

SUZY RETURNS

By Cardaniel

©copyright 2017 by Cardaniel

All Rights Reserved

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1 – Friday.....3
CHAPTER 2 – Friday Evening.....7
CHAPTER 3 – Saturday.....21
CHAPTER 4 – Sunday.....35
CHAPTER 5 – Sunday Night.....44
CHAPTER 6 – Monday Morning.....52
CHAPTER 7 – Coming Home.....67

CHAPTER 1 – Friday

Susan, trembling, approached the desk of the head librarian. In a tiny voice, she said, “Ms. Corcoran, I -- I -- I think I need to take a little sick leave.”

Alice Corcoran's face immediately showed concern. “Oh, my. What's wrong, dear?”

“I just... Well, I'm not feeling well. It might be something I ate at lunch. I mean, it's probably not anything contagious, just a little food thing...” Susan didn't want to be responsible for anyone else worrying about their own health. “I feel like...” She left the specification of her symptoms hanging, not wanting to sound as though she was at death's door, nor as if she wanted time off for something trivial. She was sure that at least she appeared convincingly sick. Her heart was pounding, and she could feel sweat breaking out on her face, which she was positive must be flushed. “I saw on... my last paycheck... I mean, I have some sick leave now.” So far, it was only eight hours -- she'd only worked in the library for a month -- but she was only trying to take off two hours early.

Ms. Corcoran gave her a look that was far more motherly than even Susan's mother could manage. It softened, just slightly, Susan's horror at the fact that Ms. Corcoran was looking at her, thinking about her, wondering about her, focusing on her. It was so hard for Susan to bring about that kind of attention that she had spent her life trying her utmost to avoid, but it couldn't be helped. If there is something you want, a voice within Susan seemed to say, you need to build up your courage and ask for it. You'll be rewarded later.

Still, Susan wished she could somehow sink out of sight, out of Ms. Corcoran's world. Susan wanted to be in her own private world, not be part of someone else's.

She wondered briefly about that voice, that tiny voice, not literally heard but sensed almost subliminally, that was urging her on. Was it Suzy?

Susan barely heard Ms. Corcoran say, “Well, you go right home, dear. Can you make it on your own? Should I call a taxi or something?”

Susan shook her head quickly, not wanting the social complication of meeting and dealing with a cab driver, a total stranger, right now -- or indeed, at any other time. “I -- think I'll be okay if I just get home and lie down awhile.”

Ms. Corcoran patted Susan's hand. “Go on home, then. There'll be some paperwork to fill out, but you can do that Monday. No, Tuesday, I mean. We're closed Monday for the holiday.”

Susan smiled with genuine relief that was entirely appropriate under the circumstances. “I'm really sorry...”

Ms. Corcoran cut her off. “Don't think about it. We all get sick sometimes. You just get some rest.”

Susan nodded in wordless thanks, retrieved her purse, and left the building by the back door. She was glad of the back door. She could usually get to her car unseen by anyone, as she did this time. She felt faint, and concentrated on breathing slowly and evenly. She couldn't do anything, right at the moment, about her heart trying so hard to pound its way out of her chest, but the important thing was not to be found sprawled unconscious on the pavement. Imagine the attention *that* would bring.

She felt a little better once she was in her car, the rattling sedan her father had bought for her. When Susan drove her car, she felt partly hidden -- people, she believed, noticed only the car, rarely peering inside to focus on Susan herself.

When she finally entered her apartment and closed the door, sealing herself off from the world altogether, she'd expected to feel her usual relief. But her heart was now hammering harder than ever.

It should be simple, Susan told herself. Make some dinner, have a few drinks, let Suzy take over.

Susan had prepared for this night earlier in the week. At the hardware store, on Monday, she'd bought a new combination padlock. On impulse, she'd also bought a roll of string -- cooking twine, 400 feet of it wound around the spool. She wasn't sure why. She supposed she could tie herself with it somehow, though it didn't look very strong. Elsewhere, she'd picked up several plastic bottles containing a combination of shelled salted mixed nuts and dried fruits, labelled as "trail mix" -- on two trips, Monday and Tuesday, since she didn't want anyone wondering why she was buying so much of that sort of thing at once, and at two different grocery stores, not wanting the clerks to remember her odd repeated purchases. She'd also picked up two six-packs of bottled water, one at each store. She remembered how thirsty she'd been last weekend, and she was sure the food would come in handy. She'd checked on the forest nuts she'd found during her last foray, and had identified them as hazelnuts. When she read that they usually fall in late autumn, and had by now been on the ground for months, she grew unsure of their current edibility, and decided to get food of her own. And the bottled water must be better for drinking than the water found in streams.

A new set of wrist and ankle cuffs had arrived in the mail Tuesday. The cuffs were fancier than the ones she had used last weekend. Made of brushed steel, each was a hinged semicircle of metal, an eighth inch thick and an inch-and-a-half wide, with prongs at the end of one semicircle that clicked into slots in the other, locking the cuff closed. There was a small keyhole in the surface of the cuff at the joining, for unlocking it -- the keys were included, of course. Near the hinge of each there was a half-ring of metal, a so-called "D-ring," for attaching chains or other restraints. Like the other set of cuffs, the wrist cuffs were actually ovals rather than circles, for a more snug fit around the wrist. Susan had spent at least fifteen minutes examining them closely, locking them and unlocking them, her body tingling with excitement. Afterward she'd had to change her panties, as she usually did after she'd spent time with her bondage equipment.

Susan had even made outdoor preparations, she believed, though she didn't know what they were. Actually, Suzy had made the preparations, not Susan. Susan had awakened Wednesday morning with a... presence, in her head. Not that, exactly, more like an awareness of someone who had just departed. It was Suzy, she was sure, apparently able to get a small message across to Susan at the boundary between sleep and wakefulness. Suzy had told her, not in words but with unmistakable clarity, to have some drinks with dinner tonight. Susan had gone to work, and argued with herself through the morning whether to heed the message or not. Initially she had decided against it -- she couldn't spend a Wednesday night tied up in the forest and then go to work the next day, not without

spending the day as a sleepless zombie, which would be hard to hide. But it occurred to her near lunchtime -- perhaps this new thought had come to her through another nudge from Suzy, though Susan felt entirely capable of thinking thoughts without Suzy's help -- that Suzy might simply want to take over tonight to see to some preliminary details for the weekend.

In the end, Susan had decided to trust Suzy. Suzy was inside her, after all, and had a vested interest in not getting Susan in trouble. Susan had used another significant part of the bottle of tequila during dinner, around 6 o'clock, and suddenly somehow it was bedtime, the clock by her bed reading 10:30. Susan's clothes were a little soiled and damp, but she was exactly where she was supposed to be at this time of night -- though she had no idea what she might have spent the last four-plus hours doing. She was relieved that her judgment about Suzy had been correct. When she checked her bondage drawer, there were a number of items missing. On a hunch, she went out to the kitchen. The trail mix was gone. Susan was pretty sure she hadn't eaten it -- or, that is, that Suzy hadn't eaten it. She'd be more full. The bottled water was also gone.

And now it was time. It was midafternoon on Friday, Memorial Day weekend, and Susan was off work until Tuesday. Plenty of time, in case Suzy put her in a situation that took a long time to escape. Susan had come home early, with the sick leave maneuver, in case Suzy needed more time to set things up, but suspected that everything was ready. She didn't feel any urge to start drinking right away, and decided to wait for her normal dinnertime. At about four o'clock, Ms. Corcoran had called to make sure Susan had arrived home all right. Susan had told her she was feeling a little better already, but still slightly queasy, and intended to take a quick nap before dinner, which she was sure would help. She thanked Ms. Corcoran and hung up, her heart pounding once more. She hated talking to people on the telephone as much as she did in person. But it was over now. Nothing to do but fix dinner and have a few drinks with it. Suzy would handle the rest.

But Susan couldn't bring herself to get started. She was excited beyond measure, certainly, but also terrified. What if something went wrong? What if she was found, chained, naked, helpless? Susan remembered, *very* clearly, how the possibility had scared her so much last weekend. How could she put herself through that intentionally now? Instead she could spend the long weekend safe, in her home, alone, unseen. That was all she had ever wanted out of life. Wanting to do anything else was completely alien to her. And yet...

If I don't do it now, Susan told herself, I will never be able to make myself do it later, not next week, not next month, not ever. I will never know that feeling again. That rush, that joy... that orgasmic explosion, like nothing I've ever felt before. Never again in my life.

She'd arrived home around three-fifteen. Now, near five o'clock, Susan sat hunched on the sofa, her hands clasped and elbows in her lap, rocking back and forth, little whimpers escaping her throat, helpless to begin what she wanted so badly to do.

She sat up straight with a sudden thought. Taking just one drink, she realized, would solve everything. One drink would calm her, which she needed badly. It wouldn't commit her to anything. She wouldn't lose her body control to Suzy, not from a single drink. One drink would simply make it easier to think rationally, an ability that had almost left her now, under the tension she was feeling. Right now, she had neither the power to say Yes nor the power to say No, and so she was being ripped apart in between.

Susan hurried into the kitchen, fumbled for a glass in the cupboard, shakily opened the tequila bottle and poured out one finger of the liquor into the glass, filling the glass the rest of the way with orange soda from the fridge. She drank about half the glass in a single gulp, and drained it with two smaller swallows.

Immediately a sensation of warmth and well-being spread through her body. She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and sighed it out, feeling her heartbeat slowing by the second.

I don't *have* to do it, she told herself, with a smile of relief. I can stay right here, snug in my apartment, for the next three days. I have enough food. Three whole *days* with no one to look at me, speak to me or even give me a single thought. I'm closed off, safe from the world, and I can stay that way.

She opened the freezer and pulled out a frozen dinner box, opened it, pulled up the cellophane edges on the plastic tray, slipped the tray into the microwave and punched the buttons to cook it, all movements requiring almost no thought from long practice. She looked at the tequila bottle again.

One more drink, she told herself, can't possibly be enough to knock me out. It's not for summoning Suzy, she promised herself. It'll just get a nice Friday evening off to a relaxed start. I'll watch one of my DVDs. A comedy.

She splashed some more tequila into the glass.

* * * * *

Finishing dinner, and dumping the empty tray in the trash, Susan felt as well as she had all day. She put her hand down on the counter top to resist a momentary dizziness. She giggled, for no reason she was aware of, and drained the last of her third glass of tequila/orange soda mix.

CHAPTER 2 – Friday Evening

As if a curtain were slowly being drawn across a stage, Susan's awareness of the world returned -- and then passed in an instant into an overwhelming self-consciousness, as the air drained out of her in a rush. I'm here, I'm doing it again!! she screamed silently. Every minute, every second of her experience the previous weekend, every pinnacle of sexual fulfillment, every tremor of pure terror, all passed through her conscious mind in an instantaneous flash. All of it was reflected in her current state of being, with her fear of what lay ahead alternating with intense sexual need from one moment to the next, flashing like a strobe light gone mad.

Another part of her evaluated her body's environment, and experienced it all at once, sending another thrill of excitement through her, leaving her trembling. She was outdoors, and naked -- she could easily tell both facts from the light breeze passing softly over her bare skin while it rustled the leaves around her. She was bound, blindfolded, her remaining ball gag filling her mouth. She was sitting upright on the ground, judging from the grittiness of the surface against her butt. Her back was straight, and she could feel what was probably a tree pressed against it, her hands bound together behind it. She twisted her right hand around and brushed her fingers over the surface -- yes, obviously a tree.

Her position might have been comfortable, except for the way her legs were spread apart, each straight along the ground, in a wide V that was nearly painful, and surely would be if she were here very long. Instinctively she tried to close them and draw her feet towards her butt, but found that her ankles were each tied to something out there ahead of her. Rotating both ankles back and forth, she could tell that her new ankle cuffs, the ones that had excited her so much, were locked around them -- she knew it was the new ones because there was no jingle of a padlock as she moved them. No clinking of chains, either: it must be rope securing the cuffs this time. Yes, she thought, as she rubbed the side of her heel against the rope's smooth surface. Definitely rope.

There were also ropes that went over the shoulder and under the armpit on both sides, holding her upper body tight against the tree, and farther down, one more set of ropes that she was, at present, by far the most conscious of: making a tight circle around her waist to hold her lower back against the tree, then running from front to back between her legs, through her labia and buttocks. The feel of it, tautly rubbing against the most erogenous part of her body, was making the most significant contribution to her state of growing arousal, the excitement she had always felt throughout her life when she so much as imagined being tied naked and helpless, which reached, as she had discovered, a level far beyond any she had known when it was no longer imagined but real.

Hyper-awareness of her body, her surroundings, her captivity, burst through her mind like a river overflowing its banks, too full to be contained. She was here, she was helplessly tied, she was naked outside where the world could see her! Blindfolded, unable to tell whether anyone was already watching. Gagged, unable to tell such a person to go away, to explain, to scream at them to stop looking. Unable to hide her nudity, her breasts uncovered, her legs spread obscenely wide. Even the rope through her crotch, which might have hid her most private place, only playfully revealed it -- she could feel the nether lips embracing the rope on either side, swelling around it, surely shining with the fluids of her arousal.

Every part of her body began wriggling, her arms and legs jerking against their restraints, her hips twitching insistently. Every movement affected the rope between her legs, pulling it tight again and again through her crotch, slipping liquidly through that place that was the center of all her attention. She barely noticed the back of her head banging against the tree, as her excitement overwhelmed any rational appraisal of what her body was actually doing...

Nnnnnnnghh!! The orgasm shot through her, as strong as any from last weekend, stronger, bigger, more huge than any words could ever say! It shook every part of her, all thought eradicated by raw sensation, and she tried to hold onto it, make it last forever, grasping at it tightly so she could never let go of it.

Yet it slipped away, the tide withdrawing from the shore, leaving her limp, exhausted.

The word orgasm is so hopelessly inadequate, she told herself. I've had orgasms before last weekend, but they weren't really even in the same category of experience. The sexual explosions of real bondage went so far beyond those Susan had ever experienced with fantasies of bondage that she understood, now, that those earlier climaxes had only been hints of the excitement life could potentially hold.

* * * * *

For a time Susan sat still, her heart still pounding but slowing, her breathing deep and shaky as she began to catch up on her aerobic needs.

I promise, she said to herself, I will never stop doing this. She remembered her resolution, at various times last weekend, never to do anything like this again. But that was just when I was really scared, she told herself. When I think of the heights I can reach, the orgasms I know I can never have any other way... I promise I will remember those, when I get terrified.

I can't do this every weekend, obviously, she thought. But I don't have to. Just to know that a repeat of this feeling is somewhere in the future, something to look ahead to and not only behind. That's enough.

