

# SUZY

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## CHAPTER 1

Susan sighed as she turned the key to open her apartment door. The sigh was partly from relief that she would be alone for an extended time, partly from resignation to being the way she was. She wished she could be... normal. Normally outgoing, normally self-confident, with a normal number of friends, going out on normal dates.

Susan knew that a doctor, if ever she could bring herself to open herself up to one so that he could form a diagnosis, would probably term her “pathologically shy.” She didn’t like the term, not because it said something was wrong with her, but because it suggested that there were other modes of existence. She couldn’t imagine them. Her shyness had survived her childhood. She’d always wanted to hide when people were around. She wasn’t ugly, or didn’t believe she was, at least. It wasn’t that she was resisting inflicting a hideous face or deformed body on the world. Her shyness was a thing in itself, not a result of something. She simply hated receiving the focused attention of even one person, let alone a crowd. She was aware of fearing that they would expect things of her she wasn’t willing or able to do. But she couldn’t recall any particular occasion in her past of disappointing parents, or friends, or teachers, or whoever stood in judgment of her. She couldn’t pinpoint *any* reason for feeling the way she did.

It was Friday. Susan had just finished her fourth week working at the library, mainly shelving books and cataloging new purchases. It was boring work, but it mostly kept her out of sight in the quiet of the stacks. People could see her, of course, but she had no reason to interact with them, and they didn’t expect her to. She was simply part of the environment of the library, like the cart stacked with books that she pushed around. She was more or less unnoticeable. She found that tolerable.

At least, most of the time. Yesterday Susan had dropped a book, which did a belly flop on the floor with a loud bang. All of the half-dozen people within view spun their heads to look. Susan froze, her face on fire, and nearly vomited. Only momentary paralysis prevented her from bolting to hide in the storage room. She realized seconds later what a huge mistake that would have been. As it was, everyone would forget the disruption she had caused within minutes -- she’d done nothing really remarkable, her rational mind knew. But if she had run, all those people -- her mind had already multiplied them into the thousands -- would remember her for days. Being remembered, being the subject of discussion among people -- that was her worst nightmare. When she was finally able to move and breathe again, she picked up the book with trembling fingers and restored it to the cart.

Even when her duties went normally, people still noticed her sometimes. Mainly the men. She sometimes caught them eyeing her speculatively, as if considering asking for her phone number and whether she was free some night this week for dinner. At twenty-one, she knew she wasn’t a child anymore. She had an adult woman’s body, with all of the standard equipment, and that annoyed her. It was as if her own body was betraying her, inviting exactly the attention she had tried for a lifetime to avoid. It had been so much easier before her breasts grew -- as soon as they’d started to be prominent, she’d started seeing all the boys in school looking at her in a way they hadn’t before. In the library, she did her best to remain inconspicuous: wearing loose-fitting blouses to make her chest less obvious, long

skirts to hide her legs, another object of male interest. She wore her hair in what she assumed was an off-putting bun, which made her look like... well, a girl who worked in a library. Her glasses -- she was nearsighted -- were as nondescript and non-feminine as she could manage. Maybe all of that helped, but there were still those looks, as if men were looking through her clothes to see the woman beneath. It made her intensely uncomfortable.

She was glad of the job, of course. She was surprised she'd been able to find *any* job that suited her, after she'd dropped out of college in her junior year when she convinced herself, at last, that she wasn't going to be able to get out of taking that public-speaking course required of all students. She'd begun looking into other colleges, intending to enroll in one that didn't have that requirement. But then the library job had opened up. She was starting to grow comfortable in it. A little.

Susan opened her apartment door and closed it behind her, then leaned back against it, her eyes closed. The relief that had been building flooded her now. Alone! Out of view!

The library was open six days a week, but none of the staff worked all six days, not even the head librarian. Most of the staff had a midweek day off, or Monday, but Susan had happened to be assigned Mondays through Fridays. She was very glad of that, having two consecutive days each week to let the tensions of her existence settle down. She'd done her grocery shopping earlier in the week, and now had no reason why she would have to leave the apartment, no reason to be seen by anyone, until Monday. She would do some relaxing reading, watch television, make sandwiches and cook frozen dinners. And feel content in her solitude.

She could hear some tapping, clicking, thumping sounds from nearby apartments, the low murmurs of voices, opening and closing of doors. That was normal. Just people living their lives and not even thinking about Susan hidden away behind the opaque walls of their building. The sounds were all subdued -- that was almost their defining property.

Susan allowed herself a smile at the thought of being one of the tenants. She hadn't realized, when she had first gone to the office for a rental application, that the building was strictly for couples fifty-five and older. She'd apologized to the sweet lady who managed the building, and started to leave. Surprisingly, the woman, Nellie, had asked Susan to wait, and then had asked just one question: "Are you quiet?"

Susan had blinked and nodded solemnly. No one, she was sure, was quieter than herself.

Nellie had burst into a grin. "I could tell that about you. That's really what our tenants like about the place. No big noises, no parties, no drama... you don't throw parties, do you?" Just wanting to make sure.

Susan had nearly laughed at the idea that she might host a party, but had simply shaken her head, with a sincere look on her face.

Nellie had smiled conspiratorially. "Okay, look. We've got three vacancies right now. One bedroom, all the apartments are one bedroom. The owner has been getting on me a little about getting them rented,

as if I could just go out on the street and drag people in to rent apartments. I can't imagine any of the tenants will mind you being here, you being quiet as a mouse the way you are." Susan couldn't help smiling, and Nellie pulled an application out of a drawer, saying, "First and last month rent in advance, plus one hundred dollar cleaning deposit. Will that work for you?"

Susan had smiled again, said "Thank you" in a tiny voice, and begun filling out the application.

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It was so nice having her own place! Susan's mother had wanted her to live at home, but Mom was always trying to change her -- bring her "out of that shell," as she put it. Mom kept trying to arrange blind dates, which Susan always declined, kept trying to get Susan to go out and do something sociable, join a local theater group, do *anything*. It seemed that Mom approved of the idea of Susan renting the apartment, even though it was fifty miles from home, as soon as Susan suggested that it represented going out on her own, doing something grown-up. It was, to Mom, a first step towards what she wanted for Susan. She'd even talked Dad into fronting the rent money for a few months, with the understanding that Susan would take over after that, now that she had a job.

Susan finished changing out of her work clothes into a more comfortable t-shirt and jeans, and hesitated in front of her dresser, wanting to open that bottom drawer and telling herself she shouldn't. She was ashamed she had broken down and bought the stuff. But now she felt the familiar tingling between her legs, and a growing compulsion to look at the drawer's contents once again. She bent down and pulled it open, and her breath caught in her throat, her eyes widened, and her hand snuck down into her crotch without her even realizing it.

The fantasy of bondage had fascinated Susan for as long as she could remember. She loved imagining herself tied up and helpless. She didn't understand it. Her most profound wish in life was to escape all notice, to be able to get away and hide from all eyes that could see her. So why would she want to be immobilized, unable to remove herself from any amount of unwanted attention?

She knew her attraction to bondage was sexual in nature. She understood about fetishes, and knew the futility of trying to explain them. Certainly her own made no sense to her. Yet picturing herself hopelessly bound had, long ago, led to her first orgasm, before she even knew what an orgasm was.

Now she had the necessary equipment for making her fantasy come to life. She hadn't acted on it, but just possessing the *means* of really doing it excited her more than ever. Her jaw, unattended, fell slack as she looked now at the chains, the ropes, the cuffs, the padlocks.

She had ordered the bondage gear from a website she'd stumbled upon accidentally one day. Well, she admitted to herself, not *totally* accidentally. She'd Googled "bondage," hoping to find an article that would explain her obsession to her, and had found a site that sold bondage gear. She hadn't even known there were businesses like that. She had come back to the site again and again for days, staring disbelievingly at the equipment available to her at the click of a mouse. She had started three times to fill the site's shopping cart with items she really wished she could see and touch, finally did it, then spent

a week trying to persuade herself to buy the things in her cart. She had her own bank account with debit card, so there was no problem ordering, other than the psychological hurdle. Finally, looking over her order for the umpteenth time, not able to breathe, she clicked on "Buy" and typed in her card information. After that she'd checked three times to make sure her bank account had her new address, so that the monthly statement would come to her and her parents wouldn't see it.

The items had arrived on Tuesday of this week. Quickly, her fingers trembling, she'd unpacked the shipping box, dumped the things in the drawer, and torn up the address label on the box so no one could sift through her trash and find out she'd ordered things from That Place.

