing tricks. What had got into that gorgeous bundle? What on earth had driven her to that conclusion? All in all, he’d always thought he’d had it pretty good. Especially when he compared his marriage to others he knew of. The *Little Guy* was highly critical of his equivocation. Don’t look a gift horse in the mouth was the word from below the belt! He took a close-up snapshot of the box and the card before putting the card away in a safe place. This was something to cherish in his old age.

Greg resisted the temptation to make his presence known. Just observing the exquisite creature was reward in itself. The velvet bag was the perfect touch. How wonderfully helpless she was, made blind and deaf. To prolong the suspense, Greg took that belated shower. Afterwards, he pulled on his dressing gown, and his slippers. He sat down beside the box, and cleared for action. The bows unravelled without a hitch. He wasn’t exactly sure what he was going to find, not that he expected chocolates or a pair of socks but even so, the contents stunned him. It was almost as if she had reached into his mind. How his heart raced while he gingerly fingered those electrifying gifts. Eventually, Greg put the lid back on, deciding to take Marion, or rather Missy, down to the living room before putting his wicked presents to practical use. That was when he noticed the lengths of ribbon trailing out, one from each side of the box. What really grabbed his attention, though, was the small, steel snap-catch attached to the end of each ribbon. No! They couldn’t be! Ping! A sudden connection was made. Inside the box was a long, delicate leash capped with a snap-catch identical to those on the ribbons. He removed it, and replaced the lid again.

Greg hefted the box. It wasn’t very heavy but even a few ounces can weigh a lot when they’re hung from a pair of pierced nipples! Urged on by the *Little Guy*, Greg pushed the box over to Missy. Wait a minute! Missy’s nipples and clit were only done today! Why didn’t they appear sore or bruised? Proximity had alerted Missy that she had company. She tensed imperceptibly, and a little shiver coursed up her spine. That shiver magnified ten-fold the moment Greg actually touched her ripe, bountiful, pendulous breasts, stroking them, exploring the detail of her deeply embedded, punitive nipple collars and discovering how those erotic eyelets had been emplaced. Though the

glittering nipple collars must be extremely painful, they squeezed too tightly to be anything less; there was hardly a sign of inflammation anywhere. A close inspection of Missy's collared, eyeleted clit revealed a similar situation. Incidentally, Greg couldn't help be aware of the effect of his tender caresses. Missy positively writhed with primordial lust. Never in the past had he done so little to achieve so much. Was that it? Had Marion, Missy, discovered something about her own sexuality? Was she doing this principally for her own pleasure? At least that idea made some sort of sense! Good luck to her!

The snap-catch was precisely the right size to clip through an eyeleted nipple. That couldn't be a coincidence, surely? Greg carefully supported the weight of the box until her other nipple was likewise ensnared, and then he lowered it gently until Missy's straining nipples bore the entire burden. He snatched the camera and clicked away from all angles, constantly monitoring Missy for a sign that he had gone too far. No such signal eventuated. If anything, Missy knelt straighter, and stuck her marvellous tits out further, in a gesture the *Little Guy* immediately interpreted as permission to take the next step. Greg couldn't help himself. He scratched Missy's bagged head affectionately, and that earned him even more approval, judging by her body language!

The pussy leash was a simple black and white ribbon, distinguished only by the snap-catch. Greg wasn't sure who was trembling most as he clumsily clipped the leash to Missy's collared and eyeleted clit. What fellow at some time or another hasn't dreamed of leading his wife around by her pussy! After all, how many chaps are led around by their dicks! Greg's eyes were as wide as saucers when it dawned on him exactly what he was looking at. There she was, kneeling at his feet, hooded and handcuffed, obviously aroused despite the day's trauma and now the humiliating and uncomfortable imposition swinging from her straining tits. The conclusion was inescapable. Greg was the proud owner of his very own sex-toy! A gentle tug was all the signal Missy needed. Mouth agape, he watched her struggle gamely to her toes, teetering on those marvellous, six-inch heels. Greg had to hug her! It was hardly appropriate behaviour for a committed tyrant, and he whimsically realised he'd have to curb this kind of benevolent impulse if he expected to make the right impression. For the moment though, he wanted to share his exuberance. The box of treasures got in the way a bit but nothing was going to stop him planting a sensual kiss through the velvet membrane and onto her luscious lips. His heart stopped beating!

Greg's lips hit something solid. His fingers tentatively traced the outline, bringing him to the conclusion that a huge, hard ball filled Missy's mouth. The temptation to take a peek was overwhelming. What stopped him from succumbing to it was a nagging fear that a look behind the mask would destroy the illusion. Then there was the visceral impact of hooded helplessness! Well, it was one or the other! In the end, Missy had the tip of her nose kissed. Greg savoured the faint, sibilant hiss of her staccato breathing. If he looked hard enough, he could actually see the ripple motion in the velvet made by her flaring nostrils.

Greg took special care on the staircase; he wasn't going to break his new toy before he had a chance to play with it. Missy responded immediately to every nudge, making his job as the expedition's guide as easy as possible. Whoever thought there would come a day when such a prize as this was obediently combing his wake, courtesy of a flimsy scrap of ribbon. Every few steps, he halted the procession and took another snapshot for

posterity. My word, wasn't the view from below while she waited patiently at the top of the landing among the most spectacular he had ever imagined. Of course it was! They reached the living room eventually, and the first thing Greg did was close the curtains. He wasn't sharing this experience with anyone. An instructive tap or two against a soft, sleek thigh had the desired effect of making Missy stand stiff and rigid close by his favourite armchair, legs pressed tight together. She thrust her bizarrely burdened boobs forward on her own initiative, even wriggled her butt provocatively for the moment or two it took to push those tantalising cheeks out behind her. The cheeky little bint! What would a proper tyrant do about that! Greg's earlier examination of the amazing treasure chest had shown him a more than adequate solution was at hand to assert his authority.

It had taken a while for Greg to appreciate he could say anything he liked. His audience was deaf, didn't he realise? He began a running commentary, explaining that saucy sluts like her had better learn to mind their manners, and show a lot more respect. Just to be sure she understood his meaning, he went on pedantically, he told her he was going to use the matching steel manacle to clamp her elbows together, and actually make them touch if such an ambition was practical. What do you think of that, Missy? A sudden premonition made him look around nervously. No-one was there, of course, only his febrile imagination. A disturbing image crowded his senses. What must this scene look like to the casual observer? A fevered gentleman, in dressing gown and slippers, a monstrous erection overseeing the proceedings, stalking a bound, hooded captive, mumbling something about fusing said captive's arms along her spine, and then dipping into the Pandora's box swinging from her tender, tormented nipples to extract a fearsome, stainless steel manacle whose only practical purpose was the infliction of suffering. They'd throw away the key!

Greg had never seen anything like it. Come to think of it, he'd never seen anything quite like the handcuffs gouging into Missy's wrists. They were so much more deadly than the standard patterns used on television. It took him a minute or so to figure out how the menacing elbow restraint worked, and the wicked grin spreading over his face confirmed that its secrets were discovered. He was a gifted engineer in his younger days, and still retained his admiration for superior design. A pair of thin, rounded steel bands was linked by an eight-inch length of flat, steel bar and the whole assembly pivoted in three places; at each join with the adjustable cuffs and precisely half-way along the bar. Obviously, the cuffs had to be applied first, into the soft flesh directly above each elbow, and the convenient length of the bar allowed Greg to concentrate on each task separately. An Allen key, one of his favourite tools as it happened, fitted into provisions in the cuffs and, one at a time, Greg tightened the internal machinery until he was certain the implacable steel bands bit into the helpless flesh beneath them with at least the same impact as was readily discernable at Missy's wrists. The *Little Guy* pleaded for just one more turn, and how could he say no? The silent captive swayed unsteadily, but certainly didn't attempt to evade Greg's unpleasant attentions, and she certainly didn't move her twisted, aching feet or relax the constant effort necessary to keep her box of treasures proudly presented. If Missy made a sound, it didn't reach Greg's ears, and he was less than a yard away. The mystery gag and the shock collar must be a potent combination!

Satisfied that Missy's biceps were pitilessly and punitively imprisoned, Greg was ready to investigate whether the retraction mechanism would live up to its promise. He arranged the three pivots so that the two arms of the linked bar pointed towards her wrist

manacles. For the moment, the angle was minimal. Missy's elbows wanted to stay at least seven inches apart, not that Greg had any intention of taking that fact into consideration. The Allen key was pressed into service again, this time fitting into the knuckle of the linkage joint. Greg relished every gradual turn, and by the time the distance between Missy's elbows had been reduced by half, his heart was beating like a drum, the *Little Guy* was desperate to participate and nothing could stop him from tapping her heels until she had spread her legs to the perfect width, and didn't those high heels help with the mathematics, so that access to her smooth, bald pussy, awash with arousal, was at his pleasure. The *Little Guy* plunged in with devil-may-care single-mindedness, hammering away with blind abandon while Greg used one shaking hand to jerk Missy's pussy leash and the other to keep up its commitment to the Allen key.

More by good luck than good management, the frantic pair kept their balance until the deed was done, a river of sticky cum trickling down the insides of Missy's thighs. Indeed, to give credit where credit was due, these desperate efforts were mostly Missy's. It took a moment for a dazed Greg to realise the Allen key had jammed because the flat bars had mated into one thicker bar running between her forearms. The image in his mind's eye as he made a quick dash to the bathroom was mesmerising. Missy's upper arms were wrenched behind her to the point where that earlier seven-inch gap now represented the distance between the tips of her shoulders. Her elbows did more than touch each other. The contact was as pressing as it was excruciatingly painful.

In the bathroom, Greg gave the *Little Guy* a comradely squeeze, and a good-humoured lecture about making such a mess. He looked closely at himself and, yep, there was no doubt about it. He was staring into the face of a maniac! The grin that followed was definitely evil, or so he hoped. A worthwhile tyrant could hope for nothing less. He strolled sedately into the living room, suppressing the wholly inappropriate concern that he may have dealt too harshly with his toy. It had come as a bit of a revelation to find the merciless elbow manacle locked to its final setting. Under the pernicious influence of the raging *Little Guy*, Greg's fingers had kept on twisting without waiting for instructions from his brain.

Missy seemed to be coping famously with the dreadful immobilisation of her agony-wracked arms. Every now and again she squirmed or spasmed, but that was hardly surprising. The strain was extreme. More significantly, she hadn't allowed the debilitating imposition to affect the proud display she made of the wicked container clipped between her cruelly collared nipples. Greg sponged Missy's cum-soaked thighs and calves and wiped up the few splotches on the carpet. Missy took Greg's gentle nudge as a signal she was meant to close her legs again, and she did so with the same stiff intensity which had earlier pleased him. It was doubly pleasing now, considering the recent ravaging and no-nonsense treatment she had received.

A tingle from his stomach reminded him of the strawberries and cream waiting in the refrigerator so he fetched them, plonking his butt down on the armchair just inches away from Missy's aromatic body. For comfort's sake, he clung onto the fabulous pussy leash, every so often giving it a friendly tug as an affirmation that the best night of his life was much more than a demented fantasy.

It turned out that night was only the beginning!

GRACE WAS ON tenterhooks; she squirmed nervously, all too aware that the first meeting with her beloved employer, under the conditions of her precious contract, was imminent. A good initial impression was vital! Grace was fresh from the benefit of four full days acclimatisation to her terms of service, and the unique uniform she would wear until her employment was terminated. She put that dreadful eventuality out of her mind immediately. That just wasn't going to happen, not if she had anything to say about it! Her crowning ambition was to serve Mr. Crane, loyally and faithfully, while ever there was breath in her body! In fact, that ambition had served her well all through the exhausting and uncomfortable preparations leading up to her present predicament. Fortified by a consuming need to serve and obey, Grace had met every challenge thrown up against her with determination and unbreakable resolve. That commitment was its own reward, endowing her with the patience, confidence and special skills required to provide the services expected of her, and in the manner they were expected.