She wondered at the intensity level of the blast she'd just experienced. This one, tonight, had seemed even stronger than the ones last weekend. Maybe, she thought, it's that I'm blindfolded. That's new. Being prevented from seeing as well as from moving. That probably was it.

Her breath restored, her heart slowing to near-normal, she sat and felt the tickling streams of sweat flowing down her on all sides. She hadn't known what temperature to expect tonight. She had carefully avoided checking or listening to any weather forecasts -- part of the thrill of outdoor bondage was the inability to avoid any discomforts of her environment, and she didn't want to know ahead of time what they would be. It was a warm, muggy night, as would be expected at this time of year. She was glad of that. She hadn't enjoyed all the shivering last weekend. This week there had been rain Monday night and through a lot of Tuesday, and some showers Wednesday morning, but after that the heat of approaching summer had restored itself. It had been mostly sunny, with just a few scattered clouds, Thursday and today. That was normal.

She was thirsty, which didn't surprise her. She understood it to be one of the basic ingredients of a hangover similar to the one last weekend. Her head ached, though it didn't seem as bad as last week. None of that really seemed to matter. The bliss of sexual release made it all unimportant.

She suddenly realized she must have made a lot of noise during her climax, and probably before it. She thought she might have screamed. She wasn't sure.

The thought filled her with horror. With no idea where she was, she had no way to know whether anyone and heard her. No, no, please no! she thought desperately. If someone heard me they'll be here any moment!

She sat absolutely still, holding her breath, her heart pounding once again, listening for any sound that would indicate an approaching person. Or even a watching person.

She did hear traffic sounds, which were neither surprising nor threatening.

She tensed and nearly cried out as she heard the sound of a car going by, much nearer than she expected, seemingly within a hundred feet or so. The pitch of the engine dropped as it went past, and soon another came from the opposite direction. She realized she was *much* closer to the street in front of her building, Stockhouse Boulevard, than she had been last weekend. Or it could be some other street. There had probably been cars going by earlier during her... excitement, but she'd been too preoccupied to notice the sounds.

But as she listened for several minutes, there were no sounds at all of anyone approaching her on foot, or standing nearby. Eventually she took a deep breath, satisfied that no one had heard whatever sounds she might have made while transported by ecstasy.

I have to trust Suzy, Susan told herself, to put me somewhere out of sight. Getting home unseen was going to be a challenge, but Susan thought she was probably safe for now.

Her sexual tension gone for the time being, Susan began thinking, for the very first time since awakening, of how to free herself. Until her climax, getting out of her restraints had been the farthest thing possible from her desire.

As the hope flitted through her mind that one of her water bottles was nearby, she began to experiment with her bondage to determine how to deal with it.

She frowned. Being blindfolded was exciting, but it did complicate her escape. Mostly rope was involved, but she did have those wide metal bands around her wrists, the new ones, as her fingers told her. They would open with a key, but she had no idea where the key might be, and she couldn't look around to find one. She quickly, though carefully, ran her fingers over the dirt surrounding her hands. No keys there. The cuffs were tied to each other, no more than an inch apart, using rope through their D-rings. With her fingers Susan could feel the thick knot holding the rings together behind her, behind the tree. She must have to untie the knot. That would be tricky, without being able to see it, but she should be able to do it by feel.

She knew getting rid of the blindfold was out of the question, until her hands were free. She'd loved the design of it: it consisted of two thick circular leather pads, each a couple of inches across, with a leather band passing through adjustment sleeves on the back side of each pad. The distance between the pads could be adjusted to fit any face, and when the leather band was buckled in place, behind her head, the pads fit so snugly against Susan's eyes she couldn't even open her eyelids. When she had tried the blindfold out at home, she could see absolutely nothing but blackness even in a fully lighted room, and even using her hands she couldn't budge the band around her head, other than by unbuckling it. And of course, her hands weren't available for the purpose now.

Susan continued feeling the knot between her cuffs with her fingers, trying to find the loose ends, to determine how to untie it.

The rope must be circling the tree trunk as well, she decided, holding the cuffs against the back side of it. She'd been trying to push her hands back farther from the tree to give her fingers more room to explore the knot, but it wasn't possible. She did find two strands emerging from the knot in either direction held taut against the trunk, confirming it was indeed tied around the trunk.

But where were the loose ends?

After a moment she wriggled in frustration. She couldn't find any strands of rope coming out of the knot other than those two that circled the trunk. The question of where the loose ends were became more pressing. She felt around the knot more carefully, determined not to miss anything.

She tried harder to pull her hands away from the tree. The ends, she thought, must be tucked down between the knot and the tree, and it was hard to insert her fingers into that small space.

After carefully feeling along every strand in the knot, she finally realized, in horror, that there simply weren't any ends of the rope coming out of the knot except the ones that circled the tree. Those ends, she understood now, must be secured with a knot on the opposite side of the tree, between her back and the tree.

A slight whimper escaped Susan's throat before she reminded herself to remain quiet. She twisted to reach, with her right hand, as far around the trunk as she could. The trunk was, she estimated, six or seven inches thick. She couldn't even reach a quarter of the way around it. She couldn't reach the knot she needed to untie.

This is impossible! she shouted silently. Suzy couldn't have tied it like this! As much as Susan thought of Suzy as a separate entity, it was still true that Suzy was inside Susan's body, using it. How, Susan demanded, did Suzy do this??

Susan's conscious mind was suddenly flooded with memories. Memories of the lost time between dinner and awakening here, tied up outdoors. The memories didn't play out in sequence, as if in a movie, but were more like a library, with books on shelves she could access at her choosing.

These were Suzy's memories, Susan realized. Things Suzy had done while in control of Susan's body.

Susan now remembered -- or Suzy remembered on her behalf -- closing her apartment door, and testing the knob to make sure the door was locked. She'd been carrying the leather briefcase her mother had bought her for college, which Susan had stashed away in the closet in her apartment, with no current use for it. Another memory had Suzy arriving at the site she had picked out for Susan's bondage. The ropes that had been missing since Wednesday in Susan's equipment drawer were on the ground near a tree of about the thickness of the one Susan was tied to now, as well as a loose mound of trail mix and a half-dozen water bottles, one of the two six-packs. It was twilight, very dim in the wooded area, but with enough light to do what needed to be done.

The briefcase had contained only several keys Susan recognized: keys to various padlocks, and the ankle and wrist cuffs, as well as her apartment key. Susan remembered now that, on arriving at the tree, she had opened the case, taken all the keys and put them in a handkerchief she'd brought, then wadded it up, tied its corners, and shoved it into a pocket of her jeans. After that she had removed all her clothes, folded them up, and slipped them into the briefcase, then closed the case. Susan remembered, or Suzy remembered for her, being tipsy, and giggling through all of this, and reminding herself to be quiet.

Somehow the memory of exactly where any of this had taken place was gone. Susan couldn't recall walking from her apartment to the tree where she was tied. Where the tree was, in relationship to anything else -- that was a blank. The degree of control Suzy had in selecting which memories to parcel out to Susan's conscious mind was surprising.

For the time being, the most relevant of the memories told Susan how Suzy had managed to bind her here, how she had made use of the available bondage equipment. The empty, unlocked wrist cuffs had already, in preparation earlier, been tied together at their D-rings by a knot in the middle of the longest rope Susan had, and the two ends of that rope had been pulled in either direction around the tree trunk, and knotted on the side of the tree opposite the cuffs, tightly holding the joined cuffs against the tree at ground level. There were still two long ends of rope left over coming out of that knot.

Next Suzy had locked on the ankle cuffs, had sat on the ground against the tree and spread her legs as wide apart as she could along the ground, then stood up, awkwardly, without moving her feet from their widespread stance. She'd then taken two ropes, and threaded each through the D-ring on one of the ankle cuffs. Reaching forward, she looped each of the ropes around the base of the trunk of a tree ahead of her, in each case with her ankle on a line between that tree and the original one, took out all slack, and then, for good measure, had pushed the loose ends through the D-ring once more, and looped the ends around the tree once more before knotting it at the tree.

With her feet now secured, Suzy sat back down on the ground, with her butt -- Susan's butt -- back against the original tree, her legs now held taut in that wide V which, at the present time, was really starting to ache.

Then she had secured her shoulders against the tree: taking two more ropes, she draped each over one of her shoulders, a short length of it in front and a lot behind. With the rope over her right shoulder, she took the end that was behind her shoulder and ran it behind her neck, around the tree, then behind her neck again, under her left armpit, took out all the slack she could, and tied it to the short piece hanging over her left shoulder. She'd done the same with the rope hanging behind her left shoulder: behind her neck, around the tree, behind her neck again, under right armpit, take out all slack, tie to front part of rope hanging over right shoulder. These ropes now held her upper back, shoulders, and shoulder blades firmly against the tree.

The blindfold and the gag came next. Susan, within the memory restored to her by Suzy, could recall not only Suzy's actions but also her feeling of growing excitement.

Almost done, now, and in the memory, Susan experienced Suzy's feeling of satisfaction at a job done well and nearly completed. And the dizziness from the tequila.

Suzy had taken the long loose ends up the rope at the base of the tree trunk, in the small of her back, and looped them each in a full circle in opposite directions around her waist, tying each end tightly behind her back to the rope already circling the tree. Then she'd pulled the two ends underneath her, between her butt cheeks and labia, up to the rope around her waist and knotted it there -- again, tight.

And then, at last, Suzy had reached back behind her, her arms around the tree trunk, putting her wrists - - Susan's wrists -- into the cuffs, closing them to lock with a sharp click. Susan remembered the thrill of excitement shooting through her at that final sound that locked away her freedom of movement.

And then, grinning and again giggling, Susan remembered Suzy thinking, "Have fun with this, Susan." Then she'd leaned her head back against the tree and allowed the alcohol haze to envelop her in sleep.

* * * * *

Susan shook her head, whimpering once more and not able to stop herself now. Suzy put me in a tie I can't get out of!! she told herself, her heart pounding harder than ever. Every single knot I have to untie is out of reach! The knot for the rope holding my hands behind the tree is in front of my stomach! I couldn't even get close to reaching it when I thought it was between the tree and my back!

Think! she ordered herself, Think! There has to be a way! Suzy left my clothes safely packed away, and keys for the cuffs, in the briefcase! That means Suzy was expecting me to get out of this!

Susan stretched her fingers out as far as she could, and rolled her feet on her heels left and right. Wherever the briefcase was, it was clearly outside the range of her very, very limited reach. But it was there, somewhere. Suzy had left Susan with a way to take off the cuffs, get dressed, and get back into her apartment, once she escaped from the tree. Why bother with all that if no escape was possible?

Getting her legs free seemed hopeless, but Susan tried anyway, though her taut, stretched-out muscles screamed at her to stop. There was no possible way, of course, to pull either foot out of its locked cuff, designed as it was for a snug fit. Breaking either of the ropes that secured each cuff to its respective tree beyond it was impossible as well. The rope was a quarter-inch thick, smooth and silky to the touch, and very strong -- it had held the weight of Susan's body when tied to a ceiling fixture, even when she jumped off the floor and let it jerk her weight to a stop, dangling over the floor. She couldn't muster anywhere near that force now just by flexing her thigh and calf muscles, especially not with her legs split so far apart -- and it wasn't just a single rope she needed to break now: Susan reminded herself that, as the memory from Suzy had shown her, all the tension she could muster would be distributed among six different strands, not just a single one.

Breaking the ropes that held her shoulders against the tree seemed impossible as well. The knots, Susan knew, were far out of reach. She tried wriggling and twisting her shoulders to see if she could get either rope to fall off the shoulder and down her arm, to give her at least a little more freedom of movement,

in case it might help her deal with her hands, but the way the ropes were tied, every movement of her upper body tended to slide the rope closer to her neck rather than the end of her shoulder -- any movement of her upper body within the ropes left her farther from escaping them. Very clever of Suzy, Susan thought in frustration. Another possible way out eliminated.

Susan was almost unbearably thirsty now, her leg muscles throbbed, especially along her inner thighs, and her jaw ached from being held open so long.

The idea of freeing her hands from the cuffs was as hopeless as freeing her feet. She couldn't possibly pull her hands out of the snug-fitting metal bands. And breaking the rope holding the cuffs against the tree was out of the question -- she couldn't get any leverage, from the position she was in, to put any significant tension in the rope.

She could rub the knot between her hands against the tree! That should work. She could wear it down until it broke.

She twisted her hands around to bring the knot up against the bark, and grunted in frustration. She could manage it, but the rope was holding the wrist cuffs so close together that she couldn't press the knot against the rough surface without her hands also rubbing against it. If she tried wearing down the knot, she would rip all the skin off the heels of her palms long before she made any useful progress.

Feeling desperate, Susan patted the ground around her hands once more -- there *had* to be a key to one of the wrist cuff locks! Suzy, Susan told herself, didn't necessarily leave *all* the keys in the briefcase! Maybe she'd put them in, and isn't letting me remember her taking one or more out later! There's got to be a key here, it's the only possible way out! Susan tried, knowing it wouldn't work, to dislodge the blindfold by rubbing the back of her head against the tree -- if she could just see the ground around her, the key might be in sight. Perhaps some earlier movement -- she had no idea what she might have done during her orgasmic thrashing -- had accidentally pushed the key away, but it still might be in reach. Or there might be a stick nearby she could use to pull the key towards her, if only she could *see* it!

She was making no progress whatever with the blindfold, but couldn't give up -- it was her last hope.

She froze suddenly, unable to breathe. There had been a sound not far away. A familiar sound. The sound of a door opening. Footsteps on concrete, muffled. The door whispering shut. Footsteps continuing. Moving away from her, she thought. It was all happening within a hundred feet or so, maybe less.

She knew the sound of that door. It was the back door of her apartment building.

Taking in breath in tiny sips, her entire body trembling in fear, Susan continued listening, trying to assure herself the footsteps weren't coming closer. They stopped, and Susan heard the sound of a car door opening, then closing. An engine started.

Susan knew exactly where she was, now. She was in the woods adjacent to her building, facing towards it -- the sound of the door had been straight ahead of her. She turned her head slightly to the right, seeing the parking lot in her mind, her eyes blind to it, and listened as the car drove away towards the street exit.

I can't be seen, Susan told herself, but *only* because it's nighttime. She was fairly sure, at least, that it was still dark. Daytime would be warmer than this, with birds chirping. At night, no one would be able to spot her in the unlit woods, under the canopy of trees. But in daytime, she would be easy to see. The trees here weren't densely packed enough to hide her.

Susan felt panic beginning to rise within her. A conviction that no escape was possible grew and began to overwhelm her. I have to get free, she screamed within her head, I have to get loose, I have to get out of this before the sun comes up! People will see me! People I *live* with will see me!