Now, against her own determination not to do it, not to torment herself with the sight of things she desperately wanted to use but never would, she looked in the drawer nightly, feeling the heat of excitement all through her body as she focused now on a chain, now on a padlock, now a rope, pictured the ways they might restrict her movements, and minutes later always slammed the drawer closed again. It was impossible, she knew, that she could ever actually make use of any of these things. It was far too dangerous. What if she locked herself into something she really couldn't get out of? She might even die, either from starvation as she lay in her apartment, unable to move, or else die, literally die, of embarrassment, the rush of blood to her face bursting blood vessels all around, from being found by someone that way. Why had she bought this stuff? She couldn't afford to be wasting money like that.

Furious with herself, she went out to the living room to turn on the television. She needed to calm down before she made herself dinner. She couldn't eat right now anyway, not with her stomach in such tight knots.

\* \* \* \* \*

As she put the frozen dinner in the microwave at last, after thirty minutes of watching entertainment news, vicariously living celebrity lives she knew she could never have, her eyes caught sight of the liter bottle tucked into a corner of the kitchen counter. She growled quietly in renewed anger. *Another* useless purchase, money thrown away. She had never taken an alcoholic drink in her life. She knew all the things it could do to people. She'd been terrified walking into the state-owned liquor store, sure that everyone was looking at her with scorn for buying such a shameful product, though they were all there to do the same thing. But she had persevered, fumbling to show her driver's license to verify her age for the clerk, who looked at her the same way her father always did when she was doing something wrong, paying with, again, her debit card -- she should cut the thing up, she really should -- and walking out into the wider world, trying to look as if she didn't have a bottle of tequila in a paper bag, though surely everyone would know why she'd been in the store. She had wanted to buy the booze to celebrate living on her own and being employed, but there, on the counter, it had sat untouched for nearly a month. She'd chosen tequila because she'd heard her father swear once to a friend that you didn't get hangovers from drinking tequila. Well, Susan had learned that you definitely didn't get hangovers from not drinking it.

Susan closed her eyes and sighed. If I drink some, she pointed out to herself, at least then the money wasn't *all* wasted. It won't kill me, certainly not if I just sip a little of it. Not like the bondage gear with its deadly danger.

She unscrewed the bottle and poured a small splash of the clear liquid into a glass tumbler, such a small amount in such a large glass that it almost looked like the amount of water she usually poured into the sink when she got thirsty at night and ran more from the faucet than she needed.

She took a small sip, swallowing as quickly as she could. Instantly she began coughing, her eyes watering. Why in the world would anyone want to drink this?? she demanded of the world.

Wait, she thought, I'm doing it wrong. Stupid, stupid. People don't drink it straight out of the bottle. They *mix* it with something, something tastier, something that cuts down the effect so it doesn't hit you so hard. And no wonder.

She opened the fridge, and pulled out a bottle of carbonated orange soda she'd been going to drink with dinner anyway. She poured it into the glass to mix with the tequila. Readying herself for another head blast like the earlier one, she sipped.

Now I'm just tasting orange soda, she told herself, and reminded herself there hadn't been much tequila left in the glass. Wanting to make it a fair test, she added a little more tequila to replace the mix she'd just sampled. She sipped again.

Her eyes rose in surprise. That's not really too bad, she thought, and at least it's not slamming my head against the wall. It tastes... darker, somehow, than the soda. Less sweet, but in a nice way.

The microwave dinged. She pulled out her dinner with an oven mitt and transferred it to the table, took another sip of her drink, then poured some more tequila and more soda into the glass. She took a little longer drink.

As she sat down to her dinner, she realized she was feeling calm, content, satisfied, in a way she rarely did even when she was alone. She retrieved the bottle and added some more tequila to the glass. Without quite so much soda.

She giggled suddenly, not knowing why. This is nice, she decided. She made up her mind to watch a comedy on the DVD player after she'd cleaned up from dinner. She was sure she would appreciate it more than usual. She giggled again, in anticipation, and took another drink.

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Susan's consciousness returned suddenly, like the flicking on of a light. The first thing she was aware of was shivering. It was cold, too cold. But it was only an instant later that the pounding in her head became more important than the cold. That, along with an intense thirst, as if her mouth was stuffed with worn wool socks. She remembered her thoughts of a hangover. I've got to tell Daddy he was

wrong, she thought. This fits everything I've read about hangovers. Except the shivering, I hadn't heard about that. Susan reached down to pull the blanket over her. Or tried to.

Full realization of where she was slammed into her all at once, but not yet the memory of how it had come about.

She wasn't in her bed. She wasn't even in her apartment. She was lying on her side on the cold, hard, uneven ground, outdoors, in the dead of night. She probably wouldn't have been especially cold if she were dressed for it, perhaps with a light jacket. But it wasn't the sort of weather to be out in completely naked. As she was.

Naked!! Outside!! Where anyone can see me!! Susan felt her face, her entire body burning with complete mortification. No one can see! she screamed silently. They *must* not see me this way!

Susan had those dreams sometimes, the ones everyone had, of being out in public and suddenly realizing she'd forgotten to dress. The feeling that came with those dreams was a detached, muted sort of shame, somehow less intense than she knew it would be in real life. She always, at some level, knew it was a dream, that it wasn't really happening.

In the same way, she knew with certainty that this, here, now, was *not* a dream. The headache, the thirst, the cold all had that quality that dreams never quite seem to reach. This was happening.

She tried desperately to get up, and it was then that a second layer of confusion peeled away, and she understood why she was having so much trouble. She was bound up in chains! Someone must have broken in! she thought. I've been kidnapped...

Memory, then, the wispy, small voice of memory, returned in bits and pieces, and she knew she had done this to herself. There were just flashes of it, like still pictures illuminated for an instant, slowly, so slowly coming clearer as she lay there, still shivering, trying to make out any useful details in the darkness. Her breath came faster, still faster, as the terror of what she had done to herself built. She began jerking randomly, now making scared little cries, her voice muffled by the gag in her mouth -- the ball gag she had bought, not the dirty laundry it tasted like to her dry tongue. She knew full panic was approaching, and she tried to fight against it.

A crucial memory returned, now, and she stopped moving to consider it. There was a way out of this! She had left herself a means of escape. Somehow the fact that she had done that helped the panic recede, brought her some measure of self-control that had almost been lost completely.

She remembered exactly where she was, now. The other side of the street from her apartment building was an undeveloped acreage of woods, part of the original forest through which the road at the edge of town had been built. The road had sporadic clearings for dwellings, mostly along its south side, such as the apartment building. She was, if she remembered correctly, about a hundred yards from the street. The trees were heavy in this spot, with thick undergrowth filling the spaces between. She was safe from detection, for the moment, even if it had been daylight. Bending her head back, she could see a very dim

glow from the direction behind her. That had to be where the street and her building were. Only a small amount of the light made it this far through the trees.

She took stock, each detail reminding her of how she had come to be in the straits she was in.

She felt around her wrists, behind her back, with her fingers. Yes, these are my wrist cuffs, she told herself. Brushed steel, two inches across, an eighth inch thick, two semicircles joined by a hinge and now closed around her wrists, the hasp pushing up through a hole in the metal, so that a padlock could secure each one, impossible to remove without the padlock key. The cuffs were really oval in cross section, not circular, to fit more snugly around the wrist. Susan traced the padlocks with her fingertips, finding them to be locked, as she remembered they were. As she remembered doing. The wrist cuffs were locked to each other by their padlocks, so that she couldn't separate her hands.

She could feel, even without using her fingers, the tight chain around her waist. It was locked in front of her stomach, she knew, with another padlock. To that padlock, a second chain was attached. This one was drawn downward, tightly through her crotch, and locked behind her back to both wrist cuffs.

With an effort, she bent her knees more than they already were, bringing her feet closer to her hands, and felt the ankle cuffs with her fingers. The same design as the wrist cuffs, except that they did have a circular cross section. They hugged her ankles as snugly as the wrist cuffs did her wrists. She verified that, as she remembered, the ankle cuffs were joined to each other by their padlocks as well.

Taking several minutes, she tugged on every cuff, one after another, to see whether she might possibly free a hand or a foot. It wasn't possible. They were very well-designed to make it impossible.

The scratching of the rough bark of the tree trunk against the backs of her calf muscles and thighs -- Susan's legs were bent around it -- was a little irritating.

There was one more chain in use, one of the longer ones. Susan couldn't trace all of it with her fingers, but she knew how it had been arranged. It began from between her ankle cuffs, secured there by another padlock. From there it wound around the tree trunk once, then ran to her wrist cuffs, circled the locks between them, and went back to her ankles, to be held there by that same padlock. There was no slack in the chain, and it kept Susan's ankles no more than half a dozen inches from her hands.