Grace pirouetted nearly one-eighty degrees and approached a full length mirror to check her appearance for the umpteenth time. The short journey demanded her full concentration, as indeed did every activity she wished to undertake now that her training was complete and her uniform fitted. It had taken a day or so for Grace to get used to the strange apparition staring back at her but that uncertainty, and others like it, had long been replaced with the calm acceptance that comes from the knowledge that you've found your place at last. Her beautiful, pale blue eyes seemed unnaturally wide, an effect no doubt created by the polished, thick white latex hood which enveloped every other feature of her face. The thickness of the material, and its high stretch co-efficient, conspired to impose a constant, severe compression all over her bald skull, just one of the many reminders flooding her brain and maintaining her focus. Not that it was obvious to a casual inspection, but the relentless, oppressive influence of the velvet-smooth, gleaming helmet was perfectly exemplified by its interaction with the permanently implanted, studded rubber bladder gag filling her mouth and jamming up her throat. Only a close and careful examination revealed the intensity of the opposing forces hard at work within her tender mouth, the evidence restricted to the symmetrical pattern of tiny bumps corresponding to the hard, angular rubber studs festooning the surface of the gag. Out of sight, the complicated gag enforced a wide range of punitive inhibitions, beginning with the wickedly barbed pouch which captured, immobilised and tormented her helpless, useless tongue.

Grace's throat was tubed all the way to her stomach, enabling the prescribed mush which was her only sustenance to be expediently delivered by a casual connection to the small, stylish valve centred all the way through her remarkable gag. Similar valves, pressing into her nostrils, forced air into her lungs with the help of miniature compressors, a necessary precaution to prevent asphyxiation. The sibilant hiss was unmistakable. Grace's eyeballs had never had as much exercise. The thick, stiff, white neoprene collar controlled her neck with such authority that she had long since resigned herself to the knowledge her crushingly hooded head would never make an independent movement again.

The latex blouse and pinafore, which made up the visible component of her uniform between her throat and her knees, was tailored with exquisite precision to present her feminine attributes to their best advantage. The royal blue, crisp latex blouse hugged her torso from the high collar to her miniscule waist. The pleated, puffy sleeves reached her

elbows, terminating snugly there, over the creaseless surface of her full-length, thick, white latex gloves. The pinafore was pristine, thick white latex, held up solely by an ingenious arrangement of rubber and steel devices connected to and through her precocious nipples. The pinafore was cut to accommodate her startling, hour-glass figure and then drape down her legs to her knees with the deliberate intention of affecting a drastic hobble. Hidden beneath the rustling rubber was the cause of her astounding, voluptuously feminine shape. Grace had never worn a corset, didn't really know what they were, until her torso had been sealed inside this rigid, white neoprene carapace. For the first day or so, she had found it impossible to bear, added to the difficulties she faced with her mouth so burstingly full of gag and her feet so strikingly twisted.

Nothing is impossible to a girl with the right attitude, and Grace had her heart set on serving Mr. Crane to the very best of her ability, heedless of the obstacles placed in her path. So she had persevered with her burdens until she was able to hobble smoothly and gracefully (the old pun was never more appropriate) for hours on end, instantly ready to perform any of the modest range of duties expected of her. Grace had no idea her natural twenty-five inch waist had been squeezed down to a mere sixteen, her concerns were more prosaic. Adjusting to the exigencies of her restrictive, oppressive, devastatingly uncomfortable uniform took absolutely all her energy. Simple survival was not the issue. To fulfil her duties in a manner worthy of her employer demanded an altogether different level of commitment and, in the final analysis, it was this single-minded determination which was responsible for her outstanding success.

Even though the merciless, inflexible corset barely extended past her hips, neither her ripe, spongy breasts nor her sensitised groin had been spared the terrible, inevitable suffering her startling, bizarre uniform was designed to inflict. A series of narrow, graduated, neoprene bands encircled each of her helpless, tender boobs imprisoning and punishing them from the base outwards, with the goal of establishing an unnaturally shaped and solid foundation for the diabolical devices attaching her tormented nipples to the top of her stylish, crinkly pinafore. Certainly, from the outside, Grace's breasts were spectacularly presented, spearing out from her chest like fat torpedoes.

Grace didn't know what had been done to make her poor nipples so huge. What she did know was they had been covered first by agonising loops of barbed steel which felt as though they cut right through her tender flesh, making her dark, engorged aureoles appear to be capped by a pair of enormous black cherries, balancing there with no visible means of support. An opaque membrane of white latex, snapped over each misshapen nubbin, provided the final covering. Grace remembered all too clearly how much trouble the staff at the Clinic had run into in their efforts to squeeze and prod her screaming, flaming nipples through the latex blouse and then the all too tiny openings in the pinafore itself. The highly pressurised spheres making such a public demonstration were not the size of golf balls, even if that was Grace's first impression. There never was a stranger pair of buttons.

That was the moment when Grace first experienced the punitive qualities of the monstrous, neoprene dildos lodged in both her lower orifices. The staff must have blamed her for their frustration, setting off an irregular series of electrical pulses which coursed agonisingly through all her most sensitive tissues, blinding her to her surroundings. She didn't blame them for their mistake, believing her punishment deserved for being the cause of their annoyance, even if she had tried her very best to be completely

cooperative. The dildos made their uncomfortable presence a permanent part of Grace's life. There was never a moment when she could forget or ignore them, any more than she could the bizarre treatment meted out to her nipples, or the impact of her dread gag, or any of the several other handicaps which made her survival such a constant, critical struggle. The dildos were too large to fall out by themselves, but nothing had been left to chance as evidenced by the crushing neoprene strap riveted from one end of her corset to the other by way of splitting her bald labia. The effect, among others, was to mate the valves at the distal end of each dildo to the complimentary valves in the gouging corset strap.

Grace had been lured over an odd tripod arrangement by the judicious use of the generous pleasure pads mounted on her dildos. She found it even harder to concentrate under this rare influence than she did at other times, even those where her behaviour was modified by the punitive capabilities of her complicated chastity unit. She had learned very quickly how to wait for the narrow extension to rise between her booted thighs, then wriggle her loins until the tiny valves snapped onto the connectors at the apex of the tripod, and finally to stand very still while her ablutions were managed with dispassionate efficiency. The catheters and enemas were a minor inconvenience compared to her other handicaps.

The thigh high, white rubber boots had been fitted while she was unconscious so Grace had no idea how they so seamlessly sheathed her long legs, or how they were able to generate so much pressure. Her full body weight was channelled onto her twisted toes, and only the support provided by the rigid insteps and nine-inch stilettos kept her upright. Grace could bend her knees a fraction if she tried hard enough, which of course she did, and eventually a combination of practice and resolve led to a remarkable transformation. One or two of the staff actually applauded her final, polished performance, and their appreciation was a marvellous morale boost.

Grace had practised diligently to overcome the inherent restrictions imposed by her shoulder-length, fingerless, skin-tight white rubber gloves. It wasn't just the limitation of using her hands as paddles, with only the assistance of a relatively independent thumb; she had to cope with the relentless pressure on her upper arms which made it almost impossible to move her elbows away from her strikingly wasped waist. Even her elbows were denied their usual flexibility, so Grace had no choice but to develop a totally new skill set to deal with the responsibilities she would be entrusted with when the long-awaited day arrived.

And now that day was come, and Grace trembled with trepidation, terrified that despite her best endeavours, she would not measure up to the great man's expectations. The crushing hood made hearing difficult, but there was no mistaking the rumbling purr of the eight-cylinder Rolls-Royce engine rolling up the long driveway. Grace hobbled to the window in the distinctive, elegant stride she had strived so hard to master, just to catch a glimpse of her idolised employer. Her heart thudded against her crushed rib-cage, her breath whistled furiously through her implanted nose valves. The tinted windscreen concealed the Silver Ghost's passengers, much to Grace's disappointment. She wasted no time in regret, hurrying to her station to welcome the returning hero.

THE BASEMENT OF Mr. Crane's residence was transformed in the matter of a few days. The solitary handywoman had turned into a battery of six, all outfitted identically in

smart, tailored white drill overalls. Neither the tall, tight, white leather collars around their throats, nor the six-inch stilettos of their gleaming leather boots seemed out of place. Girls with figures like that demand accessories like that! The sextet arrived at 6 am precisely every morning, including weekends, and toiled industriously for the next fourteen hours with only two short breaks for refreshment. Lucille caught only occasional glimpses of their activities. Her mandated routine did not include the latitude to gawk, and with her self-esteem and independence ground down to less than nothing, even the notion of disobedience had become abhorrent to her. Lucille's world was somewhat smaller than it used to be. Events beyond the confines of her evolving prison no longer concerned her. Indeed, they no longer crossed her mind. When every ounce of energy was needed to merely survive the enormous handicaps confronting her, Lucille had learned to focus on what really mattered.

Miss Valerie's frequent appearances often heralded a dire addition to her misery and suffering. It wasn't enough for her to be constantly collared, corseted and mounted atop the cruellest boots ever devised. Oh, no! Miss Valerie had to find the cruellest ways to make her wretched life ever worse. Unbearably cruel was the only way to describe what had been done to her arms as soon as the handywomen had put the finishing touches on the automated dispensing station. Strange, shoulder-length, black leather gloves were worked over her hands and up her arms all the way to the tops of her shoulders. Delicate leather lacing at her wrists, elbows, and shoulders ensured the skin-tight sheaths would hold their position against just about anything. A dense web of fine leather cord balled each hand into a tight fist, and they would stay that way, completely immobilised, until the fastenings which secured them to her wrists were released. Black patent leather cuffs were buckled with brutal thoroughness around her wrists and biceps, just above her elbows. A single snap-link bolted her wrists together behind her back and then the cable attached to that link was threaded through a stainless steel D-ring embedded in the rear of her choking leather collar. Steady pressure on the cable drew her imprisoned hands towards her throat, the slow journey along her spine becoming ever more ominous. Lucille's biceps, shoulders and spine screamed in protest, and did a much better job of it than her raw, exhausted, choked throat. Lucille had never been very flexible and that fact was agonisingly apparent now. Still five inches shy of mating the wrist cuffs directly to her collar, Miss Valerie slipped a non-retractable, high-tensile spring between the contending forces, relying on the laws of physics to work on the problem. A similar spring spanned the eight-inch gulf between Lucille's straining elbows. The cable was discarded.

No sooner had Miss Valerie stepped back to gauge her handiwork than Lucille lost concentration, overbalanced and fell flat on her face. Concrete is very unforgiving of mistakes like that, and her exposed, ripe boobs being in the forefront, absorbed most of the impact. She lay like that, barely twitching, until Miss Valerie used the cane to drive her back onto her ballet booted toes. Lucille's fitness level was orders of magnitude better than before her ex-husband's accident, so she was able to eventually struggle back to her toes, albeit not without a salutary lesson from the cane. Miss Valerie shook her head in disgust. A lone, heart-breaking sob, wrenched from the core of her soul, preceded the inevitable motion of her aching, straining legs. Prancing in time to the gentle slapping of the cane, Lucille worked herself into the fluid, fast, high-stepping stride expected of

her, steeling herself to the knowledge that the pace must be maintained for another three hours before the next scheduled break.

Lucille understood almost nothing about the laws of physics, but her ignorance failed to halt the progress of the single-minded springs inexorably drawing her wrists into contact with her neck, and her elbows into a single joint. It proved next to impossible for Lucille to perform her ablutions, or take her cold shower, or even operate the newly installed dispensers. She was terrified of dropping a tablet, or wasting a drop of water. For several hours she had waged a futile battle against the insidious attack of the pitiless springs, but that struggle was long lost now. Her deadened wrists were within three inches of their destiny while a barely larger margin separated her straining elbows. The agonising immobilisation of her arms had put an end to the pretence that a comfortable sleeping position could be found. That first night, Lucille had squirmed around in vain, in the end settling for an awkward pose on her knees, her hooded head bent forward to rest on the concrete while the cruel springs kept up their devilish assault.