More afraid than she had ever been in her life, Susan groaned when her bladder let go. She tried desperately to hold it. She had accustomed herself to the idea of peeing outdoors, because it was an inescapable part of the whole package of outdoor bondage. But she hated, *hated* having to sit in a puddle of her own piss afterward.

Wrinkling her nose at the smell, she desperately tried to force the panic away. It didn't help that she had already exhausted every possibility she could think of for freeing herself.

She felt, unexpectedly, some degree of calm descending on her, and was startled to realize it was somehow being imposed on her in spite of herself. Suzy, she thought. Suzy is telling me to relax.

A new memory suddenly appeared on the mental library shelf, something Suzy had edited out of the recollection earlier, had not allowed Susan to remember until now.

Near the very end of the elaborate job of binding Susan to the tree, at the point where Suzy had locked her wrists into the cuffs, she had done something else just before that. She had reached to her right, picked a piece of string off the ground, and tied the end of it around her right wrist -- Susan's right wrist. Or actually a couple of inches up the forearm from the wrist. She'd then draped the string over a nail hammered into the tree about a foot directly above where Susan's wrist was now. *Then* she had locked her wrists into the cuffs.

The string, Suzy's memory told Susan now, went up from her wrist, hung over the nail, and then led to a pile, about ten feet to Susan's right, where the rest of the string was coiled loosely, unrolled from the original spool, all 400 feet of it, the string Susan had bought earlier this week. The other end of that 400 feet of string was tied to the ring at the end of the handle of Dad's old Boy Scout knife, from the home-assembled tool kit Dad had insisted Susan take with her when she left home. All Susan had to do now was reel in the string, get the knife, and cut the rope.

Suzy had hidden the means of escape cleverly, not only from Susan's conscious memory but also from premature physical discovery. With the string running directly upwards from her wrist, hung over the nail in the tree, it had never been likely that the fingers of either of Susan's hands would brush against it and bring it to her attention: it was effectively out of her way, an unnoticeable secret she wore on her wrist, tied so lightly she couldn't feel it.

A feeling of warmth flooded through Susan. Thank you, Suzy! You did leave me a way out!

The warmth evolved into a stronger feeling, as Susan thought of the amount of work she still had ahead of her. That extreme awareness of her body in bondage, helpless to move, completely naked and

exposed... with the added boost of the awareness of how much time and effort would be required to free herself. Susan had barely had time to register the renewed tingling between her legs before it red-lined, more intense than before, more intense than ever!

All through her body her muscles jerked spastically against their restraints, as she tried to close her legs and free them, her arms flexing again and again to try to pull her hands free, her waist muscles straining with the effort to bend her upper body forward against the ropes holding her shoulders against the tree, none of it productive except in allowing her to ascend higher on the slopes of sexual excitement.

She reached the summit and leapt off the cliff into the abyss of orgasm. Waves of heat washed through her, each splashing against more waves in a seemingly endless series.

And receding at last, leaving Susan wrung out, exhausted, tears of joy running from her eyes, mixing with the renewed sweat rolling down every part of her body.

She was that much more thirsty now. And muscle groups from every part of her body were protesting with aches, especially her legs.

But it's worth it, she told herself. I'd take any of this pain as long as I can have... that. What I just had.

But I still have to get loose, she reminded herself. And I have to do it before sunrise. How long will it take, an hour? Two, maybe?

She gasped at the sudden thought that she might not have that much time. She had no way to know what time it was, other than the birds being silent and the long time between cars passing by on Stockhouse Boulevard -- that street just about fifty feet to my left, she thought with a shudder, her new estimate of the distance resulting from having a much better idea of her location. Like the residents of her building, none of the people in the passing cars could see her, for as long as the darkness lasted. How long was that?

She couldn't even make a guess, within a time frame that went from about eleven p.m., the earliest she thought it could possibly be, to about five a.m. She had no way to know how much time had passed in a tequila stupor. Whoever had driven off from the parking lot just now may have been making a late trip for needed groceries -- as Mr. Melman had last weekend, nearly catching Susan in the hallway before she managed to get into her apartment. Or -- she shuddered once more, violently -- maybe it was someone leaving for work in a job that started at, say, six. And there might be a lot more of those over the next hour or so before daybreak.

Her bladder control weakened again, though there wasn't much left to come dribbling out of her.

Start, she ordered herself. *Now!*

She twisted her right hand around, feeling for the string with her fingers. Twisting her hand inward, she couldn't come far enough around to raise her fingers much higher than her wrist. Twisting it outward, straining, she just managed to graze the string -- there it is, it's there! -- with the backs of her fingers, but couldn't manage, despite increasing desperation, to get any of her fingers bent far enough back to wrap around it.

Before renewed panic set in, she thought: Other hand, other hand! Twisting her left hand inward and upward, she carefully reached up with her fingers... there!

The string went limp immediately, having apparently dropped off the nail from which it had hung, and draped itself over the back of her right hand. Now she was able to grasp it with her right.

Just start reeling it in, she told herself, ordering herself not to think about how long it was going to take.

She fell into a rhythm of pulling the string in with alternate hands, periodically pausing to brush the growing pile of string out of the way, off to her left. There never was any way of determining how much progress she had made. She just kept going.

To her left, traffic on the street seemed steady, and still rare. There were no more arrivals or departures in the parking lot.

A sudden vicious cramp seized her left calf muscle. There was nothing she could do except try to stretch it out to the extent she could, bending her foot back at the ankle as hard as she could, trying not to moan in pain. She really needed to reach forward and pull the top of her foot back with her hand. Or with the other foot. Impossible, of course.

Slowly, the pain subsided. As dehydrated as she was, she knew there would be more of that sort of thing to come. She resumed reeling in the string.

It felt as though she had spent her entire life doing nothing but this: pulling an unseen string from her right to her left, behind her back, pulling, pulling, brushing it aside, pulling again.

She froze. The back door had opened again. She sat perfectly still, not breathing. Moments later another car started, drove off.

The first car hadn't returned. That wasn't a shopping trip, she concluded. People were starting their workday. It couldn't be for the night shift. Those people must already be at work. These would be people in daytime jobs -- since it was Saturday, there would be fewer of them than on Monday through Friday, but plenty of people had to work Saturdays. It was going to get busy here soon.

Two cars passed by on her left, both heading towards town. Another indication that dawn might be near. Whimpering in renewed fear, Susan continued pulling on the string.

At last: resistance! She had pulled the entire four hundred feet of string past her, except for the last ten feet that went straight from where she sat to the knife.

She continued pulling in the string. There was inconsistent tension in the string as it brought the knife, bumping and scraping over the uneven ground, closer. About five feet more, she guessed.

And then it was stuck.

No, she thought, no, please!!

There probably isn't anything there for it to get immovably caught against, she told herself hopefully. It's probably just hung up behind a rock projecting up from the ground. The knife should be able to get past it if I pull harder.

But if I pull too hard, she worried, the string could break.

She twisted her hand farther outward to try to pull from a higher elevation, hoping she could lift the knife over the rock that way. It didn't work. Probably still too far away.

She pulled on the string in brief jerks, each just barely harder than the last, hoping to find the absolute minimum amount of extra force she could use to free the knife before she exceeded the strength of the string.

She breathed out a huge sigh of relief. That last one had worked. The knife was moving again.

About a minute later she held the knife in her hand. If she could have opened her eyes, she would have closed them now. It's almost over, she told herself.

Some distance behind her, a bird began tweeting. And yet again, pee dribbled from Susan's bladder.

It's not necessarily dawn yet, she told herself. Some of the birds start before light.

She opened the knife as carefully as she could with trembling fingers. She didn't want to cut herself. Though I'm almost loose, she thought. I could free myself, run in and wash the blood off, put a Band-Aid...

She got the knife open painlessly. So far so good, she thought. Now, Susan thought, I just need to cut the rope holding my cuffs.

She worked to maneuver the knife around, then hesitated. With a finger, she felt at the knot of rope joining the D-rings of her wrist cuffs together. Too close together. She could saw away at the rope, but the tiniest slip, as she worked the knife blindly and awkwardly behind her back, would send the blade slicing through her skin. The cuffs themselves protected her wrists immediately adjacent to the knot, but not for a great enough distance on either side. And of all places to cut herself: not just cutting the skin, not just cutting the wrist, but the *inside* of the wrist. Where all those important blood vessels run.

The cramp in her calf chose that moment to return.

Susan bit down hard on the gag, concentrating all her effort on stifling the automatic scream of pain. She did what she could to stretch out the muscle once more.

She felt a flash of pain through the thigh muscle of her right leg, as if *that* was about to cramp. It subsided, but the calf muscle stayed knotted a few minutes longer before finally relaxing.

I have to do it, *now*, she told herself. I just have to be careful. And if I die, at least everything will stop hurting.

She continued telling herself Do it, do it! yet was unable to persuade herself to risk her own life. Her heart rate built, and her hand shook, the unwelcome result of adrenaline released by fear. The shaking made using the knife even more dangerous.

A thought suddenly sprang into her mind. She had a feeling this was her own, not Suzy's.

I don't need to cut the knot, she realized. I just have to cut the rope next to the tree. That will give the rope a free end, and then I can *untie* the knot.

With her left hand, she felt along the rope next to the knot where it began its circle around the tree. It was so tight around the tree that she could barely budge it a fraction of an inch away from the bark. She pulled hard outward with both hands, and maintained her hold as she slipped the blade in between the rope and the bark, the sharp side facing the rope. She started sawing up and down, willing the fibers to part.

Nothing seemed to be happening. It certainly wasn't like the movies, where a quick flick of a knife seemed to break the thickest rope in an instant. Of course, she told herself, that's fake. Those ropes are pre-cut.

After several minutes, she felt at the portion of the rope she'd been sawing on with her finger. It was frayed, a little. Progress. She resumed.

Several more minutes of sawing, and the rope suddenly broke.

She threw the knife down and scrabbled at the knot between the cuffs with her fingers, trying to loosen it. Once again, being unable to see it, and having to work behind her back, were significant handicaps. She could feel the various cords tangled around each other with her finger, but couldn't sense which strand to pull on to make it all come free.

There! One of the strands had slipped a fraction of an inch against the others. She pulled on it once again, and it slid through. The rest was easy.

* * * * *

Susan stood shakily, moving her jaw to ease the pain, rubbing her eyes, rubbing her aching calf muscle.

Freeing her hands had allowed her to shrug out of the shoulder ropes. The rest she had untied rather than cut, that being faster, and she wanted to save the rope anyway. She'd nearly screamed once more in pain as she stood, her feet still spread, and fallen forward to get to the ropes securing her ankle cuffs to the trees.

Free, at last, except for the ankle cuffs and wrist cuffs -- locked, impossible to remove without a key. Aside from the cuffs she was still naked. She looked around for the briefcase. It was nowhere in sight.

Suzy had hidden the briefcase. Doing so, and where she had done it, wasn't one of the memories Suzy was allowing Susan. Susan thought back through the memory of Suzy putting the keys into her pants pocket, and putting all her clothes, Susan's clothes, the keys inside them, into the briefcase. Susan

closed her eyes tight, willing herself to remember what Suzy had done with the briefcase next. / did it, whatever it is, Susan told herself. The memory has to be in my head somewhere!

The memory eluded her desperate grasp.

It was still dark, but there was purple, with a hint of orange, in the eastern sky. Dawn was coming on, Susan saw, exactly as she'd feared, relieved that at least she had freed herself before the light came. The light at present was not sufficient, by itself, to help Susan see her surroundings, but illumination from distant streetlights, and from the building, did the job.

Aside from the standard forest vegetation, and a lot of discarded ropes, a ball gag, and a blindfold, there were the half-dozen water bottles and pile of trail mix that Suzy's memory told Susan she'd left here. One of the water bottles was empty, as of two minutes ago. Susan widened the area of her visual search. Still no sign of the briefcase.

More birds were joining the chorus of singing around her.

Susan brushed through the pile of nuts with her fingers, just in case any of the keys she needed might be here, despite the memory of them being in the briefcase. There were no keys. Nor were there any elsewhere in sight.

Susan pressed her lips together. She was free to go anywhere, except home. She had no way into her apartment. And she wasn't about to go to the office and ask for help. Not in her current state of undress.

Suzy was continuing to withhold the memory from Susan of where the briefcase might be. Susan stood with her hands on her hips, biting her lip, unsure what to do.

She suddenly realized she only had minutes left to make an important decision.

There was only a limited area where the briefcase could be. Since all of Susan's clothes were in the briefcase, it had to be someplace Suzy could have got to while naked, in late afternoon twilight -- one of the few memories Susan did have of what Suzy had done told her Suzy had tied Susan to the tree as the last of the light was fading, and she had to have disposed of the briefcase before that.

There was a ravine that ran behind the apartment building's parking lot, angling towards Stockhouse, which it reached and went underneath about a hundred feet beyond where Susan stood. Where the ravine passed the near back corner of the parking lot, the area was understandably well-lit. Suzy couldn't have passed that point, considering how visible she would be and how busy that area tended to be at that time of day. And she couldn't have crossed Stockhouse, nude, at that time of day, with all the traffic passing by. The apartment building and its parking lot, the street, and the ravine, from its near-brush with the parking lot to the point where the street bridged it, created a relatively small triangle of land that Susan was standing in, and the briefcase had to be somewhere in it.

The trouble was, that didn't mean it would be easy to find. The fact that the briefcase wasn't in plain sight almost surely meant Suzy had made an effort to hide it, and the strip of land was much too full of good hiding places. There were hundreds of trees, and it would be easy to wedge the briefcase in

among the branches so that the foliage would hide it; worse, there had to be a thousand bushes of various sizes, many of them big enough that a briefcase could be shoved inside one so that it would be invisible from more than a few feet away. If Suzy would give Susan the memory of exactly what she'd done with the case, Susan would know where to look, but the memory was still not forthcoming.

And the sky was brightening in the east by the minute. More light should mean the briefcase would be easier to look for -- but Susan herself, searching through the area, would be very visible herself. The triangle simply wasn't big enough, heavily treed enough, and far enough from a building that would be far busier in daylight than it was now, for Susan to be able to make any such search without exposing herself. And Susan didn't feel confident in her ability to hide out in the triangle all through the day, waiting for nightfall to begin her search, a task much more difficult at night. She could see places that were safe from observation from the building, but could be seen from the street, and vice versa. The idea of attempting to conceal herself for hours, in this small area, with so many people so close by both around the building and riding by in cars, tied her stomach in knots.