She was hogtied, her favorite of all bondage positions in her fantasies. With her body encircling a tree.

But there was, as she had reminded herself, a way out. Unlike the rest of the padlocks, which opened with keys, the padlock that secured that final chain was a combination lock. The lock was in reach of Susan's fingers, and she knew the combination.

An extra chill beyond the shivering ran through Susan as she thought of the future. She had never wanted anything more in her life than to be safe now in her apartment, lying snug in her bed, instead of here. The chill came from her realization of what she would have to go through before she could return to that safety. She moaned aloud.

Once she had opened the combo lock and freed herself from the tree and hogtie, she would need to make her way back to the street, then emerge from the protection of the trees and cross the street to her building. She would have to do it still bound, hopping because her feet were stuck together, always in danger of falling because she couldn't use her arms, bound behind her, for balance. She didn't have the keys here that went with any of those padlocks securing her wrist cuffs and ankle cuffs together. They were still in the drawer in Susan's bedroom.

And she would have to do it naked. It had always been hard, so hard, for her to have people watch her, to have people aware of her and thinking about her. Though always fully clothed, she had always tried to cloth herself still more, to shrink into herself and be invisible. It was unimaginable how much more petrifying it was going to be to risk revealing her entire body, the parts she had never remotely considered showing to anyone -- even her navel was extremely private to her, but how much more so her breasts, her nipples, that dark patch of pubic hair in front of her crotch... and beyond all else, those soft folds of skin between her legs. People would *see* all of those things.

Only the darkness would save her. It was nighttime. Everyone was asleep, the street deserted, no one watching from sidewalk or windows. She *must* get to safety before daylight came.

But first, before that ordeal, she had to release herself from her hogtie, and from the immovable tree.

She felt between her ankles with her fingers. There it was, that all-important padlock, the one that had to be opened before anything else could happen. She turned the dial with her fingers, feeling it spin freely.

She twisted her body, managing to raise herself on her elbow, to bring the combo lock into view. There was just enough very dim light from the distant streetlamps filtering through the trees that she could just make out the lock, and the dark circle of its dial. But as the minutes went by and she wished so hard for her eyes to adjust still more to the darkness, she couldn't begin to make out any of the white-on-black markings around the dial. And without that, without the ability to stop the dial at very precise places marked by the numbers, she couldn't possibly open it.

No, she thought, no! I *have* to do it in the darkness! If I wait until daylight, then I don't have any hope of getting across the street, getting into my building, getting up to my apartment -- on the third floor! -- without being seen! People will be awake, they'll be moving around, looking out the windows, driving by in their cars... I have to get out of this *now!*

\* \* \* \* \*

Susan was aware -- had been aware from the moment of awakening here -- of an undercurrent, a buzz of sexual electricity, surging through her body underneath every other sensation, underneath the fear of the future, underneath the scratching of the tree and the shivering from the cold, underneath all of her rational thoughts about the situation she was in, underneath her struggles, now mostly completed, to remember what had happened. She knew the undercurrent for what it was. She knew what the idea of bondage had always done to her, and here it was, real for the first time, not just theoretical, not

imagined. It was responsible for the extra coolness between her legs, slippery with the secretions of arousal, it was responsible for the swelling and extra sensitivity of her vaginal lips, it was responsible for the hardness of her nipples, even beyond the cold, so that the smallest movement of air flowing past them seemed to lick and caress them. And it added to her fear: she saw the possibility of it interfering with what she must, *must* do, which was to get herself home, safe, undetected, without having made a memorable spectacle of herself. Besides the cold, besides her entrapment, besides the terrifyingly complete exposure of her body, it was one more thing to grapple with.

\* \* \* \* \*

Susan felt the dial of the padlock with the very tips of her fingers, hoping against hope that she could feel the markings, feel the numbers. She could sense, barely, the impressions of the markings, but her fingers had nothing like the sensitivity that would have been required to read the numbers.

She felt the panic starting to set in again, as she began rocking desperately, jerking her hands and feet against the chains holding them. Let me out! Let me out!!

She remembered having done this to herself, trapping herself here. It was such a different self that had done this -- drunk for the first time in her life, giggling as she made preparations and slid the locks closed, throwing away a lifetime of caution, for what? For a trauma that would envelop her for the rest of her life? She remembered how happy, how excited, that other self had been. Excited by...

Suddenly the panic transformed itself. That underlying sexual current rose to the surface. All of the arousal, the intense awareness of every part of her body, that she had always experienced during her fantasies of bondage, manifested in a rush, multiplied a thousandfold because now she was really *in* it! She really was bound in chains! Her rocking became more rhythmic, her moans became breathy sighs, and she began using her hands to pull on the chain through her crotch. The excitement rose still higher, centered on her private place, tucked away between her legs, an intense tingling that spread like a flash flood through her entire body. She grunted in time with each pull on the chain... and felt her body explode, there, there, there!!! Time moved so slowly! She was aware of every nerve ending, every dimension and feature of sexual release, hers to examine, cherish, and embrace for as long as she wanted. Wanted. She regretted that she had ever wanted anything, because anything she had ever wished for was trivial compared with this.

The waves receded very slowly, leaving her on the beach, spent. Breathing. Hard.

She had had orgasms before. She was sure they had really qualified as orgasms, on a par with those that anyone else had ever experienced. But they had been nothing like this. She had never had every fiber of her being crying out, shouting, screaming YES!! YES!! before. She had never imagined that any moment of her life could feel as overpoweringly wonderful as that one had.

She wasn't shivering anymore, she realized. She could feel a layer of sweat coating her body. But the pounding headache was back, and the dryness in her mouth, making her desperate for water she had no way to get. And the shivering, she knew, would return.

She plunged back towards the pit of fear as the realization of the danger she faced came floating back. Being discovered naked and bound was starting to seem a near certainty. The afterglow of her sexual explosion muted the fear, but couldn't erase it.

She remembered having thought, in her drunken daze, how funny it was! She could recall, now, emerging from her building carrying two trash bags, one full of bondage gear, one empty. As soon as she'd crossed the street and gone into the trees, out of view, in the fading light of sunset, she'd taken off all her clothes and stuffed them into the empty bag. That bag, she remembered, was now wedged securely up in the crotch of a tree, above the level of her head. She remembered putting it there, giggling and reeling dizzily, exactly so that once she freed herself, she wouldn't have any way to reach it, any way to dress herself, even to the extent of draping her shirt over her upper body, until after she got back to her apartment -- she'd have to return to retrieve the clothes later. She remembered the thrill of every part of her body being exposed, visible, and how she'd giggled again over that, while she stumbled farther into the forest. She remembered the feeling of playing a huge, hilarious practical joke on herself.

It really, Susan thought again, was as though another person had done this.

Suddenly she realized who it was.

It was Suzy.

Susan had, on rare occasions in her life, been addressed as Suzy. She had never corrected the person doing it -- correcting would be the very essence of assertiveness, alien in every way to Susan -- but inwardly she had always rejected the name. It wasn't because she didn't like it. The name "Suzy" suggested someone casual, outgoing, fun. Susan rejected the name "Suzy" because she felt she didn't deserve it. She was nothing like a Suzy.

Tonight Suzy had come into Susan's life, released by a bottle of tequila. Susan and Suzy shared memories, shared a body, but Suzy was a new occupant, at least new to Susan's awareness.

It was Suzy who had played this joke.

The ball gag, Susan realized, was part of the joke. The big gag wedged into her mouth, preventing Susan from saying anything intelligible even though she would never, ever have been able to bring herself to call out for help anyway. The gag could be removed, but not yet. It was designed to be secured by a buckle, but Suzy had tied it closed with a shoestring instead, using a shoelace knot easily untied. To untie it, Susan just had to move a few feet away from where she lay. A second shoestring was tied to one end of the first, and ran to the side and upward to another tree branch. Moving away would pull the string taut and untie the knot. But until Susan opened the combo lock, she couldn't move that far.

Susan tried to decide whether she was overlooking anything important, now that so much of her memory had returned, but all she could think about right now was water. She was SO thirsty. She wished she'd found a type of alcohol that really didn't cause hangovers, rather than trusting her father's misinformation on the subject. Then she replaced that with a wish that she'd never decided to try

alcohol at all. It had brought out Suzy, and had led Susan to... Susan's blood ran cold as she came back again to what might happen to her before she could get back to safety.