The eerily silent handywomen kept out of her way. The noise of hammers, saws and the occasional flash of blue sparks continued throughout the day, and Lucille was distantly aware that some sort of tall, steel contraption was taking shape at the far end of the basement. It looked like some work had been done on the ceiling to fit it in. Of much greater concern to Lucille was Miss Valerie's next visit. She had accumulated so many demerits, one hundred and twelve to be precise, she didn't know whether to pray for her speedy arrival so they could be expiated, or pray for an extended delay so her sore, swollen, bruised bottom might partially recover. No matter how hard she tried, the immobilisation of her arms had been the final straw. She just couldn't avoid frequent lapses in deportment, any more than she could fly to the moon.

One of her prayers was answered. Miss Valerie arrived very early, and in the company of a mature, elegantly dressed woman. Oh, if only she could be so lucky. Look at herself! Poor Lucille! Bound, collared, corseted and trapped inside hellish ballet boots, she was in the implacable grip of a terrifying nightmare. Lucille blurted out her penance immediately, still frighteningly unable to falsify or minimise her mistakes. Included in the formidable total were a further twenty-four blistering cuts, all earned for spoiling Miss Valerie's aim by an unacceptable amount of wriggling.

Lucille's buttocks and thighs were belted black and blue, adding another sound to the cacophony of noise filling the basement. To Lucille's relief, if not her bottom's, not a single blow struck her tender tits or her bald pussy. The underground workplace was becoming more and more hectic. Sobbing hysterically after the brutal thrashing, driving her tortured legs to meet the required standard, Lucille first became aware that the newcomer had set up a table nearby, on which was a terrifying collection of surgical instruments. For a moment her high-stepping stride faltered, as the dire implications sunk home, but only another moment later she was back to her regulation prance, religiously filing away the instance of imprecision for inclusion in her next penance. At least the murderous springs manipulating her arms had given up their pitiless attack, and Lucille was slowly coming to terms with the constant, agonising ache in her useless limbs. The threat of the ominous assortment of implements preyed on her failing mind.

So it was with dread expectation that Lucille came to an abrupt stop at the touch of Miss Valerie's cane, and stood as still, stiff and straight as she could. Her huge breasts, they seemed larger every time she thought about them, heaved in outright defiance of her

orders to calm down. Was there a short conference going on behind her back? The six handywomen took up positions and, on an unseen signal, picked her bodily up only to deposit her a moment later on a hard bench top. A wedge was slipped under her neck before a co-ordinated effort resulted in a web of straps pinning her to the prickly surface with such authority that not a single muscle could twitch. Her aching, immobilised arms, trapped under her torso, absorbed an unnatural share of the burden. Her long, strong legs were spread obscenely wide before the vicious strapping ensured they couldn't even flex.

Not a word was said. Only an intense, expectant visage hinted at the new horrors awaiting her. Lucille's eyes searched hopelessly for succour, her lips vainly mouthed a silent plea for mercy, but neither succour nor mercy would befall her, no more than she deserved. On the very periphery of her vision, Lucille could see Miss Valerie speaking authoritatively to the looming nemesis. The creaking pressure of the punitive leather hood, however, prevented her from hearing what was said. For the next thirty minutes, Lucille endured repeated, agonising, terrifying punctures from head to groin with never more than a minute or two to prepare for the next attack. Pathetic screams accompanied each fresh wound. No one paid the slightest attention to her suffering. Lucille didn't really understand what was happening, other than the endless skewering of her most tender tissues, but then her participation was purely passive. Lorna, the same Lorna Tompkins who had so professionally prepared Missy was nothing if not thorough, working in a logical progression from Lucille's head to her groin. One at a time, Lorna thrust a steel spike through a chosen target, inserting a custom, hypoallergenic eyelet into the piercing in the same motion as the flashing needle was removed. Lucille's septum piercing was followed by a set of three in her tongue, arranged in a line around the rim with the middle eyelet on the centreline one half-inch back from the tip and the other two in precise flank support.

Three was a popular number. Lorna worked next on Lucille's upper lip, placing three more equally spaced, eyeleted piercings through the soft tissue. Using that pattern as a guide, Lorna added three eyelets to Lucille's lower lip, checking her work as she went. Her critical eye found no fault with the symmetry. More to the point, nor did Miss Valerie! Almost as an anti-climax, just one eyeleted piercing was made in each of Lucille's nipples, close up by the aureole. Getting back in the spirit, three evenly spaced piercings were made in each labia, framing a single piercing directly through the core of her precocious clit. Lucille was ridiculously grateful for the strangely smelling unguent rubbed thoroughly into every wound. It dulled the all-pervading agony ravaging her pitilessly abused body. So many tears had pooled in her eye sockets that Lucille's vision was reduced to a shadowy image of the events going on around her. So she didn't get a good look at the cruel, elaborate harness which was about to be buckled around her bald, crushingly hooded skull all with the purpose of cleverly implanting a fiendish gag between her teeth so that it never had to be removed.

Lucille choked and spluttered while a thick, rubber tube was forced down her throat until it settled safe in her stomach. A stainless steel bit, of enormous complexity, was held close to her pierced lips so the emergent end of the tube could be squeezed through the custom channel with the aid of a very long-nosed pair of pliers. Once the tube saw the light of day, several pairs of hands collaborated to cram the monstrous steel wedge all the way into Lucille's helpless mouth, pushing and twisting until her teeth finally locked into the tight slots machined for them. With nowhere else to go, her battered, punctured

tongue was forced into a narrow pouch just beneath the shielded tube where it met a cunning, callous bank of razor-sharp barbs whose insidious effect continuously encouraged her to thrust that aching appendage further in. Of course, the further in, the worse the infestation while any attempt to withdraw from the trap was met with unendurable rebuke. Lucille maintained a desperate effort to keep her tormented tongue stretched as far forward as her straining facial muscles allowed. She was dimly aware that her bald head had been freed from its imprisonment, and that a network of gleaming, studded, black patent leather straps was being arranged around it. In a simultaneous assault, the stiff leather straps were viciously buckled while three stainless steel bolts were poked and prodded first through each upper lip eyelet, and then the steel gag itself where it so happened that the corresponding tongue eyelet was ensnared. The bolts eventually emerged, after a frustrating amount of fiddling, through the eyelets in Lucille's lower lips.

The agony-gagged prisoner writhed in helpless misery while Lorna screwed a serrated cap onto each end of the three lip bolts, working the thread until a satisfying snap heralded their permanent union. *Sotto voce*, Lorna mumbled something about *thank goodness I don't have to do that again*. Indeed, thank goodness Lucille didn't hear the remark! She would discover, soon enough, her diabolical torture gag was there to stay. Why dispel her ignorance? Miss Valerie's inspection revealed a buckle which could be tightened a further notch so that was done by willing hands while Lorna herself inserted the long-handled driver into one of the billets beside the protruding tube whose untidy end fluttered feebly about. Several revolutions served to expand that part of the hinged gag into her cheek cavity, ballooning it out against the gouging pressure of a harness strap for a particularly attractive, if punitive, effect. As soon as the matching billet filled her opposite cheek to bursting point, the expansion tool was set aside, the excess rubber tube trimmed and a combination valve and clamp used to lock the feeding hose inside the gag, conceal the billet adjustments, provide a secure, one-way channel for fluid movement and generally tidy up the overall appearance.

The final touches complete, and the terrible gag absolutely punishing and tormenting poor Lucille with zealous ferocity, her remaining restraints were released and the bizarre crew hoisted her upright again, plonking her down back where she started, on her tender toes. Rest and recovery, apparently, were not considered necessary. Lucille stumbled like a drunk, weaving a ragged path around her limited exercise area, snorting frantically through her flaring nostrils to draw a pitiful breath of air into her corset crushed lungs. Her head ached with an intensity she had never imagined. The monstrous conspiracy of her barb-bolted lips and tongue, the enormous mass of studded steel filling every crevice in her mouth and the grinding, gouging leather straps over the crushing leather hood added a fiendish horror to her already unbearable burdens. Blood was trying to flow back into her lifeless, leather gloved arms, just as somehow she was trying to get her ballet booted feet moving again, and trying to remember the monotonous rhythms that kept her endlessly prancing in place. Her frightful torment was ignored by everybody as they went about their business. The crew of handywomen went back to their mysterious labours; though Lucille thought she saw two of them depart by way of the narrow staircase leading to the ground floor. The perpetrator of the mutilation calmly gathered her instruments of torture, had a short conversation with Miss Valerie, and then left by the same route. Watching that snugly skirted bottom mince up the stairs, perched on those

towering heels, would have been a sight of ridicule for anyone but the abused, degraded creature still striving to get her knees up high enough to satisfy Miss Valerie's critical eye.

No sooner had Lucille stabilised her stride and got her breathing under control than a silent command brought her to a standstill. She fought desperately to avoid overbalancing, succeeded, and stood remarkably still and straight for inspection. Tears fell anew when Lucille realised the steel cable descending from the ceiling had the sole purpose of pinning her in place, courtesy of her freshly emplaced septum grommet. The tension was set so severely that her only recourse was to squeeze her aching legs tightly together, distributing the crippling discomfort more or less evenly between her screaming nostrils and toes. Poor Lucille shuddered despairingly as her heartless tormentor efficiently swapped the powerful springs twisting her tortured arms into a completely unnatural position with shorter, but no less powerful, replacements. The instant the new springs took up the strain, Lucille felt a revived, terrible pressure in her shoulders and arms and knew with dread certainty that the final destination for her wrists was direct contact with the rear of her choking collar, and that her elbows were destined to fuse into a single joint hard up against her spine.

As if that were not enough! As if her overwhelming misery and suffering couldn't be made worse! Of course it could be made worse! The cruel combination of her choking, suffocating collar and the wicked nose restraint prevented Lucy from seeing exactly what was done to her helplessly proffered, chemically enhanced breasts. However, her other senses were fully alive and she got an undiluted feel of the pain. Around the base of each prodigious tit went a matching leather strap, its inner surface festooned with serried banks of tiny, needle-tipped steel barbs. Valerie worked hard to fasten each buckle. There was just the one position, and Valerie strained resolutely until the task was done. Not a sound escaped Lucy's horror-gagged mouth, though a pitiful, hopeless snorting bubbled from her flaming nose. To complete the merciless bondage of Lucy's bloated breasts, a cage of wire thin leather laces enveloped each throbbing globe, positioning a spiked steel ring around each grommeted nipple. The inner diameter of these devilish rings was precisely measured to surround her dark aureoles. Lost in an endless, absolute nightmare, Lucy didn't see her tormentor's rare smile. She did feel the stinging slap which immediately followed the release of her punished nose, and that was all the incentive she needed to begin prancing again. Abjectly inspired by an implacable gaze, Lucy lurched into motion with every ounce of energy she could summon. Would anything she ever did be good enough to earn the slightest praise?

Chapter Nine

MISSY HAD LAIN awake most of the night, waiting for dawn and the promised release from her severe, erotic bondage pose. If it wasn't for the thick, knobbly penis gag filling her mouth and the top half of her throat, her bubbling enthusiasm for the coming day's celebration would have surely woken her wonderful, adored husband, and she would never dream of doing that. Sir had already told her she would be allowed to help Miss Valerie with her wedding preparations, an afternoon event which meant an early wake-up for everyone, especially the bride and her matron-of-honour. Missy's anticipation and excitement were completely at odds with her present predicament. Sir had been pleased as punch with this addition to their bedroom furniture. Truth to tell, the blatantly erotic object fired Missy's libido to boiling point, as did anything of an evenly vaguely similar shape. The object in question was a hard, neoprene dildo, twelve inches long, mounted atop a steel flange bolted directly to the floor at the foot of the bed. Missy was currently in intimate contact with it, and the multitude of angry, inflexible rubber spines which infested it. Of course, only the final six inches were in her mouth or throat, her full, soft lips stretched paper thin around its frightening circumference. To ensure the integrity of the relationship, a pitilessly strong spring spanned the gap between the flange and the thick, stainless steel ring permanently welded through her eyeleted septum. Sir got so much enjoyment from the simple act of snapping the spring to her nose ring, and that alone was more than enough for Missy.