Susan summed it up: She couldn't find the briefcase until Suzy told her where it was, because looking for it blindly would leave her impossibly exposed; and she couldn't simply stay here through the day, trying to hide from observation from so many directions. Her only other options were to climb down into the ravine, which presented a physical danger of falling and breaking an arm, at the least, or else she could cross Stockhouse, moving into that undeveloped area across from her apartment where she could conceal herself far from any possibility of being seen, for any length of time. That last was the only choice that offered any safety at all.

If she was going to do that, it had to be *now*. She didn't even have time to decide whether there were other options she might have overlooked. Susan looked to the east again. Yes, definitely lighter. She would be clearly visible from the building, parking lot, and street if she stayed any longer.

She knelt to scoop up a double handful of trail mix, and caught and squeezed the necks of two water bottles between her forearms, the most she could carry that way. She walked cautiously and carefully to the street. There were no headlights in sight. There was a point, before the street crossed the ravine, that was far enough from streetlights that it offered -- barely -- enough darkness for her to cross safely. She watched, from the edge of the woods fronting the street, several minutes, trying to talk herself into emerging into the open and crossing that river of asphalt. At last, taking a deep breath, she came out into the street.

Walking as fast as she could with the necessities she was carrying, she crossed, successfully hanging onto the water bottles and nearly all of the nuts, not believing what she was doing. It felt simultaneously unreal and far too real. She was fully conscious of the fact she was leaving behind her one real place of safety, her apartment, her home -- not only going away from it, but putting a barrier between it and herself, in the form of Stockhouse Boulevard, that would be impassable all through the daylight hours whose beginning was just minutes away. She knew she was going to have to spend the entirety of Saturday's daytime hiding out naked in the forest, hoping Suzy, at some point, would tell her how to get home.

Safely across the street, she retreated into the woods.

CHAPTER 3 – Saturday

About thirty or forty yards into the woods, Susan felt relatively safe. It was getting increasingly easier to see. The exertions of last night, and the relative lack of sleep (though she clearly had slept several hours, since her awakening tied to the tree had obviously been much later than she had imagined) left her completely exhausted. But her hunger and thirst outweighed her need for sleep just now, as did her fervent desire to be home, safe, in her own bed. The excitement of last night, hitting its peak in two indescribably intense orgasms, was a memory she would always treasure, but now she only wanted, as she always did, to be closed away from the world, in a place where there was no danger of having to relate to anyone, of being an element in anyone else's environment where they might see her, think about her, wonder about her. To be where she was now, at risk of becoming a lifelong memory for people not just in the city but far beyond it ("Did you hear about that girl they found wandering naked in the woods, with bondage gear on her wrists and ankles? Did you see the pictures? Hey, I think I can find the YouTube video") was an unbearable nightmare waiting to happen.

Susan let the water bottles drop to the ground and wolfed down a big mouthful of the trail mix in her hands. In a minute she had finished all of it, and licked her fingers and palms for the residue of salt, which should help hold off the cramps from returning, as would the half-bottle of water she chased her meal down with.

She wished, afterward, she had saved some of the nuts, realizing they were the only food she might have all day. There were more of them across the street where she'd spent the night, but she couldn't get back there until after dark.

And the answer to the big question frustratingly eluded her: How do I get home? To be able to see, mostly obscured by intervening trees, the building that housed her place of safety, but to have no way to reach that safety even after dark because she didn't know where the key to it was, was the most frustrating and frightening thing she could imagine.

She wasn't completely sure that even returning home tonight was possible. She could cross back over Stockhouse, returning to the general area where the solution to her problem, the briefcase, must be. But she would have to search for it in almost complete darkness, and the monumental number of possible hiding places, within which the briefcase would be invisible to her from as little as three feet away, made it a daunting challenge -- Susan would have to reach into the branches of every bush and every tree in the triangle, and might still miss it.

Susan sat on the ground, holding her head in her hands. Within that head was the answer she needed, and she couldn't believe she wasn't able to find it. She concentrated again on the memory she did have, of looking at the contents of the briefcase and doing a mental inventory. She should, she felt sure, be able to start from there and connect it up with the memory of what happened next -- where did Suzy take it? Suzy knew. Suzy had *all* the important memories. But still, the memory was somewhere in *this* head, the one Susan was holding. Why couldn't she find it herself?

She experimented mentally with possibilities, to see whether any of them clicked. Nothing.

It was full daylight now, and the steady stream of cars passing along the street, intermittently visible through gaps in the trees, seemed to symbolize how cut off Susan was from her home, as well as reminding her that she needed to find a safer place to spend the day -- if she could see the cars, and windows in her building, then anyone looking in just the right direction at the right moment could see her as well.

Not wanting to stand upright, she crawled along the ground farther into the woods, using cover provided by the short bushes that outnumbered the trees, the fingers of each hand wrapped around the bottles containing her remaining supply of water. Though it hadn't rained in a few days, there were frequent damp spots in the soil, clingy though not quite muddy. Birds cawed at her, or perhaps at something else, though she always felt it was about her, and squirrels scampered along the ground examining the nuts with the air of discriminating diners. She was, she thought, just part of the animal life of the forest now.

She arrived at a familiar area, and saw the discarded equipment from last weekend's adventure. Somehow the fact of having been here before, with nothing bad having happened, gave Susan a small touch of the feeling of safety she craved. She picked out an especially dense stand of bushes and crawled within their protective perimeter. Shielded from any prying eyes, as well as from the direct sunlight that had started her sweating profusely during her crawl -- it was going to be another hot day -- she took a few swallows from the half-full bottle, curled up on the ground, and fell immediately asleep.

* * * * *

Susan awoke abruptly and sat upright, astonished. Suzy had just managed her most elaborate communication to date with Susan. Susan wasn't sure whether it had been made easier by falling asleep, or whether Suzy had simply decided it was time.

The communication was in the form of memories again. In this case, the main memory was a very clearly seen place. It was a stand of bushes even more densely packed than the one Susan was in now, where the random growth had managed to create a ring of vegetation about ten feet across, with an irregular open space in the middle of it. Within that open space were the remainder of Susan's food, the trail mix, and the second six-pack of water -- and an assortment of chains and padlocks. It was all located near the city park -- near the tennis courts, in particular. The bushes hiding Susan's supplies were about a hundred feet from a corner of the chain-link enclosure for the courts. The elaborate natural bush enclosure was within a wooded area that ended about fifty feet from the court, leaving a cleared area on that side of the court, through which a jogging path ran. Susan wasn't very familiar with that part of the park -- though obviously Suzy was -- but she knew how to find it. The court was adjacent to Stockhouse Boulevard, about a half-mile from Susan's apartment building in the direction towards town.

There was one other new memory that had just become available to Susan. Suzy had obviously planned ahead farther than last time, and had found a way to talk directly to Susan. Susan, now, could recall looking at a sheet of paper on her dining room table, on which was written, in her own handwriting,

“Go find the bush enclosure by the park. Use the chains and lock yourself up as follows: Ankle cuffs locked directly together with padlock. Chain around waist, and through crotch. Wrist cuffs locked to each other, to waist chain, and to crotch chain, behind you. Use key locks for *all* of the above. Complete a hogtie, making hogtie chain as short as possible and lock it with combo lock. Also secure the

anchor chain to the combo lock. As soon as you do that, I will tell you the combination and where the briefcase is. I won't tell you until then."

Susan sat with her eyes closed. She absolutely was not imagining this. She remembered looking at the note. She even remembered, now, physically writing it -- though somehow not as an act of her own will. She only remembered watching her hand write the words. She couldn't even recall what "anchor chain" meant. Suzy had done the writing. Susan's body had been used, but she, Susan, had not had access to the memory of it until just this minute.

The note was further proof, if Susan needed it, that the knowledge of where the briefcase was, with her clothes and all her keys, was all inside her head somewhere. Why should she need Suzy to reveal it to her?

Susan didn't want to follow Suzy's command. It wasn't that she had any objection to chaining herself in a hogtie. It was the place where she was required to do it that was the problem. It was *way* too close to an active public area. The stand of bushes, as Susan now remembered it, looked like an effective hiding place in that context. No one should be able to see her as long as she stayed within it. But Susan absolutely did *not* want to trap herself there, unable to leave it without being seen, unable even to escape the hogtie in chains because she didn't have the keys or the combination, in hopes Suzy would keep her promise and tell her how to get home.

Susan drew up her knees and wrapped her arms around them. I don't have to be at the mercy of a psychological quirk, she told herself. Suzy isn't a real, separate person. She is some weird manifestation of how my mind is working these days. I can beat this. I can break through.

Yet she realized, suddenly, that in the last few minutes she had been suppressing conscious recognition of a sure sign that she was wrong, that Suzy *was* a separate mind who was stronger than Susan herself was: Suzy was imposing her will on Susan by using Susan's fascination with bondage against her. Suzy was on the verge of succeeding in forcing Susan to do something she would never, ever have considered doing on her own. And Susan already saw she was not going to win this battle.

Between her legs, Susan was already very wet at the thought of chaining herself up to await the news of how to get home. The excitement at the thought of putting herself into such helpless bondage, including using a combo lock she didn't know how to open among all the other padlocks she had no keys to, in a place that was only marginally safe from discovery, all because she had been promised the information she needed *after* she had put herself into that otherwise inescapable trap, was starting to overwhelm her. Susan's feeling of horror at the increased chance of discovery made her continue resisting the idea with all her conscious power, but she could feel the resistance crumbling.

And obviously Suzy had known Susan would react that way. She had counted on it.

Susan concentrated on maintaining the resistance. She squeezed her eyes closed, searching through every avenue of her mind for the memory she needed. The briefcase, the briefcase... She'd put all the keys in it, she'd put her clothes in it, she'd closed it, and then... She tried to imagine herself standing up, picking up the case by its handle, creeping furtively, of course, since she was naked and couldn't afford to be seen...

Nothing. There was no memory she could find in her head that was anything like that.

Susan found she was rubbing her mound with her fingers, moaning softly. All she had to do to get home was to do something that filled her with sexual excitement and frightened the wits out of her. And she could tell it was the excitement that was going to win.

She finished the near-empty water bottle so that she would only need to take one with her. There was more water where she was going, but she had to account for the likelihood that her fear would grow stronger as she neared her destination and stop her from reaching it.

Though if she did chicken out, then what? Suzy had given her, in a sense, an ultimatum: Do this, or stay out here until you're discovered.

Maybe, thought Susan, I can find another source of food. Maybe I can just live out here, as an animal, for years.

She shook her head. That's a pure fantasy, she admitted to herself. I can't live indefinitely as a naked beast in the woods. I have to do what Suzy said, she told herself, scary as it is. Suzy has already shown me how much in control she is. I know she can give me the memories I need when she wants to, and not a minute before.

Susan looked at the sky. The blue skies of morning had been replaced by cloud cover during her nap. It didn't appear to threaten rain, but didn't really cool the air much. It made it less comfortable, in fact, more humid than before. She decided that, despite the unpleasant mugginess, the clouds were probably better for what she was doing. The dimmer the light was, the less visible she was.

Grabbing her remaining water bottle, Susan rose into a crouch, and began walking on both hands and feet -- as far back into the woods as she had retreated, she still didn't want to stand upright if she didn't have to. The bushes were high enough to hide her this way, and if somehow someone did see her, she wouldn't look like a human, especially from a distance. She began angling towards the street in the direction towards town.

* * * * *

About halfway to the park, Susan came to Louris Creek. She had forgotten it would be in the way.

It wasn't at all an impassible barrier, but it introduced an extra concern. People did fish in the creek sometimes, though usually they did it closer to the bridge, where Stockhouse crossed over it. Some people did their fishing *from* the bridge, though the police made them move along if they came across them.

Susan approached the creek crawling on knees and elbows, slowly, as low to the ground as possible, alert for any voices or movement that would indicate fishers.

She stopped behind the first line of trees, sweeping her eyes along the creek bed.

She wished the creek itself would quiet down. Despite its shallowness, or maybe because of it, it did a lot of babbling. It was about eight to ten feet across at this point, probably two feet deep along its center line. Occasional splashes, Susan realized eventually, were made by the fish, not the people trying to catch them.

The forest floor dropped off into a near-vertical embankment, three feet high, on either side of the creek, below which a short shoreline led down to the water. The creek was capable of getting a lot deeper than it was now, during the rainy season. In fact, the embankment showed signs that the creek had been running deeper recently -- after the rain early in the week, no doubt. It would have been harder to cross then, and Susan wondered for a moment if Suzy had found it difficult to cross on Wednesday night, when it may still have been running deep. Then Susan realized that Suzy, fully clothed at the time, would simply have walked across the bridge over the creek. Not an option available to Susan at the moment.

Susan was, after several minutes of observation, almost positive there was no one near enough to see her cross the creek here, but she couldn't make herself move. In a sense, she was committing herself to Suzy's plan, in crossing -- if she chickened out later, she would have to go through the tension of crossing the creek again to get home, later in the day when fishers might be more likely... but she reminded herself that she had been at a loss to find a way to get home in any case, other than by doing what Suzy said to do.

She squeezed her eyes shut, whispered "I have to, I have to..." and crawled out from the cover of the trees.

It wasn't like she was visible for a long distance. The creek bed wasn't straight, so there were no sightlines without trees in the way from more than a hundred feet or so away. Nevertheless, Susan felt more exposed than ever, unable to rid her mind of the image of some fisherman spotting a much bigger catch than he'd ever expected.

She turned backwards and let her legs slip over the edge of the embankment, which came to about waist level on her, to stand by the bank of the stream. She cautiously felt at the water with her toe, finding it pleasantly cool in the heat of the day. She crouched down and crawled on hands and knees into the flowing water, still not wanting to walk upright. Unexpectedly, since the water didn't seem to be flowing terribly fast, she found it wasn't easy to cross it that way. She needed to spread her knees well apart to resist being pushed over by the flow of the water against her. But she made it across without much trouble, looked again for anyone fishing, leaned her upper body, bending at the waist, onto level ground above the embankment and squirmed out onto it. She crept toward the trees, again keeping as low to the ground as she could, snake-like.

Once back in the safety of the trees, Susan actually felt good. The flowing water had washed off the coating of grimy sweat and replaced it, for the moment, with a cool sheath of water that felt nice in the heat. She lifted her knees off the ground and resumed her hands-and-feet progress to the park.

* * * * *

Susan lay stretched out on her stomach, peeking out from behind a bush. She could see the park, and in particular the tennis courts. She could even see the stand of closely-packed bushes that Suzy intended

for her to use as shelter. She recognized it, as if she had seen it before. She had, of course, though not with Susan-awareness at the time. She had only the memory given to her after the fact by Suzy.