As her body cooled from her earlier exertions, she began shivering again.

She twisted once more to bring the padlock dial into view, squinting hard. It was no use. She moaned again, remembering the horrible Catch-22 she was in: She couldn't escape without light, but as soon as there was light, there would be too many witnesses outside the forest for her to leave it.

And now she realized she needed to urinate. I'll have to hold it, she thought miserably, until I get home. I'm not going to just pee in the woods like a wild animal.

Suddenly Susan began crying. It came on her unexpectedly, the crush of fear and pending humiliation passing beyond the level she could bear. She realized in seconds that she had to stop. With the ball gag in place she could only breathe through her nose, and her crying was starting to block her nose with snot. She sniffled desperately to clear it.

There were a lot of pebbles, like small marbles, underneath her. She'd had too many other concerns before to focus on them, but they were causing growing discomfort. She wriggled awkwardly, trying to lift parts of herself so she could brush the offending rocks aside.

The wriggling brought it back to her with sudden, intense clarity: she was in bondage. In chains. So often in her life her mind had gone to that zone of excitement. Now it was as intensely arousing as she'd ever imagined.

She pulled the chain tight through her tender vaginal lips, again and again, rubbing, making her conscious of them as never before. Her muscles tensed in rhythm, in sequence, in ripples. She grunted, in gradually increasing throatiness and breathlessness, until everything spilled over into a second convulsive, all-consuming orgasm.

She almost fainted, trying desperately to recover her breath, lying still, feeling her sweat turn the soil to mud underneath her.

And then nearly fainted again, as the thought ran through her mind: What if someone heard me just now?? What if they come out looking to see what the noise is about, flashlights waving from side to side as they search for the source? I have to be quiet! They can't find me like this! Please, no, they CANNOT find me!

She held her breath, listening tensely for any sound that might signal imminent discovery, any sound suggesting she was about to be surrounded by amazed faces staring at her imprisoned, naked body, her bare breasts, her buttocks, wondering about the sweat covering her on such a cool night, laughing at the mud coating one side of her...

No, please, no, please, no, please... She could only repeat it to herself, again and again.

After several minutes of uninterrupted chirping of crickets and sighing of leaves, and nothing else, she convinced herself that she was safe from discovery. For now. But in the morning...

She must not still be here in the morning!

Maybe, she thought, with the first spark of hope she had been able to muster since finding herself here, maybe I can open the padlock at the very first light of dawn, and get across the street and into the building before people awaken.

Her heart fell again as she examined the possibility. That first bit of light would come at around six o'clock. A lot of people had to start their day even before that, their alarms set for five-thirty or so. If I'm not out of here and into the building before the very first hint of coming daylight, she told herself, I'm sunk.

She felt at the padlock again, this time with her fingernail, letting it tick at the grooves in the dial, willing herself to detect a pattern that told her where the numbers were.

After a few minutes she bounced on the ground in frustration, making an angry growl in the back of her throat despite her resolve to stop making any noise at all. She froze and listened once more for any sounds that said someone might be coming. At last she lay back on the ground with a soft, helpless whimper.

I just need to get out of this as soon as I can, she told herself, and maybe it will be early enough. I can at least get up closer to the street and see what's happening. Maybe I'll be able to see there's nobody around, even after it gets light.

When will that be? She realized she had no clue what time it was right now. She couldn't know how long she had slept in her drunken stupor. It might be only minutes from dawn, or dawn could still be three or four hours away.

Two record-shattering orgasms had drained Susan of energy. She thought she might be able to sleep and make the time pass more quickly. But she didn't want to miss the first light.

I should at least try to relax, she decided. I have a lot to do when the light comes. I need to be alert.

She lay quietly, letting her eyes close. I don't really think I could sleep, she told herself. Even after her orgasms, there remained the background hum of sexual excitement which, it seemed, could rise again to a fever pitch at any moment...

## CHAPTER 2

Susan awoke, shivering intensely again. The cold felt almost like a cruel physical assault, instantly hurling her into alertness with a pounding heart and a need to fight back. She started to wriggle violently, her only way of warming her body.

She felt the forces building up again, sending her towards another orgasm, until she realized suddenly: It's getting light!

There were still no colors in the world, only gray, darker gray, and black. But she could see the outlines of things.

She began hearing the chirping of birds. She didn't know whether the world around her apartment building was coming to life as the day began. But the forest certainly was.

Her heart started racing. I've only got a few minutes at the most! she thought. Any longer and it's too late!

Her headache had receded, but her thirst raged more intensely than ever. And the shivering seemed to consume her entire body. Even her toes were doing it.

She needed to pee much more badly than before. Just hold off, she ordered herself sternly. I should be out of this trap in a few minutes. You can hold it that long, Susan!

She twisted to bring the padlock dial into view once more. She grunted as she bent as much as she could, trying to bring the dial as close to her eyes as she could get it -- still several feet away, nevertheless.

The illumination grew with maddening slowness. Come on, she thought, come on! Just a little more light!

She could see the white markings now, around the dial! Some of them, anyway. There were short notches around the edge, every fifth one longer, running farther towards the center. She could see a hint of numbers on either side of each of the longer notches.

She groaned as she realized what a problem her nearsightedness presented now. By now, she thought, I could read the dial, if I had my glasses. But as it is, I'm just seeing blurs. She recalled that rather than having single digits for 0 and for 5, which she could have detected, this dial had them as 00 and 05. Every pair of digits looked the same to her from where she was.

Then she squeezed her eyes tightly shut. No, she thought, no, no, no.

She'd just heard a car go by, out on the street. A few seconds later, another. The rush of morning traffic was beginning.

It's too late already, she wailed within herself. I've missed my chance!

I can either try to get home, and be caught for sure. Or I can call for help and be found. Either way, shame, embarrassment, never-ending mortification. Even if I move away to a new town, and live where nobody knows, I'll know there are people who've seen me, *all* of me, stared at me -- taken pictures of me!! They'll have their phones with them! They'll all get pictures. The pictures will be on the Internet...

Her fears of what would happen hadn't gotten to the point of considering the Internet before. Pictures of me, naked and chained, she thought, will go around the world! There's no place on Earth where I won't be known as the Naked Bondage Girl Who Got Caught!

For the first time, she thought: What if I waited through the whole day?

It seemed too much. It was about 6 a.m. now. The daylight, now in late spring, would last until about 7:30 p.m., maybe a little later. Thirteen or fourteen hours. I'd have to hide out in the woods, she told herself, naked and bound, for fourteen hours!

Yet she felt some measure of relief from the building tension, and the threat of panic began to recede: she now had an alternative to trying to get home in full daylight, which was impossible, or calling for help, which was unthinkable.

But I still have to get free from this tree! she told herself. Even if I stay in the forest all day, I can't do it like this! Everything aches from not being able to move, my jaw is killing me from having the gag in all night, and I WANT A DRINK!

The small patches of sky she could see through the branches of the trees were fully daylight-blue now. If I can't read the padlock dial now, she thought with a shudder, I'll never be able to.

She twisted and raised herself on her elbow once more. All the digits were there, but they still stubbornly refused to resolve themselves.

A wave of fear ran through her, as the evidence grew that she could never unlock the padlock. She felt her bladder starting to let go. She closed her eyes, breathed rapidly, and concentrated on regaining control, conscious of the tide of panic turning one more time, rising to engulf her. I can't give up! she shouted silently at herself. I can't let it come down to calling for help or dying!

She raised herself up, and looked at the dial once more, squinting as hard as she could. She had a lifetime of practice squinting.

There! Those two digits there both look rounded! All the other pairs have something jagged about them except those two. There aren't any 8s on the dial. Those have to be 0s.

Overhead, she saw that a layer of clouds was creeping across the sky. The day was still bright, but it wouldn't be for long.

She turned the dial slowly in a full circle clockwise to line up the tumblers, careful to keep track of where 00 was, and continued turning to put it 00 the top of the dial before lying back to rest. Then she rose up on her elbow again.

The combination was 13 - 33 - 7. It had been on a slip enclosed in the box the lock came in. Susan had not paid attention to the slip. But Suzy did, last night.

Susan turned the dial carefully clockwise, not wanting to lose her place on the dial. 35 at the top... 30... 25...20... 15... just two more notches. There! 13.

She didn't want to stop there, but she had to. Her entire body was cramping from the effort to stay twisted, and propped on her elbow, so as to be able to see the dial. The dial won't go anywhere, she reminded herself. It'll stay at 13.

As soon as she could, she twisted and propped herself up again, carefully turning the dial counter-clockwise, a full turn to 13 again, and past it to 15, 20, 25, 30... 33.