In the course of a typical evening, Missy could expect the implacable, insistent spring to force anywhere from one to two inches of dildo down her throat, depending mainly on the length of time she was attached to it. Uncomfortable as it was, and as hard as it made her breathing, Missy couldn't help but nurture a genuine fondness for the faithful impaler. It reminded her so much of Sir's beloved manhood. Missy's vision was restricted to a small patch of carpet, and this was further limited by the strands of her short, red ponytail flopping forward over her eyes. The principal hindrance preventing Missy from swivelling her lips around the dildo's gigantic girth, however, was not the nasal spring, nor the stiff, rubber prongs, although both made pretty fair deterrents in themselves. Her astounding breasts made the perfect anchors! Less than twenty-four hours after the barbed nipple collars were crimped into place, Missy had been fitted with a set of outrageous breast-cuffs, made especially for her. Miss Valerie had driven her back to the clinic before noon on the following day, the same velvet cloak concealing her punitively erotic attire. Corset and Martingale straps were applied with fresh energy, squeezing another half-inch from Missy's already tiny waist. This time, smoky, seamed silk stockings were fastened to the corset's suspenders before her feet were locked into the too small, seven-inch heeled stilettos. The hand-cuffs, and the wicked elbow cuffs, which she had become very familiar with, imprisoned her leather gloved arms with brutal effectiveness. Sir thought they were just what she needed, so she had worn them all night. The shock collar continued to occupy pride of place, and with its sensitivity set to maximum, Missy was very careful to keep her thoughts to herself.

Missy's nipples had lost none of their awareness, and the teasing touch of the svelte velvet promised so much. Last night, Sir had teased her tender nipples so extravagantly she had exploded in orgasm, in spite of her best resolve to deny such a selfish impulse. Her prodigious nubbins were so incorrigibly promiscuous that no amount of willpower

could control them when Sir chose to amuse himself! Her wanton, collared clit behaved with even less restraint. If Sir so much as looked at the engorged morsel, quivering frantically in the grip of its steel prison, Missy could no more hold back the floodgates than fly. The multitude of needle-sharp barbs piercing all three of her insatiable erogenous zones were unable to dampen her appetite, despite the relentless, intense pain they caused her.

How she wished Miss Valerie would give her permission to rub her needy nipples against the soothing velvet! Missy had accepted the fact that her beautiful, terrible nipple and clit collars were part of her life, just as the rest of the modifications would be with her forever. Indeed, Sir's obvious satisfaction was enough to make Missy inordinately proud of them.

Leashed like the wanton slut she knew she was, Missy hobbled obediently behind her daughter, concentrating feverishly on the latest addition to her costume. Over breakfast, Sir had pointed out how much more agreeable strict bondage had made his Missy, which remark the meekly submissive creature kneeling beside his chair was in absolute agreement with. Bondage put her in her place and the more uncomfortable the better. Missy relayed that observation to her daughter the moment she arrived for their second visit to the clinic. Miss Valerie didn't have to voice her approval, her expression said it all. With Missy's complete cooperation, a set of gleaming, steel cuffs were ferociously bolted around her shapely thighs, the rims of which disappeared into the soft flesh directly above her knees. A two-inch long steel bar, flexibly mounted, linked the cuffs, effectively limiting Missy to mincing steps of barely three inches.

More by good luck than anything else, Missy kept her footing while responding to the constant, insistent tug on her leash. Miss Valerie was in no mood to dawdle. A smartly attired young man met them in the foyer. He exchanged greetings and good-byes with Miss Valerie, and accepted the proffered leash. His kind smile, directed her way, made Missy feel all tingly inside. Miss Valerie departed without a word of explanation for her. In view of all the preparations that still needed to be made for the wedding, Missy was simply grateful her daughter had taken time from her busy schedule to deliver her. It would have been a long way to walk!

The young man controlling her leash chose a more sedate pace, leading her towards the elevator and it wasn't long before she was brought to a halt in some kind of bright, white, underground operating theatre. Several technicians were present, but for the time being they ignored her. Her escort draped her leash over a mobile stand, and Missy took that as a signal she was not to move. So she didn't, standing as stiff and straight as she could. An eclectic mix of trepidation and anticipation flushed her skin, bringing on a rash of goose-bumps. She shivered in nervous excitement.

Missy remembered being stapled to a steel table after her cloak and thigh hobbles had been removed. She remembered how uncomfortable her bound arms were, and being unable to get them out of the way of the stapling which nailed her immovably. Her silk sheathed legs were forced brutally wide, exposing her bald, mutilated pussy. The last thing she remembered was a friendly wink from a technician holding a syringe.

Some indeterminate time later, she was groggily trying to understand what had happened. There was the most atrocious pain emanating from her boobs, so bad that it had actually roused her from unconsciousness just as smelling salts will do. An ill-advised moan attracted the attention of the ever vigilant monitors mounted in her shock

collar and that meant an immediate, agonising reminder that girls like her were expected to keep their suffering to themselves. The staples were gone, and the surface on which she lay was marginally softer. However, something was fastened to her collar which effectively prevented her from doing more than wriggle. Certainly, she wasn't able to roll off her back. Missy's aching arms, in intimate contact with each other from fingertip to well above her elbows, were trapped beneath her waspishly corseted body, not that their distress could compare with whatever had been done to her screaming breasts. The thigh cuffs had been rigorously reapplied which limited how much thrashing around her legs were capable of. Not much, as it turned out. Writhing and wriggling did not ease her suffering one iota, but she did it anyway, anything to take her mind off the terrible pressure cinching the roots of her prodigious boobs, the agony extending out half-way to her collared and eyeleted nipples.

The awkward angle and the darkness in the room combined to deny Missy the opportunity to actually see what had been done to her. That ignorance was rudely shattered when the lights came on and a smiling technician held a mirror above her head, angling it to make sure Missy got an unobstructed view of the treatment meted out to her vulnerable tits. Grotesque should have been the first adjective to come to mind, but since Sir obviously wanted her boobs to look like this, she refused to accept that description, substituting something positive, even beautiful. Gleaming, hollow, stainless steel cylinders, almost four inches long, had somehow been forced over her tender tits to rest up directly against her chest. The diameter of these diabolical tubes was well under three inches, and since every available ounce of helpless boob-flesh was drawn through the cruel steel, what emerged at the far end were a pair of huge, engorged, spherical melons, each boasting a circumference of over twenty inches. Even flat on her back, the bizarre appendages speared straight out from her torso, like balls on sticks, angled a little to each side so the bloated, taut-skinned melons were separated by a distance of an inch or so. Atop the straining boob-balls, a pair of dark, tormented nipples quivered in helpless sympathy.

Missy was not to know how thick the cylinders were, but since the merciless, metal surface was embellished with four rows of steel pins, all showing a good half-inch of exposed shaft, it was obvious that thickness was the issue. With eight, close-spaced pins in each row that meant thirty-two presently disengaged barbs were patiently awaiting their chance to attack her. Missy's experience with her clit and nipple collars left her in no doubt as to their purpose, even without the confirmation of the sharp pricks corresponding to the pattern of pins.

The technician put the mirror aside, released her collar from its attachment and clipped her leash in place. At his urging, she struggled to her feet, wobbling unsteadily on the cramped, high heels. Missy worked hard on her balance, still a little groggy from the anaesthetic, and consumed by the terrible torture inflicted upon her prodigious tits. No sooner had she composed herself sufficiently to stand at stiff attention, than her comforting cloak was replaced, and buttoned from top to bottom. The weight of the material had no affect whatever on the shape of her bizarrely misshapen breasts. Indeed, even her promiscuous nipples were barely stimulated by the firm contact, subdued as they were by the suffering inflicted on her outrageously mistreated boobs.

Missy hobbled obediently behind the sauntering technician, not at all concerned with where she was being taken. What small part of her brain that wasn't fighting the agony

overwhelming her breasts was imagining the look on Sir's face when he saw her predicament. That was something worth looking forward to! Missy was brought to a halt in a small alcove off the main foyer. She stood still while a cable was lowered from the ceiling, and a shackle fastened through her nose eyelet. From previous experience, she knew what to expect and steadied herself for the extreme tension. The smiling technician expertly balanced her weight between her flaring nostrils and squashed toes. That would keep her mind where it mattered. Her leash dangled fetchingly down the front of the plush, velvet cloak.

There Missy waited for about an hour, until her daughter called to collect her. Out in the fresh air, the odd pair strolled leisurely towards the waiting Mercedes. Missy sighed contentedly in response to the warm smile and affectionate kiss she received before Miss Valerie fastened her into her seat. From there it was straight home; some much needed maintenance and then up to Sir's bedroom where she was promptly backed into a closet. The aroma of freshly varnished timber assailed her nostrils, announcing that substantial changes had been made to the interior of the narrow, confined space. Missy almost tripped over the tiny pedestal mounted on the wooden floor, but once she realised it was there, she didn't need to be told she was expected to stand on it. After all, it was scarcely two inches above floor level. The diameter of the pedestal, however, was the bare minimum to accommodate two sets of toes and two seven-inch stilettos. Only by keeping her aching, hobbled legs squeezed tight together could Missy maintain a precarious balance. To move her feet even a millimetre risked falling off.

At last Missy understood the hours she had already spent hanging from her nose had been in preparation for this moment. Miss Valerie lowered a cable from the ceiling some two feet above Missy's head, securing the attached shackle to her septum piercing. A faint hum accompanied the gradual tightening of the cable, the tone changing to a whirr as soon as the tension began to mount. If anything, Missy's ferociously stretched nostrils were called upon to bear an even greater share of her weight, now that she was safely closeted in her own home. Fighting feverishly to bottle up her distress lest an inadvertent cry rouse the ire of her choking, pitiless shock collar, Missy was only dimly aware that her daughter was primping her, smoothing down the folds of her soft cloak, all to make sure she looked her best. As a final touch Miss Valerie gently opened her mouth, placing the leash's leather grip between her teeth.

"Don't drop it, Mum," she whispered with mock solemnity. "Dad should be home in another three hours or so. I'll leave a note so he'll know where to find you."

Missy intercepted the automatic *thank-you* before it could trigger retribution, just! The closet door closed. Inside, it was pitch black.

Afterwards, Missy couldn't really remember how she had survived the harrowing ordeal. There were so many things she had to concentrate on, if she wasn't to spoil the surprise her daughter had planned, let alone make her suffering all that much worse. The most important of these was to keep her cramped feet absolutely motionless. Running a close tie for second were the imperatives that not a sound escape her quivering lips, clenched as they were on the leash's grip, and that she keep her exhausted, aching feet completely still. She knew exactly what the consequences would be if she fell off the pedestal. Missy didn't dare let her teeth touch the soft leather, for fear of damaging it. Of course, there was nothing she could do about her wailing, bizarrely misshapen boobs, nor her punitively bound, leather gloved arms. The crushing corset spoke for itself. Her world

was a cornucopia of suffering, which she somehow endured for an impossible three-and-a-half hours!

Bright light startled her, and in her confusion she almost dropped the leash, and toppled off the tiny pedestal. Thank goodness neither happened. With her head tilted so far heavenward, Missy's vision was restricted to little more than the ceiling. She could just discern Sir's face in the very periphery of her blurred vision. She couldn't really see his expression, but the long minutes he spent examining her, augured well for his approval. Sir stroked her tense cheeks before unshackling her nose, and his tender caress sent a shiver of genuine joy through her traumatised nerves. Extracted from the confining closet, Missy's head adopted a more natural orientation as she waited patiently for Sir to finish his inspection. Somehow, under his magnetic gaze, her suffering lost a little of its intensity. She sighed deeply while his fingers undid the embossed buttons closing her cloak. The garment fell to the floor.

Sir's gasp of astonishment and his immediate, boyish grin said it all.

"My... oh... my!" he said, a combination of confusion and elation lighting up his handsome features. "You did this for me?" The wonder in his tone was unmistakable.

Missy had to answer his question. The moment was too important for her to worry about the shock collar's reaction. A radiant smile lit up her whole face.