Susan couldn't get any closer to the shelter at present. The park, not surprisingly for a holiday-weekend Saturday, was packed. She wondered whether Suzy had taken that into account. There were players on the tennis courts, and others waiting for them to finish. An irregular stream of runners went by on the jogging path, passing by between Susan and the courts. In the distance, Susan heard voices of exuberant young boys apparently on a baseball field, judging from the recurring bat-on-ball sound, being cheered on by their parents.

There was simply no possible way of reaching her goal in daylight. It was especially frustrating because she knew Suzy had left food there, and Susan was very hungry. She had eaten only that double-handful of trail mix since dinner last night, and she estimated it was now early afternoon, about two-ish, though that was really only a guess, made problematic by her nap in the woods this morning. She could have made a better estimate if the sun had been visible, but it remained stubbornly hidden behind the cloud cover.

She twisted the top off the one remaining bottle of water she had brought from last night's site, and regretfully drank the last swallow. How long until the park closed? she wondered. Around ten o'clock, she guessed. About eight hours, by her estimate, and now she was without water as well as food. She could, if her thirst got really bad, crawl back to the creek, but for the moment, lying still felt much safer than moving. Anything moving in the woods was more visible. She would try to pass the time with whatever fluids her body still retained.

And yet her body wanted to give some water up, urgently. She crept backward a foot or so, spread her legs apart, supporting herself on elbows and knees as low to the ground as possible, and peed, then crawled back where she had been. The animal-in-the-woods feeling returned full strength.

She couldn't think of anything she could do now other than sleep, if that was possible. It wasn't that she wasn't exhausted, but her mind was spinning so fast she doubted her ability to slow it down. She was terrified of being so close to people, but reluctant to move much farther away in case she couldn't find her way back in darkness later. She remained excited by Suzy's command that she chain herself up, but unable to stop worrying that something would go wrong with Suzy's promised information, such as the combination to the lock holding her in a hogtie, leaving Susan helpless and unable to avoid discovery; and it was hard to stop thinking about her bodily needs for food and water and her inability, for an extended time, to do anything about them.

About ten feet to her left and slightly ahead, there was a trio of closely-packed bushes that offered better cover than the one she was currently behind. Trusting in the dimness under the forest canopy to protect her from unwanted eyes, Susan crawled sideways, horizontal, slowly, over to them. Curling up on her side behind them, pressed up against them, she closed her eyes. Her mind continued running in high gear for a time, but gradually ran down into neutral and she drifted off.

* * * * *

She awoke in a panic, with a crawling sensation all over her skin. It was real -- several dozen ants were exploring her body for anything useful it might present. Somehow biting down on an automatic squeal, she sat upright instantly and began brushing everywhere. It took several minutes to take care of them

all, going by feel as she looked around her for their source. As she dealt with an especially stubborn bug driving her crazy under her pubic hair, she spotted a small mound a couple of feet away that was most likely the anthill. She squirmed back to her previous location, wondering whether to retreat to the creek to wash off the last of the ants off, but it seemed she had taken care of them. She decided she was probably safer from detection where she was now than in the area of the creek, which might be busier now than at the time she passed it earlier. She kept a careful eye out for any movement towards her from the park, but no one seemed to have been alerted to her distress.

The sky seemed gloomier than before, the air still more humid, and she tensed as she heard a soft rumble of thunder. It had to be miles away, but not welcome at any distance.

She sat upright -- the bush in front of her was high enough to do so safely -- and tried to pass the time by following the progress of the nearer of the two tennis matches in front of her. She wasn't familiar with the rules, but was able to get a feeling for the flow of play by watching the emotions of the players. She was easily able to tell who was winning. Her attention was attracted to a distant family in a picnic area, with two squealing, giggling children seeming to do their imitation of bees. Time passed.

* * * * *

Susan was cheered to realize that the darkening sky, which she had first taken to be a sign of an oncoming thunderstorm, turned out instead to be twilight approaching. Her uplifted spirits immediately changed to chagrin as bright lights came on all around the park. She had no idea whether they would remain on all night. If they did, she wasn't sure of being able to persuade herself to make her way to the cache of food and bondage equipment.

She renewed her efforts to find the memory of the location of the briefcase, stored in her own brain but somehow held behind a shroud by Suzy. She absently brushed away an ant, the first to find her since the surprise attack hours earlier. It was frustrating that there seemed to be no way to force a memory to present itself when it doesn't want to be found.

* * * * *

The barbecues, picnics, and baseball games eventually ended. Tennis continued, under the lights, as did jogging. Susan unconsciously pounded the ground softly as she waited, willing the lights to go out. She seemed not to have that power over them.

* * * * *

The last of the tennis players departed. About fifteen minutes later, the courtside lights went out. They might, thought Susan, be on a timer, or turned on by motion detectors. The general illumination of the park remained, still much too bright for Susan to want to chance a dash to the waiting bush enclosure.

* * * * *

Susan had counted to a thousand from the time she had last seen anyone moving in the park. Her nervous ground-pounding continued at an increasing rate, as she fought within to make a decision.

Before anything else, she needed to get to the restroom, off to her left. Peeing was one thing, but for the last hour or so her bowels had been increasingly insistent on emptying themselves, and she couldn't bring herself to do it out in the open. She was sure the restroom had to be vacant -- no one had gone into it in at least an hour. The area around the restroom, however, was some of the best-lit real estate in the park. Walking into a lighted area was far beyond anything Susan could get herself to do.

She might, she thought, be able to approach the building from the shadowed area behind it. She rose on all fours, preparing to get to that area and then decide what to do next.

She gasped suddenly, fearing she had just gone blind for no reason, then realized the lights had finally been extinguished -- all but a few, perhaps one out of every ten light poles, which offered just enough light to navigate by.

She clapped her hands together, once, happy that *something* had finally gone her way. Still unwilling to stand, she crawled out of hiding towards the restroom.

She stood as she reached the building, her hand brushing the side wall. It was too dark to read the sign that indicated the women's room, but she knew which sex the door on the near side accommodated by having watched who went in it earlier.

Inside the ladies' room, the light was still on. Susan made her way towards a stall, and stopped halfway there frozen in terror at seeing a movement, which turned out to be her reflection in a mirror. She stared at herself for an instant, stunned by the image of herself standing completely naked in a public place. And with metal bands around her wrists and ankles. Quickly she lunged into the stall and closed the door, her safety restored for the moment.

Once she had evacuated her bowels, she sat with her eyes closed and arms folded, not eager to leave the confines of the stall for the wider world.

Her relaxation ended abruptly at a sudden noise from the doorway: a footstep on the concrete apron, followed by a male voice calling loudly, "Anybody here?"

Susan jerked her feet off the floor and held them aloft, her heart pounding so hard she thought surely the man could hear it from where he stood. She breathed through her wide-open mouth, hoping she was doing it completely silently.

She nearly lost it, barely suppressing a squeak of alarm, when the lights suddenly went out. The door to the room whispered closed, with a click at the end -- it had been standing open -- and the footsteps, outside the door, retreated, leaving Susan in absolute black darkness. A moment later she heard the same voice, much more faintly, calling "Anybody here?" again. Checking the men's room, obviously.

It must have been a nighttime security guard, making his rounds, she realized. He must not have seen her enter, or he would have looked for her. He had only called out to make sure the room was as empty as it seemed.

Susan still sat frozen, her feet up in the air, for several minutes, then slowly let them down to the floor at last. She continued sitting on the toilet seat, letting her heart settle back down. If she hadn't just taken a shit, hearing the man's voice would literally have scared it out of her.

Finally ready to move again, she felt for the toilet paper dispenser and wiped herself off. Emerging, with trepidation, from the stall, knowing she couldn't stay in it forever, she went to the sink and washed her hands -- she couldn't leave without doing that, and she had seen where the sinks were -- but failed to locate a paper towel dispenser. Deciding she didn't need to dry her hands anyway, she shuffled carefully, her wet hands out in front of her, towards the door.

She found a wall, and stood puzzled, before remembering there was a short entryway to her left, with the door at its end. She found the door at last, pulled the handle, and found it wouldn't budge.

Once more her heart started racing. He locked me in! she wailed to herself.

She nearly started pounding on the door in complete panic, but it suddenly occurred to her doors in public facilities were usually designed to be unlocked from inside, to prevent exactly the sort of entrapment that she thought had happened to her. There must be, she told herself, a latch for the deadbolt on this side of the door somewhere.

The handle was a wide vertical D-shape. She felt directly behind the metal tubing, then below it, and finally located the latch just above the handle. She turned it, pulled on the handle, and the door opened, to her intense relief.

She only cracked the door a few inches, enough for her to check for any activity outside. Sensing none, she opened it just wide enough to slip out, and immediately dropped to all fours. She worried momentarily what the guard would think when he came to open the door in the morning and found it already unlocked, but decided he would just think he'd forgotten somehow. In any case, there was nothing she could do about it.

Her eyes, by now, were well-adjusted to the darkness. There was enough illumination from distant lights for her to see her way around. The persistent cloud cover also helped, reflecting the city lights enough to give a slight all-around glow to the cloud base.

Crawling, Susan made straight for the bushes she had been waiting all day to reach.

* * * * *

It all looked just the way she remembered it -- the way Suzy remembered it for her. The pile of nuts and dried fruit, the water bottles. And all those chains and padlocks. Her favorite things.

Hungry as Susan was, she did a quick inventory of equipment before anything else. Yes, there were enough chains, of the right sizes, to do what she needed, with one left over. Among the padlocks, as well, there was one more than she needed. And there was the combo lock. Combination unknown.

Susan could now see what Suzy had meant by "anchor chain." One of the chains was already looped around the roots of one of the bushes and locked in place. That would be the one Suzy had told her to

attach to the hogtie chain by the combination lock. It would keep her here, in this shelter of bushes, until she found out how to open the lock.

Think of the consequences, Susan tried to tell herself. If you use the chains the way Suzy said to, you can't unlock them until daylight, because you won't be able to see the combo dial until then. It's possible the park might still be deserted then, and you can get away. But it's possible there may be people around already. And then you're stuck here in this hideout all day. You can't leave it if there are people around to see you. In that case it's going to be twenty-four hours from now until the park lights go out again. Don't do it! Not yet, anyway. It's dark at the apartment building. You can go there, go back to last night's place, see if it jogs a memory, the memory you need. You could still come back here if that doesn't work.

She looked at the chains. Couldn't stop looking. They were calling to her. She wanted them. She *needed* them.

The voice telling her to wait faded.

Susan grew wet quickly between her legs, anticipating. She almost wanted to get started before eating, but her hunger won out. She sat in the cleared area between the bushes and grabbed a handful of the trail mix. While chewing, she opened a water bottle.

Refreshed, she sat again and considered the chains. She had never actually put herself in bondage before. Suzy had done it for her. But she was about to do it now. And she wanted it so much!

Picking out two of the chains of different lengths, with shaking fingers, she wrapped the longer one in a circle snugly around her waist, with the ends in front, slipped a padlock through two overlapping links, not yet locking it.

She was tingling between her legs now. She felt briefly angry at all those people in the park who had kept her from this all day, but she knew it was much more important that she had got through the daylight hours safely without any of them seeing her.

She took the shorter chain and a padlock -- a keyed padlock, as Suzy had demanded, not allowing Susan to use the combo lock for this -- and hooked the shackle of the padlock through a link in her waist chain in the small of her back, hooked the last link in the new chain on the shackle of that same padlock, and squeezed the padlock closed. She pulled the short chain tight through her crotch, its metal links momentarily cold against her butt crack and her nether lips, slipped the shackle of the front padlock through the nearest available link, and squeezed that one closed. She could barely breathe now with excitement.

Then suddenly her will deserted her again. That voice of caution returned. There was still a chance the memory of the location of the briefcase would come back to her despite Suzy's efforts to hide it. As much as the chains called to her, begging Susan to use them, her excitement was, as it had so often been lately, tinged with fear. There was, she reminded herself again, a very strong chance she would have to stay here, among these bushes, all through the daylight hours Sunday, with all the activity going on in the park as it had been today -- so many people, so near. There would only be a *very* small window of time, after she had unlocked the combo lock, before the first of the crowd started arriving for

a fun day in the park, and she already knew their arrival, if she had not yet released the combo, would prevent her from leaving this shelter, just as their presence today had prevented her from reaching it until they all left. That was obviously Suzy's plan: that Susan should be in a safe place that was nevertheless very difficult to get to and would be equally difficult to leave.

And it was also impossible to know it was 100% safe. It did seem she would be completely hidden away here. But it was hard to guarantee it absolutely.

The insistent tingling between Susan's legs increased in volume once more, became louder than the voice of caution. Her thoughts began to parallel her desires. I have been trying so hard, she reminded herself, all day, to remember where the briefcase is. Going back to the apartment building isn't going to "bring back memories" of anything. I was there this morning, and no memories came to me. This wasn't an ordinary case of searching for a memory that might be found: Suzy had demonstrated her complete control over what Susan remembered. It wasn't realistic anymore, after all the effort she had put into it, for Susan to think that she might recall what she needed to know, without Suzy's permission.

I like where you're going with this, said the innermost Susan -- not Suzy, but Susan herself, the lifelong lover of bondage, so taken with the passion of restraint. The chain between her legs begged to be used, and it needed Susan to be immobilized, to set its powers free.

Susan's resistance collapsed, already forgotten. She reached for one of the padlocks and, with no hesitation, threaded its shackle through the D-rings of her ankle cuffs, slamming it closed. She felt a thrill run through her, starting from her ankles, like an electric current. *Now* she was committed. Her ankles were locked together until she found the keys. There was no way to back out of that.

She took another of the chains -- there were only two left, one of them the extra, unneeded one -- and looped it around the padlock joining her ankles, and took one of its free ends and looped it around the back of her waist chain. She used the chain itself to pull her ankles as close to the waist chain as she could get them, her legs bent double at the knees, straining to make the distance as short as she could. She looped the chain again around the ankle padlock, again around the waist chain, and finally hooked the combo lock through links in both free ends of the chain. She nearly forgot about the anchor chain, but remembered in time, taking the end of that chain and also hooking it onto the shackle of the combo lock.

Just one more padlock was needed. She hooked it through the D-rings of both wrist cuffs, and carefully, making sure she didn't miss it, hooked it through the shackle of the padlock connecting the crotch chain and the waist chain. Again without hesitation, she squeezed it closed. Her hands were locked together behind her now, and locked to the chain around her waist. And, as with her now-connected feet, she would not be able to release her hands from behind her back until she had the keys which, she had already reasoned, had to be back in that triangle of land where she had spent Friday night. She would have to hop home with her hands behind her, as she had last weekend.

The thought excited Susan still more.