Needing to rest again but ordering herself not to, she turned it clockwise once more. 30... 25... 20... 15... 10... 7.

Her heart pounding, she pulled on the shackle.

Nothing. It was as firmly locked as ever.

She kept pulling on it, disbelieving, her heart thundering against the walls of her chest, conscious again of the panic looming. She pushed it away, lay back to rest, then started to cry again. She stopped herself when she remembered the danger of that. And she wanted a drink so badly! And a warm blanket to wrap herself in.

She twisted once more to bring the dial into view. The number at the top, she reminded herself, should still be 7. She backtracked to where 00 was, and tried the combination again, more deliberately than before, taking extra care to stop as exactly as she could on each number. And pulled on the shackle.

Nothing.

This can't be, she thought, it can't be! I know that was the combination! Suzy got a really clear look at it last night, committed it to memory! Something is wrong! Maybe the lock is defective! Maybe they put the wrong combination slip in the box!

Her breath began coming deeper, faster. And helplessly, shockingly, she felt her bladder beginning to let go again. She tried to recover control, but this time couldn't focus through her terror. She felt the warm stream of urine squirting out from between her legs, through the chain, flowing down her thigh on both the front and back, to puddle underneath her hip.

She felt intense nausea building, partially from her disgust at peeing on herself -- the smell was now reaching her nose -- but mostly from the billowing fear that she was trapped here to die, that no escape was possible. She worked desperately to hold back the contents of her stomach. If I vomit with the gag in, she told herself, I'll choke on it!

Somehow the nausea passed, but the fear did not. I can't get out of this! she wailed in her mind, over and over. Either I die slowly of thirst here, or else scream for help and then live in a world where everyone stares and points, shares jokes about me, and trades nude images of me!

She began crying uncontrollably, opening up a third option of dying immediately by plugging up her only airway with snot.

Wait! she thought suddenly.

I never did try to open this lock before. I assumed without thinking about it that it worked the same way as my locker in high school. What if I'm not supposed to make a full turn past 13 to get to 33? What if I just go directly from 13 to 33?

Her fingers trembling, the ache in her shoulder building to agony from the repeated efforts necessary to get up to see the dial, ravaged with thirst, her mind hardly daring to hope, knowing she could be smashed down into despair again, she looked at the dial once more. As she did, the sunlight dimmed, the approaching cloud cover now crossing in front of the sun. No matter how hard she squinted, she couldn't make out any of the numbers now.

But it should still be 7 at the top, she told herself. I haven't moved it since I finished the last try.

Carefully, she moved what she hoped was 00 to the top, made a full clockwise turn of the dial, and tried the combination one more time, leaving out the full turn past 13.

She almost screamed in relief when the shackle popped open.

She laid back, breathing hard, thinking: Water! Water! Just get me some water!

Fumbling, she removed the now-open padlock, nearly screamed again at the pain of straightening out her legs, untangled her wrists from the hogtie chain. She squirmed back away from the tree, inchworming, lifting her butt with her fingers, walking back on her fingers and letting her legs follow.

She felt the resistance of the shoelace tied above, tugging on the one securing her ball gag. She jerked her head and the knot untied itself. It took an effort to open her mouth wide enough to push the gag out with her tongue, but she managed at last, and then had to bite back still another scream at the pain of closing her jaws after they'd been held open so long.

There HAS to be water around here, she thought.

She backed herself against a tree and, grunting and squeezing her eyes shut with effort, laboriously and clumsily worked herself to a standing position. Her anxiety level shot still higher -- she knew she was potentially making herself more visible by standing, if there was anyone around to see -- but she badly needed to be able to see farther than she could from ground level. If there was water in the area, she needed to find it fast.

She groaned as her eyes completed a sweep of the area. She hadn't seen water in any direction.

It's not just going to come to me, she told herself. I have to go looking for it.

She remembered approximately the direction of the street from here. She didn't want to get any closer to it -- she would have to eventually, but that was a worry for later -- but she didn't want to get too much farther from it either. She decided to compromise by going to the side, parallel to the street. She started to lie back on the ground, but realized she could cover ground much more quickly by hopping than squirming.

As she began hopping, she felt a wordless discomfort. As nearly as she could read it, it seemed to be trying to stop her from getting away from the area where she had spent the night. She couldn't really see any sense in it. She was leaving the combo padlock, gag, and one chain behind, but she had no reason to retrieve them. She intended never to use them again. Maybe, she thought, it was just a sentimental attachment to the place where I had the two most intense orgasms of my life. That, she told herself, doesn't really make much sense either, considering the amount of fear and outright terror I also experienced in that same place. Anyway, the important place to return to is home. Tonight that same glow I saw last night will be coming from there. I'll be able to find it.

Her desperate need of water cut off any further speculation on the cause of the mental discomfort, or even awareness of it. The only thing important in her world was water.

She had to hop carefully: it hurt when her feet landed on too many of those little pebbles, so she had to keep picking out a landing place that was relatively clear of them, requiring her to keep her eyes focused on the ground directly below her, rather than at a distance. It occurred to her that such picking and choosing of her exact route was taking her off the line she'd wanted to follow, but that didn't seem sufficiently important to worry about.

Her breasts bounced as she hopped, making her, once more, intensely conscious of being naked. A flush of horror washed through her suddenly, as she momentarily felt positive she was being watched. She paused to listen, but couldn't hear any sound of human life but her own pounding heart, and automobile traffic faintly in the distance.

After about ten minutes, as her desperation grew, she finally located, by its soft bubbling sound, a tiny stream of runoff from the recent rain. She flopped down lengthwise in the stream on her stomach, letting the precious water run into her mouth.

The undergrowth consisted largely of small bushes, growing to within about two feet from the smaller trees, four feet from the larger ones. After drinking her fill, and feeling *much* better -- her headache was gone now, the temperature had begun warming quickly after daybreak, and best of all she wasn't being driven crazy by thirst anymore -- she wormed her way within the nearest cluster of bushes and curled up on her side among them, out of sight of anyone more than a few feet away. Completely exhausted by a night of tension, exertion, and little sleep, protected from the sun by overhead boughs, feeling safe from detection, feeling the warm air around her like a blanket, she drifted off in minutes.

\* \* \* \* \*

When she awoke, it was much darker than it had been. That can't be! she thought. There's no way I slept *that* long.

The day had turned out very warm, almost hot, despite the clouds, and it was humid, much more so than earlier, to the point that the air smelled wet.

And then she heard the first distant rumble.

She shook her head vigorously, trying, by denial, to change the course of what she knew was about to happen.

Over the next few minutes, the light grew still more dim, and the temperature seemed to drop by about ten degrees. There was another rumble, louder, and the first raindrops fell on her as she lay curled up in her shelter of bushes.

The rain quickly grew harder, and Susan's whole body jerked at the sudden flash of light, followed shortly after by a rattling boom of thunder.

Her first instinct told her to get under a tree for protection, but her memory reminded her that would be the worst thing to do. The trees are the targets!

Rain was running into her ear. Susan turned onto her stomach and brought her knees up underneath her, resting her chest on her thighs so that her face was out of the water now covering the ground, her cuffed hands resting inevitably in the small of her back, somehow feeling that the kneeling fetal position would present the smallest target while preventing her being drowned. The rain pounded down on her back, flowing in torrents between her arms to her neck and down its sides, with another river of it running down between her buttocks. She screamed when a sudden blinding flash was followed almost instantly by an ear-pounding explosion -- thunder heard from so close sounds nothing like the drawn-out rumbling echo of more distant thunder, but more like a single blast of a sledge hammer striking a bucket with your head inside it.

Susan was shivering again, feeling both cold and terrified, whimpering "Make it stop make it stop make it stop!"

The most intense part of the cloudburst abated after perhaps ten minutes, and it seemed the lightning strikes were getting more distant. A steady but less threatening rain continued for some time after that. The sky, while still gray, was significantly brighter now.

Susan finally turned back onto her side in what had now become a bed of mud. She was exhausted from what seemed an endless series of adrenaline rushes, and still shivering. She looked around herself, and gasped when she saw that a tree, perhaps thirty feet away, was now a blackened cinder, still smoking, though any fire there might have been had been doused by the downpour. If I'd tried to hide under a tree, she told herself, it might have been that one!

She couldn't stand the shivering anymore. She remembered, then, that she had found one way to deal with it.

She closed her eyes and occupied her mind with the fact of being in bondage. She concentrated on the restraint. Hands trapped behind her. Ankles cuffed together, unable to walk.