"Yes, Sir!" she said in a brave, adoring voice, simultaneously staggering from the brutal retribution. As the after-shock trailed off, she summoned her hidden reserves of character, and repeated her answer with even greater passion.

"Oh, yes Sir!" This time the fiery pain acted as a perfect expression of her loyalty and devotion. How she hoped he would see that!

Sir took a scrap of paper from his trouser pocket and with it a peculiar, steel tool, the purpose of which Missy guessed only too well. Her first thought was to pray for the courage to endure the imminent ordeal without spoiling Sir's enjoyment. One particular look drove her to her knees with a jarring thud, reverberating through her aching bones and muscles. She squatted back on her haunches, acutely aware that Sir's highly aroused manhood was scarce inches from her lips, straining against his trousers. If any confirmation of Sir's reaction was needed, there was none better! Missy licked her dry lips, preparing them in wanton anticipation. She just couldn't help herself.

The ominous tool engaged the head of the first barb. A sudden, twisting thrust sent it rushing into the compressed neck of her pitilessly misshapen boob. Missy shuddered from the impact, a faint moan escaping her trembling lips. Sir's shout of exultation as he screwed the barb's head a half-turn, permanently embedding it, made Missy delirious. That she was able to bring so much joy to his life made every bit of her monstrous suffering absolutely worthwhile. Sir only managed to implant four of the deadly, needle-sharp barbs, before his need became overpowering. Missy watched him shuck his clothes with scant regard for where they fell. Moments later her willing mouth was stretched wide around an enormous, excited organ doing everything it could to rip out the back of her throat. Missy put her lips and tongue, and even her throat, to the loving worship of the frantic intruder. As a violent torrent of cum spurted into her bowels, Missy winced from the pain of yet another barb thrusting home.

Before that night was over, Sir had reached seven separate orgasms to Missy's none, though her face and tits were covered in the residue, let alone how much filled her

stomach. Just as importantly, every one of the sixty-four steel barbs had been hammered into place.

Since that night, Missy had adjusted to the ruthless demands of her terrible tit-cuffs, not that they were the only burdens she had to bear. Far from it! Sir delighted in finding ever more restrictive and painful ways to handicap her, turning even the simplest of tasks into almost impossible chores. All Missy could do was accept them, and strive to serve him better because of them.

Missy's musings were disturbed by a rustling in the bed above her. Perhaps Sir was awake at last. She was so excited about the day's events, so excited that she tugged against her taut restraints. Her mercilessly mistreated boobs were spring-chained to separate bedposts just as her nose was encouraged to keep her gaping mouth in eager, intimate contact with the huge dildo filling her throat. The only part of Missy's body that actually touched the floor were her knees, and to make sure they couldn't move a millimetre, a single stainless steel manacle wrapped gougingly around her leather-booted thighs, just above the joint and another of the wicked, high-tensile steel springs stretched between her eyeleted clit and a small bolt embedded in the floor a foot or so to her rear. Her arms were rendered singularly useless. Sheathed to the shoulder in creakingly tight, black patent leather and welded together behind her back at both elbow and wrist, they were connected to her manacled ankles by an aggressive spring which made sure her hands and feet were pressed together in an amorphous jumble near her juicy bum, and unable to interfere with anything. Missy's thrumming taut clit tether passed between her calves.

Sir was definitely awake now, Missy knew, because the rustling of the sheets had got closer. Sure enough, she felt his strong, affectionate hand on the top of her head, pushing down, and heard his whispered *delicious, m'dear*. A minute or so later, Sir was out of bed, and kneeling beside her to get at the steel manacle cutting into her thighs. Knowing exactly what to expect, Missy inched her numb, tingling, long imprisoned thighs as wide apart as she could, as wide apart as her crushingly imprisoned hands and feet would allow. The angle made by the viciously taut spring separating her collared and eyeleted clit from the staple in the floor behind her was not so acute as to deny Sir access to whichever of her lower orifices he chose to penetrate. This morning, as usual, he chose her steaming pussy, made already moist merely by the knowledge that it might be so favoured. Missy slurped avidly on the gigantic dildo pushing into her throat just as soon as she felt his idolised manhood force its majestic way into her welcoming channel. First thing in the morning, Sir liked a robust fuck, so Missy had learned to endure the effect his passionate attention had on her helpless and tormented nipples and clit. Heroically, she put her agony to one side to direct all her handicapped talents towards Sir's pleasure. Missy's squelching pussy clenched furiously in time to his resounding thrusts while her lush, spongy buttocks strove ardently to meet his demands, notwithstanding the terrible consequences. A warm glow suffused her pounding heart, knowing she had once again been responsible for providing Sir with a memorable orgasm, unsullied by any carnal effusion on her part. A friendly swat across her exposed backside as he staggered to his feet was a sure sign of his approval.

Sir left her to her own devices while he headed for the shower. He did place a saucer between her thighs to protect the carpet from the copious juices dribbling steadily from her swollen, intensely aroused pussy. If Missy was very good, and Sir was in a

benevolent mood, there was a good chance she would be permitted to lap up every drop of the precious fluid. She could only hope.

Missy guessed the time at around 6 am. She certainly hoped it wasn't any later; there was so much to get done. With nothing better to do, she squeezed her pussy muscles convulsively, expelling every possible drop of elixir. Sir returned to the bedroom, humming merrily while he leisurely released all of the restraints which had kept Missy quiet and compliant for the evening. Without instructions to the contrary, Missy made the most of this opportunity to crawl submissively to Sir's feet where she prostrated herself, bestowing kiss after adoring kiss all over his bare toes. Her misshapen, tortured tits protruded sideways like strange candlesticks capped with dark, immense, grotesque plums. Even though her limbs were unencumbered, that is if you don't count the deeply embedded steel manacles cutting into her biceps, wrists and ankles, Missy kept her arms behind her back, striving to keep her elbows in contact with each other by an effort of sheer willpower. Her lovely legs were pressed together and tucked neatly under her haunches. Sir humoured her protestations, as he often did, clearly enjoying the attention.

A gentle nudge curtailed her worship, and she scurried into the en-suite, still on her knees and with her arms behind her back. Missy had learned to take care of her personal needs with lightning efficiency and thoroughness, all the better to make Sir the sole focus of her attention. Sure that she looked her best, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, Missy fondled her gag for a wistful moment before clipping one end of a short length of chain through her septum eyelet. Pushing the dangling chain away from her mouth, she popped the gag into her mouth. It went in easily enough although it was always a little tricky to properly trap her tongue in its wickedly barbed prison. The cramped space was barely adequate. After several weeks of constant practice, Missy nowadays almost always got it right. The narrow, shallow slot in the very front of the roughly spherical shaped rubber plug accepted the working end of a Philips-head screwdriver with machined precision. Missy turned the handle confidently, never relaxing the pressure until every one of the stiff rubber barbs festooning the gag's hard surface were ground as far into her cheeks and palate as they could go, her jaws were jacked frighteningly wide, and her lips stretched paper-thin around the bloated rubber ball. The screwdriver was set aside. Desperately snorting air through her nostrils, Missy's trembling, leather-sheathed hands fiddled with the other end of the short nose chain, snapping it into the slot and disguising its existence.

The next task for her busy fingers was straight-forward. Missy fastened a longer chain, a much longer chain, directly through her eyeleted, searingly collared clit. The silvery links draped between her leather-booted thighs all the way down to the floor where it terminated in a solid steel ball, all of four inches in diameter. Her final responsibility each morning was to secure a high-tensile spring between each of her gougingly manacled wrists and the corresponding nipple eyelet. Missy couldn't smile of course, but there was a twinkle in her eye as she vigorously tested the tension in her wicked collared nipples. Just as Sir liked it!

Strutting proudly, Missy made her way downstairs to the kitchen, the heavy pussy-ball bouncing excitedly in her wake. What a wonderful day this was going to be. She could hardly wait for the festivities to begin!

LUCILLE'S BALD HEAD was absolutely ground into submission by the combination of her grinding leather hood, the stiff, choking collar cutting and gouging into both her jawline and shoulder blades, and most of all by the horrific cruelty with which she had been permanently gagged. Her wild eyes had taken on a fixed, terrified stare. And now Lucille's last freedom had been taken away from her, if you can so describe the ability to writhe and squirm on a hard concrete floor. The change to her routine began the previous evening, barely hours after the unbearable steel gag had been diabolically sealed within her bloated mouth by the three steel bolts welding her eyeleted lips closed around it. One of the staff had pumped nutrients into her tubed stomach, then led her to the open stall where she thankfully half-squatted to relieve a full day's waste. Lucille had never paid attention to the faces of the strange handywomen who had redecorated the basement, so she wasn't sure if the elaborately and punitively costumed maid attending to her needs had changed her outfit, or was a new recruit altogether.

Something in the maid's exceedingly erotic and uncomfortable attire sparked a distant memory. The moment came back to her with surprising clarity. It was the night Archibald had proposed. Lucille vividly remembered her deliberate deception, dressing in a silly French Maid's costume to welcome him to her modest apartment. What an act she was! The ruse worked to perfection and before that evening was over, she had landed her fish. Fortunately, the early wedding date meant she didn't have to repeat the foolish charade very often, abandoning it forever after the marriage ceremony. These thoughts flashed through her mind in a second. What she wouldn't do, right now, to swap with this pretty creature!

Of course, her brain turned to jelly with Miss Valerie's silent re-appearance. Her tormentor's waist was tinier than ever. The exquisite vision was mesmerizing. Trembling as much from genuine fear as from her intolerable bondage, Lucy awaited, with infinite dread, her next thrashing. How much worse would it be, now that she was unable to recant her mistakes? Miss Valerie carefully inspected the efforts made by the pitiless springs charged with the duty of tearing her arms from their sockets. Sure enough, they had done their part, allowing a single steel shackle to fasten her lifeless wrists to her collar, while an identical shackle did the same for her twisted elbows, mashing them together. The exhausted springs were discarded.

Lucy did as she was told, high-stepping her way to the far end of the basement, toward the huge contraption poking its way up into the room above, its final shape and purpose concealed by a clean, white tarpaulin. Left to her own devices while the tarpaulin was removed, Lucy immediately began to prance. What was this strange contraption? If only she had been a better person!

GREG HARPER ATTRACTED plenty of attention, turning up at the office in a fashionable tuxedo. His daughter and her erotic entourage had arrived barely minutes after the *Little Guy* had finished with his morning exercise, and Valerie had oh so politely suggested that the rituals about to be performed were mysterious women's business. Greg took the hint and, after Missy had fussed around helping him into the ridiculously expensive tuxedo, and Valerie had pronounced herself satisfied with his appearance, he slipped out the door and drove to the office. He couldn't keep the grin off his face. His daughter's wedding was important, but not as important as his Porsche, promised for delivery in just one more week. A quiet emolument had bumped him up the waiting list.

Molly was waiting for him where she invariably did these days, inside his office, eager to begin their morning ritual. Gone were the petulance and unpredictable mood swings, to be replaced by unfailing good humour and, more importantly, profound respect. Greg had already decided to recruit his delectable secretary as his very personal assistant when he made the decision to abandon Excalibur in favour of starting his own business. Earlier in the week, he had put all 440,000 Cortigane shares on the market, at Valerie's suggestion and, by close of business, every one of them had been snapped up, transforming his half million investment into almost seven million, and all in the space of less than a month. He could live in luxury for the rest of his life! Greg had deliberately kept the news from Missy. Now that their relationship had advanced to a much more satisfactory level, at least for him, there were things his little Missy no longer needed to know. Was it a week ago already? Missy had signed the paperwork without demur, even after Greg had explained to her the consequences. Every joint asset now belonged to Greg alone, a far more suitable arrangement.

Greg had at last worked out where Valerie's information came from. His daughter didn't say as much, not exactly, but she did reassure him that he was not exposed to charges of insider trading. Maybe the podgy crip wasn't such a bad bloke after all! Ten million dollars, near enough, can buy a lot of goodwill!