The combo lock was not yet closed. Susan had given herself this opportunity to stop and decide, here: Did she want to complete the hogtie? Her ankles were hobbled, and her hands trapped behind her

back, with padlocks she couldn't open, but she could still, if she wanted, unwind the hogtie chain and hop away from this place.

She did need to do one last thing. Raising herself on her elbow, she twisted around to make sure the combo lock, not yet closed, was in a place where she could see it. It was far too dark to make out any features of the dial, but she could see where the lock was, and saw that she should be able to read the dial with more light. That was enough. Without hesitation, she slapped the combo lock closed. She was completely trapped, ankles locked together, hands locked together behind her to both the waist chain and crotch chain, with the hogtie chain holding her heels against her butt, and also anchoring her to one of the bushes that constituted her shelter, from which she now had no possible way of escaping.

The thrill of excitement within her rose to a boil. Her hips twitched, her back and leg muscles writhed, every movement beyond her conscious control, responding to the sexual arousal that exploded within her. Every movement transferred itself into the perfectly placed chain between her legs, an attentive lover whose only goal was to please her. For a time that seemed forever and yet not nearly long enough, every fiber of her being took part in the symphony of her physical sensations, the notes of the music reaching higher, higher...

She quaked with the force of the orgasm that, once again, reached an intensity she had never experienced before Suzy came to help her.

It let go at last and Susan felt herself floating slowly, featherlike, to the ground.

Sighing in satisfaction, she closed her eyes and let herself sleep.

* * * * *

Susan awoke, in darkness, not immediately remembering where she was. She was outdoors, something she was becoming accustomed to, lying on her side. She tried to stretch before the chains reminded her that she couldn't, and she gasped as the tingling of excitement began between her legs again and spread from there. She fought it down, wanting to save it for later, and succeeded in regaining control.

It was important, she decided, to make sure of her boundaries. Had she missed anything, made any errors? If she hadn't done everything exactly as Suzy demanded, she didn't know what would happen. She tried moving her arms in every possible way, making sure her wrist cuffs were securely locked together, that they were attached to the chain around her waist and to the one though her legs, all of the padlocks closed and secure. She checked that her ankle cuffs were locked together, felt the padlock between them to make sure it was locked. She strained to pull her heels away from her butt, and felt along the hogtie chain to the combination lock, felt its shackle with her finger to make sure it was closed, closed her hand around it and shook it, felt the links that it went through, and felt along the anchor chain attached to it. She yanked hard on the anchor chain, though she already knew it was locked in place around the roots of one of the bushes -- she'd have to uproot the entire bush to free up the chain, and she knew that was far beyond her strength. She squirmed along the ground away from the bush -- it was behind her -- and felt her movement arrested after just a few inches by the anchor chain.

She wished she could be blindfolded, but reminded herself she'd at least been able to have that pleasure earlier. She couldn't use the blindfold if she wanted to open the combo lock. She also would

have loved being gagged, but then she wouldn't be able to eat. Suzy, she thought, might come up with a solution to the long-term gagging problem eventually.

The idea of eating while gagged reminded her she was hungry and thirsty again. She should have filled up on water before chaining herself, she decided, but had been too excited to stop for that.

Forgetting herself, she tried to reach for the pile of trail mix before remembering her inability to use her hands. Momentarily frustrated, she realized there was only one possible way to do it. She squirmed to the side, towards the pile, glad that the anchor chain hadn't put it out of reach, bent her head down and took a mouthful straight from the pile. After a few bites she'd had enough, but the salt made her thirstier. The water bottles were in reach as well, but she puzzled for a time over how to drink from one. At last she backed up to one of the bottles, twisted the cap off with her hand, carefully set the bottle standing upright, wriggled away from it, laboriously turned onto her other side, clamped her teeth around the neck of the bottle and lifted it into the air. Gritting her teeth harder, she managed to make the bottom of the bottle swing outward and upward so that the water streamed into her mouth. She almost choked on it, but managed a few swallows before setting the bottle back down. She decided not to put the cap back on. The ground seemed level enough, and the bottle shouldn't tip over and spill the rest of its contents. If it did, she still had some more bottles.

Nothing to do now, she told herself, until Suzy...

Susan gasped, her jaw dropping open. Suzy should have told her what she needed to know by now. Susan had done everything she was supposed to. Suzy had promised!

Susan squeezed her eyes shut, willing the memories to appear. She had to know the numbers that would open the combo lock! She had to know where her clothes and all the keys were so she could get home... and that wasn't even important right now, wherever they were she had no way to get to them without first getting the combination to the lock!

Susan frantically tested her bonds, struggling to find a way to get loose. She had just tested them all not fifteen minutes ago, but she hadn't *really* wanted to get free then, not like she did now, when it was life and death -- not death, but to Susan something worse. She could call for help at any time, after sunrise, easily heard in a busy public park, but she knew she could never, ever do that. She would try to stay hidden here, unseen by people all around, until her food and water were gone, and then she would die.

Once again, helpless to hold it, she felt warm pee squirting out between her thighs. She could barely focus on the thought that she had probably lost more urine involuntarily than intentionally since she'd awakened at the tree Friday night.

And then came something she'd felt before: a calming, as if a warm, soft blanket had descended on her. A feeling of being told, "Shhhh. It's okay" in a whisper, not audible to her ears but no less real than a sound.

10-35-24. It was there, as if she had always known. Susan could see the small slip of paper from the package for the lock in her mind's eye. Along with it came a memory of what Suzy had done with the briefcase, that missing bit of Friday's preparations that Susan had struggled fruitlessly to recall without Suzy's help. Susan knew now where she'd hidden it, remembering her body performing those actions,

without recalling the internal will that made her perform them. The will had been Suzy's, but the actions had been done by Susan's body.

Susan was getting used to that as well: remembering physical acts without remembering the mental impetus for the acts. Things done by her body under another person's control.

It didn't matter. It's okay, Susan told herself, that I have another mind inside me. I can trust Suzy. She gives me what I want, and she keeps her promises.

Susan smiled, not only with relief but also appreciation of Suzy's cleverness. The briefcase was indeed in that triangle of ground where Susan knew it must be, but finding it would have taken time Susan couldn't have afforded. It wasn't in a place Susan would have thought to look.

Susan relaxed, resting her head on the ground. She knew she could get out of the hogtie in the morning and escape from the shelter of bushes, and she knew where to go to finish unchaining herself, get her clothes and get into her apartment. She just needed to...

She reminded herself that all of that couldn't be done at once. She could open the combo lock here, but the rest of the things she needed were back near the apartment building. She would have to get there with her feet cuffed together and her hands cuffed behind her back, hopping, like last weekend. Hopping *much* farther than last week. She remembered how exhausting that had been, how much her legs had ached...

A full visualization of the amount of work that still remained before she could finish freeing herself and get home to safety washed over her. Such a long journey, while still bound, still naked...

The heat and tingling between her legs flared once more. Thinking of all the time and effort needed to escape her bondage: somehow that always did it for her, an extra push up the hill of sexual arousal beyond the mere fact of being bound and in danger of discovery. Susan's hips began twitching on their own, each wiggle focusing her attention once more on the chain caressing her most intimate place. The movement spread through the rest of her body, each movement adding to her hyperawareness of the details of her bondage, the restriction of movements, her powerlessness to escape that restriction.

A tornado of orgasm seemed to fling her into the air, concentrating her existence into a whirling explosion of selfhood that overpowered and banished the outside world she so feared, made her bigger than all of it, pulsing within her, pulsing, pulsing... now fading...

She slept.

CHAPTER 4 – Sunday

Susan awoke, passed quickly through the usual disorientation, and spat water out of her mouth -- rain! It was raining lightly, though still warm. The ground around her, even underneath her, was already mud, so it had been raining for a while, she had no idea how long.

She realized the light looked wrong. It clearly wasn't nighttime anymore, but it was not exactly daytime either. Last night the sky, with its thick cloud cover, had reflected a uniform soft glow from the city lights. Now it was visible tufts of charcoal-gray cotton, barely brighter than it had been at night.

As she twisted around to try to see the dial of the combo lock, a gust of wind came and overstayed its welcome, rushing through the trees around her, making the branches wave as if they were trying to get her attention. With the wind came a sudden chill.

She knew what was coming, and a hollow formed in the pit of her stomach. I deserve this, she told herself, for refusing to check any weather forecasts.

Still twisted around at the waist, she sought the combo lock with her hand, trembling with fear rather than cold. She was sure before even looking that there wasn't enough light, but she had to try. 10-35-24. 10-35-24. I know how to get free but I need more light! she told herself. There was a picnic area with tables sheltered under a roof nearby. If she could just get herself loose from her hogtie and anchor, she could hop to it in less than a minute. She couldn't hear any sounds suggesting any early risers had come to the park yet. It probably wasn't officially open for the day yet, and in any case the weather surely must be discouraging any potential visitors. Susan could get to the picnic area with no one to see her, but she had to free herself from the anchor first.

She strained to try to get her eyes closer to the combo lock dial. She could see the dial itself, a black circle against a silvery outline, but couldn't make out any markings on it.

She shook the lock in frustration, as if that would help. The storm was coming through at *exactly* the wrong time. It was daytime, the park was deserted, and she could open the lock and get out of here, if the weather would just cooperate! Maybe, she thought, this will blow through quickly and I'll still have time. But *I need light!*

As if mocking her, the sky lit up for just a fraction of a second. A few seconds later, a staccato burst of sound was followed by a prolonged rumble.

She heard the heavier rain before she felt it, a steady, building, hissing sound. And then it was on her.

She had hoped the leaves above her would protect her, but all of the many gaps through which she had seen the sky last night were pathways for the rain to fall unimpeded, and all of the water diverted by leaves still had to reach the ground eventually, by a more circuitous route that often ended at Susan. In a few places the leaves served as funnels, concentrating waterfalls that Susan couldn't completely escape -- wriggling away from one only brought her under a new one, and several were hitting her at any one time.

She was shivering within seconds, and unable even to think about dialing the combination, even if she could see the dial. This rain was much heavier than the downpour last weekend, and Susan was suddenly overwhelmed by a mental image of her enclosure of bushes somehow holding all of the water within and filling to drown her. Near panic, she wrapped her shaking fingers around the anchor chain and yanked on it as hard as she could, over and over, though the sliver of her rational mind remaining told her that even if she could free herself of the anchor holding her here, the bushes forming the enclosure were too close together to allow her to slip out between them while lying hogtied on the ground. She gave in to random attempts to free herself from her bondage -- she knew she had tried every possibility last night, but that, she reminded herself, was before I thought I might die here if I don't get loose.

The storm played games with her, often giving her plenty of light with which to see the combo dial, but only for a split second at a time, and so bright it forced her to keep her eyes closed anyway. She wished she could close her ears as well.

Giving up on getting loose, she still had to keep her body in constant motion to generate heat as the rain poured down on her. She turned her head to face the ground to keep the water from running up her nose, keeping her head lifted as the water began pooling underneath her.

She had no way to measure the time the rain continued pouring down, but remained aware that her window was closing for avoiding being trapped all day nude and bound in a busy public park. If the rain stopped right this second, she thought, and the sky got brighter, I could probably be out of here before people start coming to the park. But the time is running out.

Her teeth were chattering by the time she saw, with hope, that the sky to the west was lightening, and she could see detail in the clouds there. A few minutes later the downpour was reduced to a steady light rain. Minutes later it was only a heavy mist, and she twisted around to look at the combo dial again. She could see vague markings around the perimeter now, but still not make out specific numbers. With better eyesight, she thought in frustration, I might be able to read it now, but my vision is what it is.

And she was still shivering, her hand trembling so that she didn't yet have the delicate control needed to manipulate the dial with the needed precision. Come on, she thought, come on, I've probably got only a few minutes now.

The temperature, though cooler than it had been for days, was warmer now that the rain was stopping, but it didn't help that there was now a half inch of standing water all through Susan's enclosure. She realized she must be in a slight depression, which had been impossible to perceive before. She recalled how the ground all through her trip to the park had seemed a little moist. The rain earlier in the week, she realized, had probably left it saturated, unable to absorb more water.

There was blue sky to the west, now, the first break in the cloud cover in more than a day. The sun, however, was in the east, still well hidden, and the daylight still dim.

Straining, as she had before, to get a closer look at the dial, her body squishing through water-covered mud as she moved, Susan was able at last to make out the small rounded numerals that had to be 00. She spent a minute or so wriggling strenuously, trying to warm herself enough to get control over the

shivering, and finally was able to start trying the combination. She spun the dial several turns clockwise, stopped at 10, and began turning counterclockwise towards 35. Halfway there, a spasm of continued shivering made her hand shake, and the dial jiggled slightly clockwise. She gritted her teeth in frustration, and decided to continue. She completed the combination, and as she expected, the lock failed to open.

I should have just started over as soon as I messed up, she told herself angrily. I knew it wasn't going to work.

She spun the dial again and started over, and again lost control before reaching 35. She started over immediately this time, increasingly feeling the time pressure.

On the third try, she got to 35, and then the dial jiggled during the short clockwise run to 24. She stopped at 24 anyway, and tried opening the lock. Nothing.

The sky was much brighter now, though probably, she told herself in frustration, not much brighter than it would have been an hour ago if the storm hadn't been passing through. The misting had stopped, and the air continued warming. Susan wriggled again for a time, and finally was able to stop shivering. She felt the familiar tingling between her legs, now, ignited by her struggles against her bondage, and forced the feeling away. I don't have time for that now!

And then she heard the thump of shoes running on asphalt. She froze, her heart pounding, but the thumping sound soon faded into the distance. A minute later she heard another runner.

Susan let out a sigh and subsided against the wet ground, as if she were a balloon whose air had all leaked out with the sigh. Too late, she moaned to herself. Joggers. The park is starting to fill with people.

Her background anxiety level rose higher than at any time yesterday, or last weekend. She'd spent hours beside the park during the daylight hours yesterday, but none of it *this* close to all the activity.

She still needed to open the lock quickly, so that she could sit up in the muck instead of wallowing in it. A further motivation was that if she were going to be discovered here in her hiding place, she wanted at least to be a little less helpless than she was now.

Twisting once more to see the dial, and squinting to pick out where 00 was again, she began once more to manipulate the dial. Less than a minute later, the shackle released with a satisfying *chink* sound. She dropped the combo lock on the ground, and unwound the hogtie chain. Free to straighten her legs now, she did so very gradually and carefully, aware that the pain of doing it suddenly, after her legs had been bent double all night, would probably make her scream.

Now I could leave the bush enclosure if I wanted to, she thought dispiritedly, and hop away. But not without being seen.

She was hungry and thirsty. At least she could do something about that.