Her hips began twitching, almost on their own, without her intention. Gently, she began pulling up on the chain through her sore vaginal cleft, feeling the tingling that radiated outward from there. She began grunting, softly at first, and gradually with greater urgency as her whole body entered the game, writhing, wriggling, convulsing. She could feel the climax drawing closer, and she invited it, encouraged it, opened her soul to it.

Uninvited, the thought of how hard it was going to be to get herself home entered her mind again, like a pesky fly. She swatted it away.

And then the orgasm hit, and she clamped down on a scream, every part of her in rippling motion, heat shooting outward from between her legs to her outermost extremities. There!! Now!! There!!

She blinked and shook herself. She seemed to have actually fainted this time. The glow of her excitement remained with her. She wasn't shivering anymore.

She wasn't surprised to feel sleep coming over her again. The aftereffects of intense sexual excitement and release, following debilitating terror, seemed to lead to that.

\* \* \* \* \*

Susan shook herself awake after a time. She wasn't feeling any real urgency. There was nothing she could do to get herself home until nightfall. She couldn't even try to get closer to the street in preparation -- from here, she had no idea in what direction it was, and there was no nighttime glow of lights to help. The heat of the day had returned following the storm, so she was comfortable. She did feel a little thirsty, and a lot hungry. It was... well, it had to be afternoon by now, and she hadn't eaten since last night.

She managed to get up onto her knees and then tried throwing her weight backward. It worked -- she was able to get to a standing position without a tree to lean against.

The continued cloud cover made it impossible to estimate the time of day, but the light that there was didn't have the hue that suggested approaching twilight. Susan supposed it was about three o'clock, within an hour either way, but that was really just a guess.

She hopped back to the stream, now swollen and flowing faster with runoff from the storm, and took another long drink, lying on her stomach along the flow of the water again.

Since the time was now getting closer, she began doing what she had been steadfastly avoiding: thinking in more detail about what she would have to do, beginning with crossing the road. She had been shutting down all consideration of it until now, but she knew she needed to figure some things out in advance.

For a moment she was aware of a spike in the level of the background sexual arousal, a greater consciousness of her body. She almost invited it, gave in to it, but in the end pushed it away. I have to think about tonight! she told herself sternly.

She would wait, of course, until traffic had nearly completely ceased before hopping into the street. That would be around midnight, perhaps. She should do it, she decided, as near as possible to her goal on the other side, which should be the right-hand end of her apartment building, which offered what she thought of as the rear entrance. The building faced the street in its long direction, with the two short sides on left and right. The entrance on the left went into a small lobby with Nellie's office, the mailboxes, and a common room with some vending machines, with the corridor to the apartments beyond that. Tenants might find a reason to be there at almost any time of the day or night. The entrance on the right side, in contrast, opened directly into the corridor. The parking lot was behind the building, and people coming from there or going to it might use either entrance, but more likely the one on the left, Susan judged. She would feel much safer using the door on the right. She would need to unlock the door and open it just a crack, to make sure there were no...

Susan's eyes flew wide open suddenly, and she gasped in horror. Unlock! Of course she had to unlock it! That door was always locked. Her apartment key opened it. Where was the key??

A soft whimper started at the back of Susan's throat. What had Suzy done with the key?

Susan thought back to Suzy's inebriated journey to this place, concentrating. Suzy *did* have the key with her, thought Susan. I remember that. What did Suzy do with it? Leave it with my clothes? No, I remember Suzy keeping it, attaching importance to it. Did she still have it when she reached the tree?

Susan thought the answer was yes to that, but this part was more hazy.

It suddenly came back to Susan. She thought she understood why it had slipped her mind. By the time Suzy had gotten to the tree, she was *so* excited, her sexual fluids almost squirting from between her

legs, so eager to get started, and of course so drunk, that she had found it very hard to focus any attention on the key, but now Susan remembered Suzy bending down, just before she opened the trash bag and emptied its contents of chains, cuffs, and locks onto the ground, and dropping the key at the base of a tree. Not the same tree Suzy had locked Susan around afterward. An adjacent one. Suzy had intended for it to be easy to find.

Relief flooded through Susan. I just have to go back and...

She whimpered yet again. Where was it from here??

THAT was what that subconscious alarm had been about, Susan thought, the one telling me not to leave the tree where I'd spent the night. That was Suzy trying to remind me! But Susan had been nearly insane with thirst at the time, and the alarm couldn't get through.

And now, in this entire forest, Susan had to find that one particular tree. She knew it must be within... probably fifty yards of where she was now, and she knew the direction -- approximately. At least she knew from which direction she'd made her final approach to the stream. But she hadn't been able to maintain anything like a straight line of travel. She could start out in that direction, but it seemed impossible that she could follow the exact same jagged path she had used to get here.

The idea that she must have left tracks occurred to her. She looked along the nearby ground and groaned. She did see the impressions left in the mud by her hopping feet going from her bed in the bushes back to the stream, but that had been after the rain. If there had been any tracks she'd left before that, they had been on harder, dryer ground and the downpour seemed to have washed out any trace of them.

She would just have to search blindly, hoping against all odds...

She looked back at the stream. I can try more than once, she told herself. The stream itself should be pretty easy to come back to -- it's a long line of flowing water, not just a point. I can start out from here and try to find the tree, and if it seems like I've gone too far, I can come back to the start and try in a little different direction.

She looked at the sky again. Still doesn't have the color of late afternoon, she told herself. I think I have a few hours of daylight still.

She shuddered at the thought that the time might not be sufficient. If she didn't find the tree in daylight, there was certainly no possible way she could find it at night. She'd have to spend another entire long, cold night here, with no guarantee she'd be able to find the tree after sunrise. And if she did find it, then she'd have to wait for nightfall *again* to get home!

Susan worked her way, as she had before, to a standing position. She quailed again at the idea of anyone seeing her. At least the entire front of her body, her breasts, stomach, mound, thighs, were all

coated in mud, cutting down on her visibility. Though only from the front. She knew her backside was clean from the rain.

Her stomach was continually growling with hunger now. She tried to put it out of her mind.

She turned in the direction she had come from, and began hopping.

It was that same, slow, careful hopping that had brought her here, picking her way ahead through patches of ground that threatened the least pain to her feet. She paused after every four or five hops to look around her for anything familiar.

Exactly as she feared, after she'd covered a distance she felt sure was about twice as far as she'd come from the tree, she failed to see any configuration of trees that suggested she had been there before. As an added worry, she didn't feel completely sure she would recognize the right place if she did see it. She might be looking right at it now. At least if she got close enough she'd spot the padlock and chain she'd left there. But from any significant distance, with all the other trees that interfered with a clear view, they would be easy to miss.

With another in a long series of internal groans, Susan turned and hopped back towards the stream, moving with fewer pauses but still keeping close watch for the tree she wanted.

She found the stream, downstream from the place she'd left it but near enough that she could see her starting point. She hopped back to it, arriving there with an odd mixture of relief and dejection: She'd succeeded in returning, which was important, but she had spent perhaps an hour of her limited remaining time without accomplishing anything.

She wasn't sure she wanted to spare the time for a drink, but the day was hot enough, and steamy after the rain, that she'd been sweating freely over the last hour, and she was feeling thirsty again, a sensation she had quickly come to hate. She dropped to the ground and wriggled back into the stream.

As she drank, she looked closely enough at one of the ever-present pebbles nearby to realize it was actually some type of nut. I could eat those! she thought in relief.

Caution held her back. She had no idea what the things were, and in particular whether they might be poisonous or, nearly as bad, allergenic.

I'd better wait, she thought, until I'm hungry enough that I don't even care anymore. I could go for days without food if I have to. Please, please, PLEASE don't make that necessary.

She got back upright and started hopping once more.

\* \* \* \* \*

She was nearly ready to give in to complete despair during her third try. Every muscle in her legs trembled and ached, all the way from her buttocks to her feet, from all the hopping. Her breasts hurt from all the bouncing. And everything always had the same, unfamiliar look.

And, worst of all, the light was definitely failing now. It wasn't another approaching storm. The cloud cover had that orangey look of oncoming sunset. I'm going to be here another full day, she moaned within herself. At least. Ten hours of darkness, of shivering in the cold, of not knowing whether I can find the key tomorrow. And then fourteen hours of daylight waiting for another nightfall, if I *do* find the key. And starving, and trying to decide whether I can risk eating the nuts.

For the hundredth time, the thought of crying out for help came into her mind, and was rejected as firmly as ever. Susan pushed it away with her entire being. If I die out here, she told herself forcefully, that's still better than if anyone sees me. That wouldn't be just a momentary embarrassment. It would follow me all of my life.