Thank goodness Molly took so much trouble with her appearance these days. The complimentary elegance and discomfort of her exquisitely feminine outfits worked wonders on the *Little Guy*, thoroughly rejuvenating him no matter how heavily he had expended himself. The revitalisation was no doubt helped along by Molly's addiction to corporal punishment. The very morning after her surprise name change, she had come to him sheepishly, a thick, ominous, bamboo cane in her hands, and deferentially pleaded with him to thrash some sense into her. Greg was certainly taken aback by the bizarre entreaty, but stranger things were happening all around him, so he recovered his equanimity pretty quickly. Indeed, while he told Molly to pull her knickers down and bend over, he strode to the door and locked it. It turned out there were no knickers, just a beautifully presented, bare bottom, displayed in a frame of frothy, elasticised, satin suspenders, and bisected by the incredibly tight Martingale straps securing her waspish, breath-taking, crimson brocade corset. A cleverly concealed zipper ran the length of the crimson hobble skirt, and Molly had expertly unfastened it, flipping the swishy folds aside.

Greg made up what he lacked in skill with enthusiasm, wailing away until Molly's bottom, and her thighs and hips, were alive with dark, angry welts, and his arm, unaccustomed to this sort of exercise, was exhausted. Molly made a valiant effort to keep her moans and screams below the threshold which might attract attention from their colleagues. Greg didn't care. He was a Vice-President, and he was on top of the world! What impressed him more than anything was Molly's ability to endure the agonising discipline without once attempting to protect herself, or evade the deadly blows. She did squirm a little, but by-and-large kept her silk-stocked legs squeezed together, balancing precariously on her tiny, and six-inch heeled stilettos. Her interleaved fingers were firmly clasped behind her head, presumably to keep them from interfering with her chastisement. Greg was genuinely touched by her unexpected gratitude. Without unclasping her hands from the nape of her neck, she knelt seductively before him and nuzzled into his groin, her furtive exploration firing up the *Little Guy*. Her teeth gripped

the zip, and gently tugged the fly open. A long imagined fantasy sprang to mind. Greg nodded in the direction of his battleship-sized desk. Molly took the hint immediately, waddling over and scrunching herself into the knee-hole. Greg dropped his pants where he stood, stepped out of them and plonked his bum on the edge of his plush office chair. The smooth castors propelled him forward, and his aim was spot on. The *Little Guy*, screaming impatience, slid sublimely into the warm, wet, welcoming cavity and once inside, did what he did best, responding to the passionate slurping and teasing with a torrential discharge which poor Molly had terrible trouble swallowing. Her valiant efforts kept most the thick fluid from staining the carpet. Her meticulous attention after the event ensured the limp *Little Guy* was squeaky clean. Greg was tickled pink to watch the unselfconscious girl bury her face in the carpet, and lap up the spilled milk. A beaming Molly scrambled out of the cubby-hole, tidied up and scurried off to bring her boss a freshly brewed coffee. Alone, Greg took a few practice swings, and then put the cane in a closet. There wasn't anything at the gym that could compete!

That satisfactory episode, for both of them apparently, led to daily encores. Greg soon mastered the arcane art of objective caning, hardly surprising considering the amount of practice he got. Nor was Molly's the only bottom he thrashed. Missy's delectable rump was a prime candidate for more of the same, providing him with the opportunity to develop a wide repertoire of flogging skills. He did draw the line when his daughter suggested he might give her some of the same treatment he had meted out to her mother, and he awkwardly laughed off the cheeky petulance his refusal brought on. Looking on the bright side, Greg had totally reversed his position on Valerie's marriage. The sooner she was off his hands, the better! She was Archie's problem now, the poor bastard!

Greg didn't say a word when he walked into his office. Molly was in her usual position beside his desk, bent at right angles, her naked, deliciously welted bottom beautifully presented for his convenience. That he wasn't expected in today hadn't deflected Molly from her duty, just in case. Greg idly wondered how long Molly would have waited for him. All day, of course, as he later found out! Greg was convinced of the therapeutic value of his daily ritual. Dispensing a thorough thrashing every morning, turning a soft, plump, helpless bottom into a bruised and battered trophy, perked him up to no end, and primed him perfectly for whatever the day might bring. Far from attracting opprobrium, the suspicious goings-on behind his closed office door seemed to have had a completely beneficial effect on the female workforce. Not only was their productivity up by more than 100%, the whole atmosphere had changed to one of cordiality, consensus and cooperation. The only conclusion Greg could draw from the amazing evidence before his eyes was that the more trouble a girl took with her appearance, the more feminine her wardrobe, the smaller her waist, the tighter her skirt and the higher her stiletto heels, then the more agreeable, conscientious, hard-working and pliable she became. And what was wrong with that! Certainly his male colleagues appreciated the reversion to older values, even if they, like Greg, had no real idea of the cause.

Molly had matured as well. She almost never made any noise now, other than a faint, erotic moan, and usually managed to keep her insatiable haunches wriggling provocatively throughout the caning session. A week went by before it dawned on Greg that the occasional, fierce tremors wracking her gorgeous body were actually secret orgasms. When questioned about it, she penitently admitted her guilt, and hoped Mr.

Harper wasn't offended. Of course he wasn't! But he had no intention of revealing his real thoughts. On the contrary, Molly's instructions were simple. She was absolutely forbidden to have an orgasm without his permission, nor was she to ever dream of asking for one. The proscription, Greg concluded, was in effect until such time as he chose to withdraw it. Despair writ large on her face, Molly unconditionally accepted his authority.

Just as he hoped, and despite a valiant effort at self-control, her infamous, independent pussy took matters into its own hands and disobediently exulted in a magnificent orgasm, the very next morning. To her credit, Molly didn't try to conceal her crime, bubbling an abject apology while jiggling her flaming bottom to the tune of Greg's searing attack. Greg's response was predictable, a particularly severe thrashing, and when that renewed assault brought on a second orgasm, he was exactly where he wanted to be. Molly grovelled at his feet, slobbering over his shoes and plaintively begging for forgiveness. Greg had nothing to say for the moment. A nudge sent the contrite girl to her place beneath his desk, and he took his usual seat to receive the erotic homage he had come to expect as his due.

Greg had put the question to Valerie the previous afternoon, over the phone, as diplomatically as he knew how. What he wanted to find out was the location, and the services offered, of the institute, or whatever, that had done such a fine job on Missy. Valerie was more than helpful, and Greg had quite a job closing the conversation. He refused to satisfy her curiosity. There are some things you really don't want to discuss with your daughter. Greg called the Clinic immediately, asking for Beverley Petersen, and was pleased to be connected so quickly. He identified himself, was relieved by the instant recognition, and then saved the embarrassment of trying to explain his requirements by her friendly invitation to pop by the premises on his way home. Perfect, he told her, promising to be there by seven at the latest. He didn't want to put her to too much trouble. It was much easier than he anticipated. The range of products, and services, was truly extraordinary. Furthermore, a genial Beverley was delighted to schedule an impromptu appointment for the following morning, just as Greg requested. If only all health care professionals were so courteous and accommodating!

Greg waited until the *Little Guy* was exhausted, and Molly had repaired her stunning wardrobe, before handing her an embossed business card. She had no idea what it meant, and nor did Greg do anything to enlighten her. He instructed her to wait on the curb outside the front entrance for a vehicle bearing the Oracle logo, which would take her to the institution where she would learn to control her libido. Before she could ask questions about the length of her stay, or the details of her treatment, he added the procedure was quick and simple, and she would be returned to the office by close of business. Molly looked like she wanted to say something, thought better of it, and excused herself with a genuine and respectful *thank-you, sir*. A few moments later, Greg followed her out the door. She was already gone, having no doubt taken the instructions literally.

As good as their word, Molly was returned late that afternoon with a strange, far-away look in her eyes. Other than her distant expression, there was nothing in her appearance to suggest that anything had happened at all. Maybe not quite nothing. Her teetering, hobbled stride was more pronounced and there was a definite improvement in the way she thrust her luscious, battle-scared buttocks out behind her. Beverley, his liaison at Oracle, called soon after, confirming that all had gone as planned, that Molly had been completely cooperative and that their surprisingly modest fee would be debited

in one week's time, dependent upon his satisfaction. He could hardly complain about that! She confirmed that Molly had given him a small package, and informed him that all he need do was open it, depress the single button and leave it in a convenient drawer. The battery would need replacing every six years or so.

Greg resisted the *Little Guy's* impatience to view the Clinic's handiwork. He behaved as though nothing was out of the ordinary, or tried to. Molly quickly reverted to her usual, delightful self, if anything treating her revered patron with heightened courtesy and respect. As was her custom, she waited for Greg to leave before giving his spacious office a thorough cleaning, just as she arrived on the dot of 6 am, the earliest admittance was allowed, to make sure his suite was still immaculate, and that anything he might want for the day was thoughtfully on hand. On his way home, he did imagine what Molly would be going through. The chastity system he had chosen was ideal for her needs. Well, ideal for Greg's needs, but wasn't that the same thing! Of course, as soon as he walked in the door, to find Missy slaving away in her marvellously outrageous bondage costume, he quite forgot about Molly! Not until he was in bed, drowsy, the *Little Guy* out for the count, did he reflect on Molly's predicament and wonder whether she would be able to sleep.

A mobile crew from the Oracle Clinic had entered Molly's small apartment while she was busy being treated, and installed a tiny, secret monitor which would direct affairs as Greg had specified. There was no need for Molly to be informed of this intrusion, and as the skilled team would leave no trace of their activity, she would be none the wiser. Greg imagined Molly arriving home, pattering around for fifteen minutes, and then experiencing the first of the mild, electrical reminders that she had just five minutes to fill her pretty mouth with the custom chastity gag which would ensure that no-one, especially Molly, would derive any sexual pleasure from her oral cavity. Complimentary devices already filled her pussy and bum, their sophisticated design allowing normal bodily functions while absolutely prohibiting any hint of gratification. Or so read the Oracle guarantee! Of course, that prohibition was overridden whenever Molly was within twenty yards of the transmitter in Greg's office desk. Inside that perimeter, his indispensable secretary could enjoy unlimited sexual stimulation, save only that orgasmic relief would be forever just out of reach. Experiments with Missy had already verified his adolescent fantasy that his pleasure was enormously enhanced by his partner's frustration, and that as his loyalty clearly lay with the *Little Guy*, then this was the way it would be.

The next day, Greg put the Oracle equipment to the test. Molly's bruised, welted bottom greeted him with its usual enthusiasm but what really caught his eye were glimpses of the twinkling, steel chastity devices poking out of her nether orifices. Sensing his interest, Molly spread her legs wide, improving his view. Few emotions could compare with the raw intensity of absolute authority! He laid on that morning with exceptional vigour and, sure enough, unable to do anything but endure her impossible frustration, poor Molly became a wreck. The more desperate her yearning, the harder Greg flogged, the fiendish cycle escalating until Molly lost all control and collapsed, writhing and jerking demonically. A hopeless, pitiful wail reverberated around the room, and must have reached the ears of anyone nearby. Puffing ostentatiously, Greg collapsed, the smoking cane slipping from his lifeless fingers. It was quite a while before either of them recovered, and when Molly eventually scrambled underneath his desk, hungrily

searching for the *Little Guy*, Greg was certain that his secretary's unrequited arousal lent a new dimension to her passionate affections.

Molly pulled herself together, submissively resigned to her fate. Her winsome, endearing smile even suggested her gratitude for Greg's intervention was genuine. So it should be! That afternoon, Molly came to him, embarrassed and anxious. Just for a moment, Greg wondered whether he had gone too far. Without the *Little Guy* egging him on, he was an altogether milder fellow. Perhaps insisting that Molly brutally gag herself every night, and all weekend for that matter, as a part of her chastity regime, might have taken things a bit too far? He needn't have worried. Molly wasn't there to complain. Apologetically, she explained that her friends, Prue and Nancy, both clerical assistants from the engine-room, his old haunt he reminded himself, had been pleading with her for days to have their greedy bottoms introduced to him so they could share in Molly's good fortune. She went on to add that since this morning, when she'd revealed her chastity devices to them, including the awesome chastity gag which she was compelled to keep within twelve inches of her pretty mouth every second of the day, their pleas had become insistent. Fearing the stony expression on her adored patron's face bespoke his annoyance at her impudence, Molly tearfully begged his forgiveness for her temerity, and backed away. Greg halted her progress as soon as the full import of the disclosure touched the *Little Guy*. He thanked Molly for bringing the information to his attention, wondering if she had concealed her special gag where he thought she might. The only place he could think which might hide it was within her startling cleavage. Given the numerous steel spines which covered the deadly device that must have been uncomfortable!