She was no longer hogtied, but her hands were still trapped behind her. As before, she ate from the pile of nuts, now an island surrounded by the shallow lake the ground had become. She drank a full bottle of water, in the same way she had yesterday, having to grip it by her teeth as she drank.

She sat upright now, though in a slouched posture to avoid raising her head too high.

Nothing left to do, now, except pass the time -- fifteen or sixteen hours, she guessed -- until the park lights were turned off. And hope like hell this enclosure was as opaque as it seemed to be.

* * * * *

Susan learned how slowly time can pass when there is absolutely nothing to do. She couldn't even distract herself today by watching the tennis -- yesterday she had been far enough away in the dim recess of the woods that she felt relatively safe from observation, but today felt far too uncomfortable with the idea of sticking her head up above the level of the bushes forming the wall of her enclosure, and the entire park around her was invisible to her -- not that she could use that blindness to her surroundings to convince herself there weren't dozens, perhaps hundreds of people near her, since she could easily hear all the activity. She simply sat and listened, leaning back against the bush behind her as a prickly cushion, tensing whenever a sound seemed too close, as one did every few minutes.

Yet as physically miserable as she felt, and as frightened as she so often was, the background level of sexual arousal never entirely let go, always present if not always conscious. She could, at any instant, bring it to the forefront of her mind simply by pulling lightly at her wrist cuffs, or twisting her feet around in their restraints. She had to tell herself to stop doing it, because giving herself release by masturbation now was out of the question -- she never felt sure exactly what sounds she had been making after each of her orgasms the last couple of days, except to be fairly certain they would be too loud now. She promised herself she would seek out that release as soon as she could establish some distance from anyone who might hear.

The sun had emerged at last, and disappointed Susan by telling her it was still morning -- she'd thought, or hoped, it must be late afternoon by now. The tree leaves above her, which had done such a terrible job protecting her from the rain, at least gave her some protection from sunburn now -- only small bits of direct sunlight found the gaps between the leaves, making sparkling and erratically moving spots on her skin. The temperature was tolerably warm, and her shivering had eventually stopped, but it worried Susan a little to note that the weather front that had brought the storm had considerably dryer air behind it. She knew what that meant for tonight's temperatures: though the season for freezing nights was long gone, the inability of dry air to hold onto the heat of the day meant tonight was going to be uncomfortably cold.

Near noon, Susan found she needed to pee, and her first reaction was only resignation to the need to empty her bladder without the convenience of a toilet, an idea to which she was growing accustomed, but a sudden realization sent her mind spinning, searching for an acceptable solution: she was still sitting in a puddle of standing water that she couldn't get out of. The puddle covered the entire area she could physically reach, since even though the anchor chain was no longer holding her, she couldn't leave the safety of the enclosure with so many people around. Her only choice was to pee into the puddle, and afterward sit in toilet water for the rest of the day!

Could she leave her fortress even if she wanted to? She considered pushing through the bushes on the side away from the park, but they were packed too close together to let her through in a sitting position no matter how she tried it, and even from behind the enclosure she risked being seen from the jogging trail, at the least. She couldn't even take the chance of rising high enough to peek over the tops of the bushes in front to see whether anyone was in a position to see her: someone might be looking in her direction just at that moment. Standing upright, the only way she could leave the enclosure, was not under consideration.

And the food! It was sitting in the puddle too! Even though most of it was still piled in a tiny hill that stood above the water, she was sure she wouldn't be able to make herself eat it once it was surrounded by diluted urine.

To solve that much of the problem, at least, she squirmed up into a hunched-over kneeling position, bent down and took in several mouthfuls of the trail mix, more of it than she felt she really needed just now, eating quickly because her bladder wasn't going to let her wait much longer. The salt in the nuts made her suddenly thirsty, but her willingness to take in any more water just now was limited. A drink could wait: the bottles wouldn't be hurt by a little pee on the outside.

She sat abruptly as a new idea struck her. Scraping first her heels, and then the outer side of her right foot against the ground, she tried to force the mud into a pile that stood above the puddle. Gradually, as she fought off pains from her bladder and clamped down as hard as she could, she formed her mud sculpture into a circular island about six inches across, and then pounded down with her heel in the center to make a cup-shaped depression. She got up onto her knees once more, again careful to keep her head down, knee-walked towards the pile and then directly over it, and finally let go, a cascade of pee running into the depression.

The piss pooled in the depression, and then quickly sank into the loose soil. And probably, Susan thought, out through it into the rest of the puddle, but I'm going to say it didn't. I did the best I could. I'll sit down and not think about it. But I'm not touching any more of the food. That lunch I just ate is going to have to last me.

She sat down gingerly, shrugged, and leaned back against the bush once more, trying to let her mind go blank and time pass.

* * * * *

Letting her mind go blank, she decided eventually, left her open to falling asleep, which she was afraid to do, in case she slid over onto her side and drowned in the puddle. She pulled against the chains, which once again elevated her arousal to the point of wanting more, wanting orgasm -- another of her fears. She finally focused on the slowly moving spots of sunlight on the surface of the water surrounding her, watching each until it either blanked out or left the enclosure before picking out another one. Around her, she could hear all the same sounds as yesterday -- the joggers, the tennis players, the baseball games in progress farther away -- all of which maintained a background level of dread that she could only push away by observing that in all this time she hadn't been seen, and that as long as she remained as motionless as possible, nothing bad could happen to her.

She had mixed feelings about finding she had to pee again. As before, she couldn't simply do it sitting where she was, and over the hours she had found a feeling of relative safety in sitting perfectly still. Yet it did give her something to do, and using her self-constructed toilet had proven safe in the past.

She was relieved, in more than one way, afterward. She resumed her posture as a seated statue.

* * * * *

Susan knew the sun was close to setting, now. She couldn't see it through the bushes, but the light was dimming, and had progressed through yellowing to reddening. No clouds were responsible for the loss of light. It's for real, she told herself, marveling that no matter how slowly time passes, it does eventually pass. Any past life before her sojourn in her fortress of bushes seemed imaginary, as if all her real life had been spent here.

As the sky began purpling, Susan became aware of a new silvery light above and behind her, partially visible through the gaps in the leaves above her as the sun had been earlier. She worried for a time that a brand new lamppost had been constructed during the day without her noticing the activity, which would make her visible to one and all, but the light seemed a different color from that coming from the park's lights. It occurred to her at last that it was the moon, missing behind the clouds all though last night, and invisible to her personally the night before because of her blindfold -- it would have set by the time she got the blindfold off. Last weekend the moon had been a useless thin crescent Saturday night, setting a couple of hours after the sun, a non-factor all through the night. Now, eight nights later, it was more than half full, and trailed the sun by about nine hours. It would reach its high point in the sky at around 10 o'clock -- just about the time the park lights would go out, allowing her to leave her enclosure. At least she *hoped* she could leave it then. The moon might hurt her by making her visible, or it might help by making her surroundings visible to her. It depended on how bright it was.

As the sky slowly, so slowly, darkened, Susan felt an odd buildup of conflicting emotions: relief that she was safer from detection than before, as long as she remained within the darkness of the bushes; excitement that she would soon be able to move; fear of what would happen when she did. She was still trapped in the enclosure. She could hear the sounds of tennis balls against cement and racquet continuing unabated under the lights, and occasional passing joggers along the well-illuminated path, and any of these people would easily spot Susan if she rose to a standing position right now.

The air was getting noticeably cooler. It was a good thing, she decided, that getting back to her apartment was going to take a lot of physical effort -- being out naked on a night like this, she was going to need to generate a lot of body heat.

The thought of all that effort renewed the tingling between her legs. She thrust the image of her return trip out of her mind.

* * * * *

Once the sky, to the extent it was visible through the leaves, turned black -- what would that make it now, she wondered, about eight-thirty? -- Susan listened intently to the sounds around her to judge their decline. The sounds of tennis continued for, she estimated, a half-hour to an hour, but stopped at last. Conversations from the court went on, and she wondered whether another group would start play momentarily, but she felt a thump of excitement when the court lights suddenly went out. Someone, of

course, might still arrive to turn them back on, but that seemed unlikely -- it was probably too late to begin a match, and there was always tomorrow. The general lighting of the park was still on, and joggers still passed, but less frequently, at intervals of several minutes.

Susan felt cold, now -- already the temperature was clearly lower than it had been at any time in these last three nights. She wished she could get moving toward home, just to warm up, but that was still impossible. An alternative way of warming up -- masturbating -- was also out of the question. Too many people still close enough to hear the sounds she knew she couldn't help making.

After an extended break between joggers, the park lights, at last, went out. It's time, Susan thought, I can get out of here! Before she made a move, a memory came back from last night, and she froze, ordering herself to wait.

As unwelcome as her experience last night in the restroom had been, Susan was very grateful for it now, as she knew to expect the footsteps she heard now on the jogging path, walking rather than running. The beam of a flashlight passed directly over her hideout for an instant -- exactly where she would be standing now if she hadn't stopped herself. Minutes later she heard a voice, from the direction of the restrooms, call out "Anybody here?" -- the same voice that had panicked her last night, checking for occupancy of the room. The call was repeated a minute later, for the men's room. Afterward she could barely hear footsteps going away, the sound diminishing, gone.

Now it was safe to move. As far as she knew. Though she told herself to continue waiting. The safety, she was sure, would gradually increase as time went on.

Resigned to waiting out a short interval before emerging from the bushes she had hidden among for twenty-four hours, Susan wasn't prepared when her background level of sexual arousal, never at any time absent as long as she was in any way bound, exploded within her. She had been holding it down, with effort, with promises to take care of her need as soon as it was safe. That time was now, the need told her, and it didn't want to wait any longer. Unexpectedly it went on to remind her that the hogtie chain was still here, the anchor chain was still here, and the combo lock was still here, and it would be so much more thrilling to be hogtied! As exciting as it always was to be bound, it would be still more exciting to be bound *more!*

Susan shook her head vehemently, as if it had been an audible voice speaking to her. It was not, and it didn't seem to be Suzy either. The thrill of bondage had always been one of the two most basic, fundamental pieces of Susan's identity, along with her shyness. Suzy was new. Susan's fascination with bondage was not.

It was the two most central parts of Susan's selfhood that were at war now -- her need to be walled away from human contact, against her need to be helpless against limitations to her own movements.

Unable to stop herself, she wriggled across the enclosure now towards where she knew the hogtie chain to be, invisible in the darkness under the still-present-but-thinning depth of rainwater. She felt under the water, in the mud, with her fingers, searching... there it was. She pulled it free of the mud, immediately lay on her side, and pulled one end of the chain through the padlock holding her wrist cuffs together.

Shy Susan, the part of her that needed to get home to the safe harbor of her apartment, desperately outlined all the reasons against what Bondage Susan was doing. I can't open the combo lock at night! she reminded Bondage Susan. I'd very likely be stuck here another twenty-four hours, all through a day that would undoubtedly be even busier than today in the park, probably the busiest day of the year, because it will probably be unsafe to leave these bushes once it's light enough to see the lock dial! And I don't have any food! It's all ruined in mud! And I'd have to spend all the hours of darkness lying in this mud puddle, unable to sit up, and I'd have to pee sometime, adding urine to the water I'm lying in! Remember that? Remember why I made the toilet? Which I can't use if I'm hogtied? And I'd be lying in piss, and that's way worse than sitting on my butt in it! I'll spend twenty-four hours starving after lying awake all night so I don't drown in toilet water! And I wouldn't be able to get home until the wee hours of Tuesday! Just a few hours before I have to show up at work! I'd be a total zombie at the library, if I can even get there!

A further thought made Susan gasp. It's going to get colder, Shy Susan told Bondage Susan, and if I spend the whole night lying in this water I could die of hypothermia! Please, please don't do this!

Bondage Susan continued, immune to any rational argument, intent only on reaching that explosive orgasm she knew she could have, wanting it, needing it. Bending her lower legs back, bringing her feet within reach of her hands, threading both ends of the chain through the padlock between her ankle cuffs in opposite directions, pulling them through, feeling through the mud for the combo lock -- there it is! -- and the end of the anchor chain -- found it! -- threading the shackle of the padlock through a link of the anchor chain and the links of the chain going both to her ankles and from her ankles. Adrenaline flooded Susan's body, making her tremble all over, and her hips twitched with a tingling that was almost a buzzing between her legs, building stronger by the second as she started to squeeze the combo lock closed.

Susan cried out suddenly as an agonizing cramp seized her fingers, all of them at once, making her automatically straighten them out to stretch the muscles, to relieve the pain. And Shy Susan felt a mandate -- without words, but as close to resembling an audible voice from within that she couldn't help thinking of it that way -- to work herself to her orgasm *now*, while her body felt helplessly hogtied but the lock was not yet closed.

Susan worked every muscle in her body rhythmically, rocking back and forth on the ground, softly moaning with the buildup of arousal, receiving and collating sensations from every part of her body -- the hands trapped against her back despite every effort of her straining arm muscles, the feet she couldn't separate or draw away from her butt though her thigh and calf muscles tried so hard, and above all, amid the twitching of her hips, that crotch chain that made her tingle, then buzz, then quake between her legs...

She spilled over into orgasm, every fiber of her existence quivering in flames and ice, feeling again that there was no hostile universe around her because all of the universe was inside her, not surrounding her but herself surrounding it.

She fainted.

* * * * *

Susan came awake, still glowing in the residual heat of her climax, immediately aware of still being hogtied, and knowing she had to get herself out of it while Bondage Susan was basking in the sexual satisfaction that now dominated Susan's emotional state.

She felt for the combo lock, terrified that she might have closed it while her body had overwhelmed her mind during the orgasm, and was intensely relieved to find it still open. Yanking it free of the links of the chains, she quickly squeezed it closed and dropped it on the ground, and untangled the hogtie chain, straightening out her legs once more.

Safe now from self-imposed disaster, Susan blinked at a sudden insight into what had just happened. As she had felt earlier, and believed even more strongly now, it was not Suzy who had just now been making her act without regard for consequences. On the contrary, it was Suzy, acting on some sort of self-preservation emergency powers, who had blocked Susan from taking the final action of closing the combo lock that her bondage compulsion was pushing her towards, a compulsion Susan herself had been utterly unable to fight against on her own. It was Suzy who had seized control of her hand to stop Susan when Susan had tried to close the lock, and it was Suzy who had told her how to block the compulsion by seeking out the sexual release she craved before it would have dire consequences. Though Suzy knew that the element of danger, and helplessness in the face of it, was required in order for Susan to reach the ultimate heights of sexual satisfaction, and had therefore put Susan in exactly that danger and helplessness, Suzy had seen that Susan was now going well beyond the boundaries of Dangerous and invading the land of Stupid. Suzy wanted Susan to be able to get maximum enjoyment out of her bondage fetish. The next twenty-four hours wouldn't have been enjoyable at all, and would put Susan in imminent danger of losing her job, and perhaps her life.