She sucked in a sudden breath. That fallen tree! Susan thought it looked like the one she had detoured around just after she'd started out from last night's area.

She hopped closer. Yes! There's that small branch sticking out that I almost missed seeing and tripped over.

She hopped around the remembered obstacle, and looked beyond it. From here it should be...

She saw a glint at ground level. The padlock! Next to it was the chain, with the ball gag a few feet away.

As she hopped excitedly towards it, she realized how much harder it was to see now. She might have ten minutes of light left. At the most.

She dropped to her knees, seeing signs of her overnight stay at the base of the familiar tree that even the rain hadn't obliterated. She looked around. Which one...?

The rain had left a smooth layer of mud at the bases of most of the trees. Susan moaned as she realized it had probably covered up the key.

She looked at the tree immediately to her left. Suzy left it by this one, I think, Susan told herself.

She sat with her back against the chosen tree and scraped carefully through the mud with her fingers, several times back and forth. She wriggled sideways partway around the tree and tried again. And then back the other direction.

She shook her head. It wouldn't be on the back side of it, she told herself. It must be a different tree.

The light was gone now. That same glow she had seen last night, from the lights of the street and the windows of her building, lit the prospect in one direction very dimly. In the direction she wanted to see,

in the direction from where she sat that she believed the key had been deposited, everything was pitch black.

She wriggled on the ground to her right. She was sure there was another tree that way, but she couldn't seem to find it. She backed up a few more inches and bumped into it. She patted and raked the ground behind her, and felt something longer and thinner than a rock. She scraped it into her hand, felt its shape.

YES!!!! She curled her hand tightly around the key to her apartment.

## CHAPTER 3

Even with the diffuse glow to show her the way, making her way towards the street was much harder than Susan had anticipated. Suzy, of course, had made it from the street to the tree in very little time, probably five minutes. But she'd been able to walk freely, and able to see where she was going in the twilight.

Susan found that, though she could make out most of the trees just ahead of her in dim silhouette, she still banged one or the other shoulder or elbow against many of them, unseen. And she couldn't see the ground at all, nor any of the bushes that occupied most of the spaces between trees. She hunched into a semi-squat as she hopped, though it made her exhausted thigh muscles scream in pain, because with her knees bent, she could fall onto them when she lost her balance from hitting an unexpected obstruction, rather than sprawling headlong. Even so, she still fell flat twice, desperately hanging onto the key each time, knowing what a disaster it would be to lose it in the dark. She could only hop ahead a few inches at a time, so that she could feel the bushes with her knees or shins before they tripped her, and detour around them -- which invariably led to colliding with another tree. And when she banged her toes hard against a sudden discontinuity in the ground, the part ahead of her several inches higher than the part behind her, like a cliff scaled for mice, falling hard to the ground once more, she knew that hopping was not only too slow but far too dangerous: if the next cliff went downward instead of upward, she could easily break an ankle falling over it. Or worse, if the height of the cliff was a foot or more instead of a few inches.

She switched to walking on her knees, swinging her feet behind her from side to side as she went. She seemed to make better progress that way. The bushes scraped at her stomach now.

Slowly the light grew brighter, to the point where the ground, and the bushes, became visible. She stood back upright and resumed hopping.

She stopped about twenty feet from treeline fronting the street. She found that the arrangement of the trees shaded the area in which she stood from streetlights, keeping her invisible, yet the street itself was perfectly visible. She was directly across from the rental office of her building, and she cautiously hopped to a point across from the farther end before sitting with her back against a tree.

She didn't know the exact time, but supposed it was around eight-thirty. She still had hours to wait. Until the hardest part of all began.

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Susan's heart was pounding. It was time. She was sure it must be past midnight, perhaps even one a.m. At first cars had passed by with a gap of at most a minute between, sometimes several cars in succession. That had been long ago. For a time she thought the flow would never slow, but gradually, hardly perceptibly, it did. She had decided to wait until she could count to a thousand between cars. She finally reached that number, and still couldn't make herself move. Perhaps another hour went by, and still she waited.

She had begun feeling the cold once more, after her body cooled following the exertion of traveling to the street. Now she was shivering convulsively again, giving her increased incentive to move, yet still she couldn't make herself go. She couldn't risk masturbating either, nor even a quieter exercise to warm herself, because too much movement would increase the risk of being visible.

The feeling of needing to empty her bladder, also, had been building as she waited. By now she was clamping her knees together hard, rocking back and forth, trying to hold it in. She had been conditioned since childhood to empty her wastes only in certain approved receptacles, and though she had urinated earlier, that had been involuntary, and she couldn't blame herself. All through the day, the combination of how dehydrated she had been and how much she'd been sweating had kept her bladder from filling, but it was very full now, and had been for some time.

She thought about how close she was to being home, and tried to tell herself she could hold out until then. But it occurred to her that she was about to do something that required her fullest possible concentration, and she couldn't afford any distraction, including pain and clenched muscles in her middle. There was no choice but to take care of it now.

Groaning silently, she rose up onto her knees and spread them apart as far as she could. And then she let go, her pee pattering on the ground.

It seemed to go on forever. The relief was overwhelming. At last the stream slowed to a trickle and stopped, and she backed away carefully, avoiding getting one of her knees in the puddle of piss.

And now, she thought, I really have to get moving. I don't know how well I'm judging time, she pointed out to herself. If I stay until I feel sure it's one or two o'clock, and it turns out I underestimated and the sun starts coming up, I'm sunk.

There hasn't been a car in a long time now. Do it now, Susan, just do it. You *have* to.

Susan stood, on legs trembling so badly they barely held her.

As scary as everything has been before now, she told herself, this is the first time I've done anything that truly exposes me to possibly being seen. But I *have to do it*.

Most of the apartment building windows were dark. Two were still lit, but they were both near the far left end. That didn't necessarily imply the occupants of the rest of the apartments were asleep. Those were bedroom windows. The residents in those apartments might be in brightly-lit living rooms, and might reenter the bedroom at any moment. But at least those dark bedrooms probably held sleeping people or no people at present. Susan didn't think people in the lighted bedrooms would be able to see her, if they glanced out the window, not only because of distance but because she was in front of a spot where an overhanging tree blocked the light from the nearest streetlamp, casting a shadow nearly all the way across the street. That was a nice piece of luck.

Considering all the possibilities, there were no circumstances under which Susan could feel completely safe. But the worry about misjudging the time impelled her. She absolutely could not take a chance on dawn arriving.

She squeezed her eyes tightly shut, summoning what courage she could find. She felt the key clenched in her hand. She listened, to see whether she might detect an approaching car engine. She looked both directions for several seconds. Then she hopped out of the protective screen of trees and into the street.

The instant she reached the pavement, she saw headlights approaching from her left.

She spun, nearly falling right in the street, and hopped madly back into the trees, going sprawling as soon as she was safe. Not five seconds later, the spot where she had been standing was lit by the headlights. She didn't even really hear the car pass: the pounding of her heart in her ears overwhelmed it.

She knew she was hyperventilating, and forced her face against her knees to try to regain control.

Frightened out of her wits, she knew, nevertheless, she was going to have to try again. As soon as she could make herself do it.

She stood again, even more shakily than before. She repeated the process of checking for sights and sounds. Then she took a deep breath and began hopping again.

Across from her stood her goal. There was an illuminated concrete walkway along the end of the building, about eight feet wide, walled on one side by the building itself and on the other side by a retaining wall -- the land sloped gently upward going from left to right, and while the left end of the building, where the office was, was at ground level, the right end was about three feet below it. The retaining wall separated the walkway from ground three feet higher. At the far end of the walkway was the parking lot. Susan had decided to go on the other side of the wall and work her way up into the wooded land beyond the wall. She wanted time to listen for activity before rounding the wall into the walkway.

She had nearly reached the far side of the street when another set of headlights appeared from the right. There was no choice but to continue. Susan realized she wouldn't have time to squirm up onto the higher ground before the car reached her and lit her visibly, so she veered into the walkway, with no idea whether anyone was approaching it from the parking lot or from inside the building.

The car went past, its lights further illuminating the walkway for an instant -- not long enough for anyone in the car to be able to make out her condition, she felt sure.

She stood still, her heart pounding in the frenzy it had reached so many times today, and worked to catch her breath.

I can't wait here, she told herself forcefully. The longer I stand here, the more likely someone will come out. Or come from the parking lot to try to get in.