In due course, Prue and Nancy were summoned, excitement competing with anxiety lest some youthful indiscretion spoil their one-and-only opportunity to make a good impression on the awe-inspiring Mr. Harper. Obviously schooled by Molly in appropriate behaviour, both buxom beauties stood rigidly still and straight, showing off their hour-glass, venomously corseted figures atop their stylish, six-inch stilettos, and doing their level best to exude their eagerness. One blonde and one brunette, they were definitely worthwhile additions to his harem. Wherever had all these wonderful girls been hiding? Greg caned them both, inspired by the *Little Guy's* enthusiasm for fresh fodder, alternating the blows between each enthusiastically presented bottom until he was sure of their sincerity, or as sure as two fierily striped bums could make him. He examined the pair of bald, plump, exceedingly wet pussies, reckoning himself already a connoisseur, and their engorged state was a clear indication they had been very naughty. A wide, mischievous grin showed there was still plenty of boy in him. Who ya gonna call? Oracle! Of course, he made sure the *Little Guy* had every opportunity to sample the feminine delights of their eager, if inexperienced, tongues, aware that he had all the time in the world to improve their technique.

Greg was mindful of the state of his tuxedo, so Molly was particularly careful to keep the mess away from his clothes, even if quite a lot of it ended up over her smiling face. Few sights can compare with a grinning, cum-splattered countenance! Valerie had made him promise not to keep her waiting. He didn't intend to. Aside from indulging the *Little Guy*, there were the first sales figures since his ascension to analyse, and that was relief! An incontrovertible increase, 35% it looked like, would silence his few disgruntled colleagues as nothing else could. Smug was the best word to describe his feelings. Surely a smug fellow like himself was entitled to another taste from the honey pot? So who from

his stable of delectable fillies would win the privilege? Greg decided a random choice best suited his needs on this special day. He picked up a die from his desk, rubbing it for luck. Conveniently, his office harem had grown to seven, including Molly, which made the procedure simple. No matter the roll, he would be the winner!

While waiting for Antonia, number five, to answer his summons, his mind ran through the arguments, yet again, for and against the creation of an independent consultancy. Greg knew it was unlikely he would do as well financially, but it was becoming increasingly difficult to pretend that nothing out of the ordinary was going on. Strange looks, in Greg's direction, didn't auger well for the future. After all, with seven chaste, increasingly frustrated, erotically attired girls hobbling around the office, all of them blissfully unaware of the calamitous effect they were having on every poor fellow who saw them, it was inevitable it couldn't last. Besides, there would be nothing to stop him from running his own office exactly as he wished. That would be something! For no particular reason, he decided to postpone the decision until after his Porsche was delivered. Actually, if he levelled with himself, it wasn't the decision he was postponing; it was the announcement. By the time Antonia arrived, his energy was restored, his mood ebullient, his whip hand refreshed, and the *Little Guy* heroically willing to take the plunge down her warm, welcoming, passionate throat.

Greg pulled up to his driveway a full ten minutes earlier than he was expected. The bridegroom's Roller blocked the passage so Greg parked the out-of-favour SUV in the street. Perhaps he should have more empathy for the ugly vehicle, since all the good things that had happened to him recently seemed to flow from that one incident. Rubbish! He was hardly a superstitious person.

Archie's decorative chauffeuse had turned herself into a glossy, black leather statue, mounting sentry by the side of the sleek Silver Ghost. To the best of his recollection, she hadn't moved an inch in the past three hours. He admired her dedication, as apparently did several of his neighbours, peering into his property with varying degrees of secretiveness. Greg beamed a genial smile in their direction, acknowledged their interest with a friendly wave, and sauntered up to his front door. You'd never guess an old duffer like Archie had it in him!

Full of good humour, still grinning, Greg gave his breathtakingly presented daughter a fatherly hug and kiss, choosing not to comment on the extraordinary nature, and eroticism, of her stunning bridal costume. No-one in the room, including the bride, seemed at all concerned so why should he object to what were obviously his daughter's wedding plans. In the light of his own plans, and where his life was headed, what he really should be doing was wishing Valerie the very best. It was Valerie's day, and judging by her infectious smile, it was going to be great. Arm in arm, father and daughter together, Valerie left her family home for the last time.

ARCHIE CRANE WONDERED nervously whether a chapel was the right place for this sort of wedding. Granted, it was a small chapel, and the number of assembled guests hardly a multitude. What sort of red herring was that logic? This was the second time Archie had been to the altar, and though his nerves bothered him a little, everything about this ceremony was an improvement over his first experience, especially the bride! Even the flowers were to his taste, his favourite azaleas and not those insipid blue-bells. For good luck, Archie reached behind him and patted the rubber booted leg belonging to his

kind, compassionate nurse whose constant presence, and unfailing attention to his every need, made tolerable the functional loss of his legs. He could drive the wheel-chair himself, he knew that, but much preferred the intimacy of Grace's personalised service. Never was an invalid wheeled around with more aplomb and precision, and certainly never by a more provocatively uniformed attendant.

Where had his marvellous bride-to-be found such a unique gem, and how had she known so exactly how his secret mind's eye had visualised the quintessentially perfect nurse. Guilt and searing excitement stunned his mind the moment he first saw her standing just inside the door of his fabulously renovated home. Guilt, of course, would have won out had it not been for Valerie's timely intervention. The gentle Archie would have had no choice but to try and relieve at least some of her astonishing handicaps. In the sweetest, most earnest voice, Valerie explained that Grace was here entirely of her own volition, just as his extraordinary chauffeuse was, and their decisions to voluntarily adopt the stringent uniform code were motivated solely by their desperate need to win his approval.

Grace heard every word, and being in complete agreement with them, strove heroically to communicate her loyalty and devotion using the only means available. Her wide, bright eyes glowed with sufficient intensity to convince a blind man of her sincerity. Tears of joy welled uncontrollably, and trickled down her gag-bloated cheeks, when Archie smiled awkwardly and affectionately stroked one of her bizarre, pinafore buttons. He thanked her, and everyone else in sight, for making an old man's homecoming so memorable. Valerie gave him the most tender kiss, which he savoured jealously. Her wonderful smile had its usual effect, and the subtle homage she paid to his roaring erection was to prepare him for some very special treatment.

That afternoon, Valerie took him for a tour of their matrimonial home, and introduced him to the staff she had carefully assembled to look after him. So many, he thought, but he was untroubled by the quantity given the marvellous, erotic, and most important of all, restrictive uniforms they wore with so much evident enthusiasm. Where had this bevy of gorgeous creatures sprung from? In all his life, he scarce imagined one such paragon. With Grace, his rustling, aromatic nurse, propelling his chariot, Archie and his adored fiancée took their time over the inspection. The first room on the tour was the library, Archie's favourite room, and now considerably enlarged. All his many books were there, arranged as he liked them, and Valerie was quick to point out that any one of his eight loyal, devoted maids would be thrilled to fetch a title of his choice if it happened to be out of reach, or even if it wasn't. The furnishings were perfectly suited to his old-fashioned tastes, although he did wonder about the bulky object in the middle of the room, concealed beneath a tarpaulin. Valerie anticipated the question, and in that mischievous, sultry voice she used so often on him, explained it was a wedding present, and he would have to wait until after the ceremony for its unveiling.

Indeed, upon exiting the library, there in the long corridor outside were all eight of his liveried domestics, forming a marvellous honour guard. Sumptuously costumed in the classic French tradition and deliciously handicapped in slim but sturdy restraints were two lines of goggle-eyed girls, their rosy faces unmistakably and adoringly aglow. Even the enormous, punitive gags filling their pretty mouths could not suppress their excitement. In turn they each performed a perfect curtsey as the entourage made a slow, regal procession down the hallway. Archie's guileless grin was priceless.

Archie had heard a faint, melodious, whistling a couple of times, but it wasn't until Grace wheeled him into the pristine, all-white kitchen that he discovered the source. Cook's mouth was filled with an extraordinarily huge ball-gag into the drilled centre of which was a fluted steel tube, serving as both her only breathing option and a quixotic musical instrument. The odd bulges in her flaring nostrils bespoke the presence of large plugs blocking those air passages. Obviously anticipating the arrival of the master of the house, Cook had abandoned her labours in favour of standing at rigid attention in the centre of the spacious kitchen, eager to show off her domain.

Cook was a large, olive skinned woman, still under thirty and, for all practical purposes, naked from the groin to the crown of her bald skull. Her uniform, what little there was of it, consisted in part of a pair of blindingly white, neoprene thigh-boots, complete with towering, rapier heels all of seven inches high. Cook's fleshy thighs were rigorously encased in the stiff rubber, clear evidence of how tightly the creaseless sheaths oppressed her lower limbs. A shaped corset belt, more of the gleaming, white neoprene, encircled her waist, dramatically emphasising the contrast in dimensions between her prodigious bosom and generous hips with her tiny petiole. Sure, in comparison, her waist measurement was an unremarkable twenty-two inches but then her ponderous breasts were an astounding 46HHH while her lush haunches checked in at forty-four inches. The ferociously embedded corset had taken no less than thirteen inches from cook's waistline. Her ripe, spongy buttocks quivered atop the strenuous boots, jiggling of their own accord. Her precocious labia, stunningly bald, stood out starkly in the frame of her rubber-crushed thighs.

Archie was fascinated by the substantial, stainless steel shackle guarding the entrance to her moist pussy, and the thin cable attached to it which flowed straight down through the floor via a snug hole. Even more to his liking was what had been done to her outrageously exhibitionist clit. In keeping with cook's size, her throbbing, engorged clit was fully large enough to poke its greedy head well past the safety of her fleshy, shackled labia, and this wanton display had earned the indiscrete organ a decorative, crinkly crisp, white latex ribbon, tied excruciatingly tight into a pretty bow. That theme was repeated on both long, thick, turgid nipples. Cook's arms were lost inside the full-length, crushing neoprene gloves which, like those Grace wore, transformed her small hands into smooth paddles, relieved solely by independent thumbs which at least allowed her some functionality. At the moment, these hands were held together beneath her massive breasts as she waited on tenterhooks for her employer's approval. A merciless, white neoprene collar aggressively choked her throat, bolted her bald head rigidly to her shoulders, applied punitive pressure to her jaws and collar-bones, all the while adding urgency and melody to the jolly tune she played on her bizarre gag-whistle. Archie couldn't imagine how such a huge, studded ball had ended up inside such a small mouth. He needn't bother wondering about how it could be removed. It couldn't! A hint of a smile appeared when he realised the little joke.

"So this is the galley?"

Valerie beamed. Archie thought the whistle a trifle superfluous. After all, such a comprehensively gagged cook was hardly likely to steal the food. Archie diffidently enquired whether he could have a demonstration of how the pussy cable worked. Cook responded to the polite request, and Valerie's suggestion that she brew a pot of coffee, with genuine pleasure and excitement. Away she went, her short, mincing steps

controlled by the taut cable's reluctance to accompany her. The tension against which Cook tugged was considerable, if the strain on her pussy lips was anything to go by, but the obvious discomfort did not appear to distract her. Valerie pointed out the cable's resistance increased the further Cook moved from the locus, and entirely prevented her from leaving the kitchen or the tiny water closet. Watching those enormous buttocks jiggle and squelch set Archie's heart racing. He'd have stayed there all day if Valerie hadn't suggested they move on, and let the coffee catch up to them.