She hopped to the door. There was a tall, narrow strip of glass serving as a window. She looked through for several seconds into the corridor beyond. There was no one moving in it.

She turned her back to the door, the key in her hand, and had to crouch just slightly to get her hand down to the level of the doorknob.

She pushed the key into the slot, turned the knob, and slowly pulled the door slightly open, as quietly as she could, while she recovered the key. She remained with it slightly ajar, listening.

Satisfied, she pulled it completely open and hopped through. She let it swing closed on its own, with a sound to which no one would attach significance.

The door to the stairwell was immediately to the right. There was an elevator in the opposite wall, which would obviously be easier to use than the stairs, but, especially given the average age of the tenants, they used the elevator far more often than the stairs. There was no way Susan was going to take a chance on getting trapped in an elevator someone upstairs was waiting for.

For the first time, Susan wished she'd never taken a third-floor apartment. It was nice having no one above her, no footsteps ever thumping against her ceiling, but for now it was frightening that she had to climb two flights in a stairwell that might be used before she could reach her floor.

Especially since, she now realized, there was no question of hopping up the stairs. She wouldn't have wanted to try it even in a physically rested state, but given her present degree of exhaustion it was out of the question. There was no choice but to sit on a step, use her elbows to lift herself to the next higher step, bring her feet up, and repeat the process. Over and over.

Near the second floor landing, she nearly panicked when she heard footsteps approaching from the corridor. She was glad she'd taken care of her bladder earlier, because she knew she would have left a huge puddle of urine on the step otherwise. She began breathing again when she heard a door open near the end of the corridor. It had just been someone returning home from the front of the building. She continued climbing the next flight.

She stood, finally, after reaching the landing, and listened for several minutes at the door to the third floor corridor. She couldn't detect any activity. Finally she pulled the door open a crack and peeked through. She opened it all the way then.

She almost started hopping, before she realized it would be a serious mistake. Even from their beds, any of the tenants who heard the loud thump - thump - thump noise she would make that way would be very likely to want to investigate.

As much as it scared her to travel so maddeningly slowly, she had to shuffle. Even in her joined ankle cuffs, she could put one foot about two inches head of the other. She moved along, in two-inch steps, even a little more slowly than she might have because she was trying to minimize the jingling. Her apartment was the third door down on the right side.

With her heart pounding -- she had to be sure to give it a rest tomorrow -- she made her slow, slow progress down the corridor. A trip that should have taken a few seconds went on for ten agonizingly tense minutes.

Standing in front of her own door at last, she turned her back to it and crouched again.

Before she could get the key into the lock, she froze suddenly, her heart flying into her throat. She could hear footsteps approaching the door of the apartment opposite hers, the Melmans, and heard the doorknob start to turn. Richard or Grace Melman was about to get a full frontal shock, that would last until Susan dropped to the floor in a faint. She already felt a pre-faint fuzziness.

A voice, farther from the door, called out, "Richard, take your umbrella! You know it's supposed to rain some more." She heard Richard grunt, "Yuh, yuh" in response. The knob stopped turning.

Susan tried desperately to still the trembling of her fingers and get the key into the keyhole. Time seemed to slow to a stop. She really wished somehow it would.

The key slid in at last, almost by accident, and she turned it, pushing the door open, hoping she hadn't pushed it so hard it would bang against the wall. She had no choice but to hop now, rounding the door quickly so she could push the door closed. She heard, in rapid succession, one second apart, the sounds of her own door clicking shut and the Melmans' door opening.

She looked wide-eyed around her apartment, her own apartment, her home, her place of safety, as she listened to Richard Melman's footsteps, their sound slowly diminishing down the hall.

Then she fainted.

\* \* \* \* \*

When she came around, she squirmed along the floor to the bedroom, there finding the keys to the padlocks. A minute later she was rubbing her wrists and ankles, trying to hold in a wild laugh of relief that threatened to burst out of her and would have seriously annoyed her neighbors.

Her jaw dropped when she saw that the bedside clock read eleven-thirty. It couldn't *possibly* be that early, she thought. But when she found her wristwatch, it agreed.

She left the bondage gear on the floor and staggered wearily to the shower. After spraying off the worst of the mud and grime, she rinsed down the surface of the tub below and then filled the tub with water

for a nice, long bath. She probably wouldn't have done that at two a.m., but the neighbors would accept that an eleven-thirty bath was within the bounds of reason.

As she soaked, she looked over her body. There were scrapes and bruises everywhere she looked, including in particular her wrists and ankles. Her crotch was *very* sore. But clothes would cover everything, even her wrists -- she usually wore long-sleeved blouses, and the cuffs of the sleeves would hide the bruises.

She nearly fell asleep in the tub, but at last got out and pulled the plug.

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In the kitchen, now dressed in her pajamas -- so nice, so calming to be in clothes! -- Susan quickly assembled a sandwich, which, she hoped, would hold her until breakfast in the morning.

As she finished wolfing down the sandwich, her jaw clenched when she saw the tequila bottle, tucked away in its corner of the counter. About one third of the liter was gone. She didn't recall drinking that much, but it did explain a lot.

She yanked the bottle out of its corner and unscrewed the top, holding the bottle over the sink to pour its contents down the drain.

She stopped. She didn't pour. At length she put the bottle, intact, on the counter next to the sink, still ready to pour it out depending on the outcome of the battle going on inside her.

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I see now, Susan thought. I know what the reason was for those extra-powerful orgasms I was having.

It was more than just the bondage. If I wanted to, I could put the cuffs on again right now, chain myself up, and masturbate. But that wouldn't do it. Not with the keys right there in the room with me.

That wouldn't be bondage. There wouldn't be any work involved in getting out of it. Nothing remotely close to what I had to do to get home tonight.

Susan had known, still knew, even more certainly now, that she was the farthest thing possible from an adrenaline junkie. The constant terror of the last twenty-four hours, and especially the last hour of it, was so alien and undesirable to her that she couldn't imagine that people sometimes chose to live with that kind of stress.

It hadn't been the danger, as such, that had been bringing Susan to such an elevated state of arousal. It was her consciousness of how hard it was going to be to get herself loose. Awareness that the bondage was almost, but not quite, inescapable. Susan remembered, now, that for that third orgasm, she hadn't

been able to push herself over the edge until she consciously thought about how far she was from getting free.

That is what bondage is to me, thought Susan. That's what arouses me.

Yet Susan knew it probably could not be done *without* the danger, no matter how she tried to set it up. Danger was always going to be a consequence of bondage-you-almost-can't-escape.

Susan wasn't capable of courting danger. She couldn't make herself do that to herself again. She remembered the stress SO clearly. Most stressful of all had been constantly thinking of the dangers of being caught. I never want to be caught, she told herself. Never. Ever.

But...

If I never do bondage like that again, she thought, I can never reach that incredible super-orgasm again, all the rest of my life. And I can't let go of the possibility of re-experiencing it. It can't be only in the past. I have to have to potential of it in my future.

But I can't make myself expose myself to the dangers that self-bondage holds. It's impossible. I can't form that inner determination and say, I'm doing it.

So I need Suzy's help, to do for me what I can't do myself.

Suzy cares about me. She didn't try to get me stuck in the forest with no way back. She made sure to look at the combination of the padlock before using it. She was careful about the apartment key. She even tried to warn me not to leave the key behind. It's my own fault I almost couldn't find it. I promise to listen to Suzy from now on.

I am putting a lot of trust in you, Suzy, thought Susan. I'm putting it all in your hands. Please, please be careful.

Susan screwed the top back on the tequila bottle and put the bottle back in its corner on the counter. Then she went to her bedroom, picked up the cuffs, the padlocks, the chains, cleaned them with care, and put them neatly away in the drawer.

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Susan pulled down the covers of her bed and tucked herself in.

I'll need to go get my clothes back in the morning, she reminded herself. It should be easy to find them. I remember where Suzy put them. I don't have a combo lock anymore now, but I can pick up a new one at any hardware store. People don't even associate that with bondage, not all by itself. Nobody will think twice about me buying one. I do have another ball gag. I ordered different sizes. I'm missing a chain, but I have plenty. And I can always order more.

Next weekend, she thought with a sudden shiver, is Memorial Day. Three days off. I hope Suzy doesn't make it so I have to spend *two* full days and two full nights in the forest, and can't get home until the wee hours of Monday. Be nice to me, Suzy. Okay?

And I hope it's warmer at night next weekend. With no storms.

I'd better check out those nuts, to see if they're safe. Just in case.

Susan slipped her hand down inside her pajama bottoms and began to rub herself. In a moment she moaned.

END