A noise at the chapel door reminded Archie where he was, and that he was still stroking Grace's rubber crushed thigh. False alarm! It still wanted five minutes of noon, and brides are always late, aren't they? How strange it was that none of the guests seemed at all disturbed by the presence of his exquisitely uniformed nurse. Indeed, as he studied the smiling guests, he gradually became aware that they were fully determined to share in the wedding spirit. Sir Colin was there, flanked by a pair of identically costumed, deliciously mature women. Archie knew who they were, Amanda and Pamela, absolutely identical twins, the latter, ironically and until very recently, his second wife. Over the lunch immediately following the Board meeting which had seen Archie appointed a full director and the *de facto* CEO, Sir Colin had confided that Pamela and he had divorced. Not because he was no longer fond of her, but rather because the law would not permit him a second, or third wife. Archie wasn't sure he followed all the plot twists. After years of wishful thinking, Sir Colin had finally expressed his secret longing to possess both Jones' twins and had been amazed and delighted that his feelings were passionately reciprocated. So the divorce was necessary to keep things equitable. Sir Colin further confided, with a twinkle in his eye, that he planned to retire early in the new year, and that he would use his considerable influence to have Archie appointed his successor. With Valerie's loyal support, Archie hoped he could measure up to the challenge.

Amanda and Pamela were clearly enjoying their predicament, cuddling close to a smiling Sir Colin, who was looking much healthier nowadays. The twins rubbed their shoulders against him, and every so often twisted awkwardly towards him in the faint hope that at least one of their wantonly displayed boobs would get the privilege of making contact, any sort of contact! No wonder all four pieces of ripe fruit were candidly exposed, bursting through the profusion of midnight-blue, lacy frills garnishing their erotically cut blouses. Nor could there be any doubt as to the ownership of those lush, ponderous melons for each one of them had been beautifully and prominently tattooed, above the dark, excited nipples, with a simple heraldic emblem, unequivocally proclaiming them the property of Sir Colin Hampton. Some may have thought Sir Colin had allowed himself to be a little carried away by his predilection for body art, how else could you explain the matching tattoos etched into the twins' foreheads, and made all the more noticeable by the glaring contrast with their bald skulls. Indeed, as those guests lucky enough to observe the arrival of Sir Colin and his party had seen, there was more evidence of artistic extravagance. Knee-length, impossibly restrictive hobble-skirts, their midnight-blue sheen alive in the noon-day sun, had been erotically tailored to bare two pairs of particularly soft and juicy buttocks, primarily to establish that these sensitive areas were, too, Sir Colin's uncontested property. The heart-shaped, frilled opening made the perfect frame to showcase the tattooist's skills. Decorum had restrained Sir Colin

from exposing the remaining evidence of his ownership, his personal emblem blazed into each mons, just above the twins' bald pussies.

Sir Colin was so proud of his beautiful possessions he had ordered his chauffeur to stop the limousine a good five-hundred yards from the chapel. With a friendly remark to remind his girls how disappointed he would be if they embarrassed him, he popped the innocuous, golf-ball sized, steel sphere which depended by a delicate gold chain from each distinctive nose ring, into each willingly opened mouth. Sir Colin loved to watch the consequences, loved to watch them work on the deadly ball until they had it aligned exactly where it had to go, on top of their helpless tongues. The constant encouragement he had given the twins to act in perfect unison whenever possible had been taken to heart, and Amanda and Pamela stole a quick glance at each other before simultaneously pressing down with their palates. Sir Colin jumped even more than his lovely girls, imagining the impact of four sharp needles spearing into each tongue, and kept there by retractable barbs. There was a scarce momentary grimace before the twins forced genuine smiles to their lips, completely disguising the misery just behind them. The chauffeur was allowed to assist them to their elegantly shod feet. Sir Colin's idea of elegant began with a seven-inch heel, continued with the fact that a size eight foot required a size six shoe, and concluded with the necessity for a secure locking mechanism to make sure the gougingly buckled ankle-straps could not be tampered with.

Once outside the limousine, the twins stood up perfectly straight, the better to flaunt their remarkable, hour glass figures. At first glance, it may have appeared the poor creatures were deformed. Not so, fortunately! The absence of arms was explained by the crushing, full-length corsets oppressing them from collared neck to captured thighs, inside which their scrunched up arms had been squeezed to oblivion. Flesh-coloured, seamed silk stockings emerged from beneath the embroidered hems of the stretched hobble-skirts and, of course, there were those towering, midnight-blue, patent leather pumps. As the *piece-de resistance*, golden bells clipped to their gold-ringed nipples, and animated by the provocative bouncing of their uninhibited boobs, provided a light musical accompaniment to their eye-popping promenade. Understandably, Sir Colin was in an exceptionally good humour, the twinkle in his eye confirmed that! Indeed, even the most unconscionable profit had seldom raised his spirits so high.

Archie had arrived at the chapel just as the twins were making their grand entrance, though he saw little more than two magnificent, corset-extruded, tattooed bottoms wriggling in delightful symmetry as they ascended the shallow steps with laudable panache. He remembered shaking his head in bewilderment. What was the world coming to?

Sir Colin caught his eye, and gave him a conspiratorial wink. Archie tried to return it, aware that his rejuvenated manhood had taken more than a passing interest in Sir Colin's companions. Nor was Sir Colin the only guest to brighten the scenery. Archie had always been rather fond of the bumbling, agreeable M. Elliott Riddle, and it gladdened his heart to see the plump lad looking so pleased with himself. One of the many uncharitable rumours circulating though the Bank's corporate offices, at Elliott's expense, was the explanation for his continued bachelorhood, despite the family name and wealth. There wasn't a girl in sight with an IQ low enough! That rumour, if not the others, had been dispelled in no uncertain manner. Archie wouldn't have recognised the bizarre creature squatting at Elliott's feet as the Bank's brightest female executive, a

scrumptious, ambitious blonde, had it not been for Elliott himself confiding that fact to him at the same luncheon where he had learned of Sir Colin's changed circumstances. For reasons beyond him, all sorts of people had lately taken to sharing their confidences.

Elliott had chosen a seat so that he could park his puppy girl in the aisle where the entire assembly could share in his good fortune, whether they wanted to or not. No expense had been spared to create an uncannily accurate caricature so that what the audience saw was as close to a pampered poodle as a dehumanised girl could become. Especially effective in sustaining the illusion was the punitively oppressive, white rubber hood with its suggestively shaped snout, cute nose tip, and large, floppy ears. The puppy girl's eyesight was non-existent, with never a pretence that she had the ability to use that sense. Every inch of the creature's skin was sealed inside a creaseless, white latex film, the bare expanse relieved by the cutest tufts of fluffy puppy fur, sprouting from all the appropriate, poodle places. The extraordinary modifications made to her limbs reinforced the canine caricature. From a distance, it appeared her fore and hind limbs had been truncated at the elbow and knee respectively. Of course, it was always possible the missing extremities had been doubled up and squeezed so ferociously tight that their existence was concealed. Either way, it was impossible to imagine the puppy girl still possessed her hands or feet. No amount of compression could have erased them completely, and there wasn't the slightest bulge anywhere to hint at their presence. Indeed, the shaped pads supporting all four legs were clearly designed as substitutes, with the principal function of putting a spring in her step.

Elliott was one of the last guests to arrive so almost everyone had the opportunity to watch his pet lope stylishly down the aisle, heeling her owner, her fluffy puppy tail, fiendishly anchored inside her rectum, going nineteen to the dozen. The cute, pink colour of her polished leather body harness made a dramatic impact, almost as dramatic as the severity with which it had been applied. The gleaming, patent leather collar did far more than provide an attachment for the placid puppy girl's leash. It absolutely immobilised her neck, concealing the junction between her crushing, canine hood and the latex skin, if there was one. It guaranteed that every breath would be a life-and-death struggle, while its precisely contoured rims, festooned with a myriad of malicious steel prongs, gouged and ground their way into her collar-bones and jaw-line. Not immediately apparent, but remarkable nonetheless, was the absence of any sort of buckle or locking device. The startling, choking collar had been riveted in place, the active rivets hidden in plain sight among the many steel studs which decorated the surface. A single D-ring was mounted at the front of the pitiless collar, high up, and from which swung her pink, braided leather leash.

At least the puppy girl's collar served a practical purpose, even if it did so with considerably more vigour than necessary. The same could not be said for the matching, patent leather straps which punished and tormented her slender waist and her over-ripe boobs. The brutal corset strap had been shaped to avoid her ribcage and hip bones, the better to crush the soft flesh of her waist with abominable relish. The steel studs embellishing it, and the wicked prongs crowding its edges, matched perfectly with the patterns on her collar. The much narrower leather straps cinching the bases of her taut, bloated, latex-skinned boobs were miniature versions of the wasping corset strap. The unifying themes of colour, texture and steel inclusions were particularly well-suited by

the subtle riveting which had seen the diabolical restraints permanently welded to her helpless body.

Archie wished his eyesight was just a little better so he could make out exactly what had been done to the puppy girl's enormous nipples. It looked like stiff, pink, latex caps had been forced over the tender nubbins, isolating each nipple from its tormented tit. Piercing cap and nipple both were bright, steel rings, for the moment squashed together by a simple steel shackle which ensured the tension remained extreme. The puppy girl had wriggled into an exceptionally cute pose, sloshing her cinched, ringed and mercilessly linked tits to make them flop ahead, under her snout, and then promptly lowered her hooded head until her extended chin rested in the bizarre cleavage. Her fore-legs splayed out either side, while her hind-legs remained upright, the better to present her delicious rump to its best advantage. The puppy girl's mouth was agape, kept permanently so by an invisible, implanted steel ring-gag, while her astonishingly elongated tongue lolled lazily beyond her modified lips. Elliott was affectionately scratching the canine creature's coccyx, indeed he had been doing so since sitting down, and it was clear these ministrations were driving his pet into a sexual frenzy. Her raised haunches shook with irrepressible frustration while her fluffy puppy tail swished at the speed of light. The musky aroma wafting through the chapel was unmistakably that of a puppy girl in heat.

The increasingly frantic gyrations were distracting everybody, not that Elliott noticed. It took a discrete cough from Sir Colin to attract the lad's attention, and the hint of an admonishing frown to make him remember where he was.

Archie acknowledged Elliott's ingenuous grin with a sympathetic smile. He could hardly blame the boy. Just two minutes had elapsed since he last looked at his watch. Wouldn't it be terrible if Valerie had changed her mind? Why let such a miserable thought spoil the moment, he chided himself. Looking around the chapel, at the amazing, secret world he had never dreamed existed, and remembering Valerie's entire object demonstrations of her love and loyalty, Archie knew with heart-warming certainty the ceremony would take place. Be patient, you silly old fool!

At the back of the chapel, sitting in a pew by himself, was Professor Hartmann. The gorgeous creature standing so stiff and straight behind him had to be his wife. Archie was touched the Professor had delayed his departure until the last minute, to pay his respects to the bride and groom. The professor's flight home was scheduled for early the next morning, and Conrad had apologised with regret that they would have to leave the reception early. Pretty in pink hardly did justice to Gilda's ravishing beauty, enhanced as it was by her radiant expression. The stunning costume was brand new, and took full advantage of the positive improvements made to both Gilda's mind and body by the intensive treatment she had received. Not that anyone could tell a unique pair of contact lenses had been fitted over her eyeballs, in effect secretly blinding her. Similarly, behind her smiling lips lurked a clandestine, punitive gag, its barbed malevolence directed indiscriminately against her tongue, her cheeks and her palate. And finally, to complete the set so to speak, Gilda's ear canals were meticulously plugged. Indeed, so enthusiastic was the Professor's devoted wife with these debilitating handicaps, that not a soul in the congregation was any the wiser! Electrical warnings, directed at her monstrously dildoed pussy and bum, and supplemented with similar shocks through her clamped nipples and barb-infested tongue, ensured the perfectly helpless woman kept close to her husband's

side. Archie acknowledged the rare smile on the Professor's face with one of his own. Birds of a feather?

This time, the commotion outside the chapel entrance was the real thing. Archie held his breath. Moments later he was blinded by a vision of loveliness beyond his wildest dreams.

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