Susan was more strongly determined than ever to trust Suzy. Always trust Suzy.

CHAPTER 5 – Sunday Night

As her breathing returned to normal, Susan began to feel cold again. It was time to get moving.

She counted to three hundred as she listened intently for any human-made sounds other than car traffic. At last, telling herself forcefully there was no one around, she worked to stand up.

At least she still had water. She decided she could carry two of the bottles with her -- she didn't see how she could manage more. They might come in very handy later. She took one bottle in each hand behind her. There was nothing else she could use her hands for anyway.

Getting standing was harder than she'd anticipated. The bushes around her were much too yielding to lean back against for leverage. She ended up pressing her head against the ground, still covered in a thin layer of water, rolling onto her knees and rocking her weight back to get onto her feet.

She bit her lip, nearly whimpering in fear as she slowly straightened from a crouch to stand upright. It seemed impossible anyone could see her in the darkness, but for the first time in twenty-four hours there were uninterrupted sightlines between her and any potential witnesses in the surrounding area. She hadn't really thought ahead about how that would hit her. She stood still for several minutes, sweeping her eyes back and forth for any movement that could signal danger.

Getting out of the enclosure was also more work than she'd expected -- it had been easy enough to get into it last night, but she'd had full freedom of movement then. There was a big enough gap between the root systems of two of the bushes on the back side of the enclosure that she could squeeze between them while standing, but a careful effort at moving ahead by hopping nearly sent her over backwards because of branches pressing her legs unevenly from both sides that interfered with her balance. She could only move sideways through the gap by the one-inch baby steps the ankle cuffs allowed her, while twigs, branches, and leaves scraped at her lower legs, until she was through. She continued shuffling until she was out of the water-filled depression in which her bush enclosure was centered, and stopped. For the first time since awakening this morning she was on dry ground.

Free of surrounding encumbrances at last, Susan looked around, deciding where to go. And how to get there. She was way too far from home for baby steps to be practical. Last weekend she had covered some ground by knee-walking but tonight's trip was, again, too far for that -- she would rip all the skin off her knees long before getting home. She knew hopping was going to exhaust her, but there was no other choice.

But the big trouble with hopping was that she could see almost nothing of the ground or surrounding vegetation. She was sure her eyes must be fully dilated by now, but she could barely see more than a hint of hazards such as rocks, uneven ground, bushes, or trees. A tiny amount of moonlight was filtering through the leaves from overhead, but not enough. Behind her, the park itself was much better lit by the moon.

She shivered briefly as the cool breeze stiffened for a moment into a stronger gust. Whatever she decided to do, she knew, she'd better get moving. It was only going to get colder as the night went on.

She hated the idea, but she knew she had to start by getting closer to Stockhouse Boulevard. There were more streetlights along it here than farther out of town where she lived. She should, she decided, be able to stay far enough behind the woods to remain invisible while being able to see where she was going. And she needed to get to the street by going through the park. The danger of being seen in the park, at this time of night, was minimal next to the physical dangers of hopping through terrain full of unseen obstacles.

She could see the trees between herself and the park as black columns blocking the view of the dimly moonlit landscape. Crouching to get a better look at the ground and examining it before each move, she headed, about one hop every five seconds, towards the park.

She stopped, still within the trees, once the ground became adequately visible. She shivered again, this time with sudden fear. It seemed surreal that she was standing here, where she would have been instantly visible to all of the tennis players, joggers, and picnickers who had filled the park all through the day as she lay hidden, up until just an hour ago.

She began hopping parallel to the edge of the woods towards the street.

As soon as she reached the area into which the illumination provided by streetlights spread, she turned to hop parallel to the street, towards home.

* * * * *

Susan's latest fear was that she would collapse before reaching home. She had thought last weekend was exhausting, but now she really knew how it felt to be running on fumes long before the goal was reached.

She knew she hadn't been getting enough sleep. Even Thursday night she had fretted most of the night about talking to Ms. Corcoran about getting the time off in the afternoon, and sleep had only come in bits and pieces since then. She wanted so badly to lie down and close her eyes, but she was sure that she wouldn't be able to wake up before sunrise, leaving her stuck another full day out here. Without food.

She wasn't even halfway home yet. She felt as though it had been at least an hour since she'd left the park behind, but it was still clearly visible behind her. It wasn't just a matter of how tiring it was to hop. She had to pause after each hop, using the minimal light available to her to plan her next hop, examining the ground ahead of her for bushes she might trip over, trees she might bang into, or sharp protruding rocks that her bare feet might land on. The ground was also still spotted with puddles of standing water of various sizes, which she generally avoided, especially the larger ones, unable to see what was under the surface. And every time a car approached from either direction -- at least their headlights made them easy to spot a long way off -- she had to crouch down behind the nearest sufficiently tall bush and wait until it had gone by. The crouching especially was murder on her thigh muscles. Kneeling would be easier, except it was so much additional work to get back on her feet afterward that crouching seemed preferable. She might change her mind later.

She could only make better time at the cost of greater danger. Closer to the street the light was better, and that was what she needed in order to move faster, but she was well aware that she herself would be more visible. It wasn't just the passing cars. The side of the street she was on had remained

undeveloped beyond the park, but on the other side there were occasional houses, some of them with lights on, almost certainly indicating occupants still awake. She didn't think it could be midnight yet, more likely closer to eleven. As she got farther along the street and the clock crept ahead, the cars would become more rare and the houses more sparse, with more of the residents in bed. That would help her move faster later, but now was now. She thought about waiting a few hours, but it was getting too cold to remain motionless for any length of time, and there was, again, that danger of falling asleep.

She was getting very thirsty. At least she could do something about that. She squatted and carefully fell onto her butt, her two water bottles gripped behind her. Sitting on the ground, she screwed the top off one and set it upright, turned on her side and used her elbows to help her get up onto her knees, and knee-walked to the standing bottle, clamped her teeth around it and lifted it up to drink. With a lot of practice, she was getting good at it. She drained about half the bottle. She wanted more, but knew she needed to save it. She capped the bottle, and picked it and the full one up. Rocking her weight back, she got onto her feet again -- and thought for a moment her aching legs weren't going to lift her. She gritted her teeth and overcame the muscle fatigue. She shivered -- the dry, cool air evaporated her sweat quickly -- examined the ground around her, hopped forward, checked the ground again, and hopped again.

* * * * *

Susan could hear the creek before she saw it, which surprised her. She didn't recall it sounding like that before.

With a feeling of deep foreboding, she looked ahead and behind for traffic on the street, and for houses on the other side. It was safer, for the time being, to hop over a little closer to the street to get better light. She wanted to get to the creek quickly to see if what she feared was true.

The immediate area on either side of the creek was lit better by moonlight than the woods, as the forest canopy parted above the creek. Susan hopped to the edge, where the ground dropped off precipitously to the level of the creek. As soon as she could see the creek, she closed her eyes, shook her head, and moaned aloud.

Yesterday there had been a gently sloping shore leading down to the creek, below an embankment in the form of a vertical three-foot drop-off from the surrounding ground level. Now the shore was gone. The water came all the way to the embankment, and had come about a foot up the side of it. And the relatively gentle flow of yesterday had become a headlong rush.

That rainstorm this morning. It had done a lot more than make her unspeakably miserable. She had given some thought to the creek, but not much -- she knew it would have been collecting the rainfall from the surrounding area, but had told herself that surely by this time the level would be back to normal. But she knew now that she hadn't thought the subject through. When the rain had stopped for *her* this morning, that didn't mean there was no rain anywhere. It had moved on, continuing to fall elsewhere. It might very well have rained for hours, at places farther and farther away, the waters draining into this creek upstream from here -- and all that water had then taken hours to flow back here. It may even have rained for a longer time farther upstream than it had here -- it was possible she herself had only caught the edge of a much more extensive storm. The water level in the creek might actually still be rising.

She saw headlights coming. She hopped away from the street, parallel to the creek, and crouched behind a bush. At least there was enough light here for safe movement.

Susan remembered her crossing yesterday, how the flowing water had tried to take her with it. She hadn't been in any danger, but she'd had to set her knees apart as she walked through it. Knee-walking through the stream was out of the question now -- standing on her knees the water would probably be up to her neck, at least. Even standing upright, it would probably be above her waist, and her only way to move standing up was hopping. She wouldn't hop far, she knew: the flowing water would push her over and carry her with it. And she would have no way out. With her unable to use her hands to grab onto anything stationary -- and from where she stood now she couldn't even see such a handhold anyway -- she would be washed downstream for miles without any way to stop herself. Not that she would need to worry about how to hop all those miles back afterwards. She would have drowned early on.

Of course, Stockhouse Boulevard had a bridge over the creek, not thirty feet from where Susan was standing. A well-lit bridge, with streetlights at both ends. Last weekend Susan had hopped across Stockhouse near her apartment building, taking advantage of the darkness at the place where she crossed. On the bridge, she wouldn't have the darkness to hide her, and to cross the bridge she'd have to hop, she estimated, about three times as far as she had in crossing the street. And once she was on the bridge, she'd have no way to duck quickly back into the woods. She'd be exposed, very visible, and hopelessly trapped if a car should approach suddenly.

Not to mention being visible, in a well-lit area, from either of the two houses across the street, adjacent to the creek on either side of it.

Susan began shaking -- from fear, not from cold. She had no way home. She couldn't cross the creek, either by wading through it or using the bridge over it. Suzy hadn't foreseen this. The creek wasn't like it was before.

Susan looked again at those two houses, one of them on her side of the creek, one on the other side, hoping to see *some* sign that they would not present a danger to her. Each had a large cleared yard that abutted the creek. People in those houses would easily see Susan hopping across the bridge. At the moment, each house had a light on in a front-facing room. It was safe to assume someone was awake in each house -- or more to the point, unsafe to assume no one was.

Susan stood biting her lip, asking herself, What do I do, what do I do?

I've only got two options, she told herself. No, three. No, four.

She could try wading through the creek itself -- without the use of her hands, without being able to separate her feet. She looked at it again, rushing past, impossible for her to stand upright in, waiting to sweep her away and smash her against rocks she couldn't avoid. She shuddered. Cross that one off. Don't even bother thinking about that one again.

She could wait to see whether the flood settled down. She could cross if the water level and speed were the same as it had been yesterday when she'd crossed -- admittedly with no physical handicaps at the time, but she still knew she could make it. But there was no way to tell how long until the overflow

spent itself, and there were only a few hours before dawn, when the rising sun would trap her outside for another full day -- and without food, as she had so often reminded herself. Already she was starving, after insufficient food for the last two days. She couldn't imagine adding another full day to that. Susan shook her head. Cross another off.

She could explore the creek in the direction away from the street, looking for another way to cross it. The creek might widen at some point, making it more shallow and probably slowing its flow, but there wasn't really a reason to expect that. The big trouble was that there wouldn't be enough light. Even before the moon set, it would soon be too low in the sky to shine down directly into the area around the creek, with its light blocked by the trees. And moving away from the street meant losing the illumination from the streetlights as well. Without streetlights or moonlight, she would be moving in utter blackness in less than an hour, and even if there was a place she could cross, she'd never see it. She'd have to give up and come back, and that presented its own problems. In total darkness, she could follow the creek to return to here, but only by sound -- and having to stay close to a rushing creek she couldn't see in order to keep her bearings would put her in extreme danger of falling into it. So instead she'd have to simply stop when she lost the light, trapping her in place until morning.

Another option off the list.

And that left only the Stockhouse Boulevard bridge. Breathing hard in fear, Susan looked at the bridge again. As if to emphasize her fears of using that means of crossing the creek, a car passed over it just then, followed about twenty seconds later by another going the opposite direction. Several minutes passed without another, but the sudden traffic reminded her that cars could come whizzing by at any time, and if she was in the middle of the bridge when she spotted one coming, there was nothing she could do, nowhere to go. And there were still those houses, with lighted front windows with a perfect view of the well-lit bridge. The occupants of one or both houses might well be people who habitually left a light burning all night, to discourage burglars. Susan's parents did exactly that. So they might be burning all night, and Susan would have to assume someone was awake in those rooms to see her. Even if all vehicular traffic on Stockhouse were to stop, there were still those windows. And vehicular traffic was *not* going to stop.

Cross the street bridge off the list.

There was nothing left. That was all of the possibilities. I'm totally trapped here, Susan told herself, as her stomach tied itself in knots. No way to cross the creek tonight. And tomorrow night, the creek would still be there. Maybe by *that* time the water level would be down. There was no guarantee.

Susan, despairing, looked at the houses again, on opposite sides of the creek. She visualized neighbors from the two houses getting together for a barbecue, for the holiday tomorrow, talking and laughing about the crazy girl who had...

Susan blinked. Neighbors indeed. They probably did know each other, spent some time visiting each other's houses.

When one family visited the other, did they all pile into a car, back out of the driveway, drive across the bridge, a road trip of all of fifteen seconds, and pull into the other's driveway? Did they come on foot,

walking across a street bridge with no pedestrian walkway that got busy with traffic every weekday morning and late afternoon?

Or had they, in a neighborly way, constructed a footbridge across the creek?

A moment of intense excitement in Susan gave way to fretting. She couldn't see any such footbridge from here. The creek ran at an angle to the street, approximately parallel to the ravine that ran near her own apartment building, and if there was a footbridge, it would be invisible from here, behind the house on the left. All of Susan's hopes now rested on the use of a footbridge she couldn't be sure existed.

And the danger of even looking for it, let alone using it, presented itself. She would have to cross the street to find the hypothetical footbridge. She had to do that eventually anyway, but she couldn't do it here. There was way too much light, and she'd be crossing into the front yard of one of the houses. She would have to backtrack some distance to an area between streetlights, cross, and come back to the creek. The footbridge, if any, would also probably be visible from one or both houses, and the area around the footbridge would be illuminated in moonlight, at the least. She would probably be visible approaching the footbridge, and perhaps even more visible while crossing the bridge itself.

But there weren't any other choices.

There'd better be a footbridge, she told herself. There is no other possible way I can cross this creek before morning.

Susan wanted badly to rest for a while. Her legs were trembling from fatigue. But she'd stopped too long already, and a much more general shivering from the cold told her she needed to get moving.

She began hopping parallel to the street, away from the creek, very conscious of the fact that, as exhausted as she was and desperate to get home, she was now moving *away* from that ultimate goal.

* * * * *

Susan thought she had been standing in the woods, looking out at Stockhouse Boulevard, for what must have been an hour. She understood it was probably more in the neighborhood of ten minutes, magnified by her growing discomfort and her fear that time was growing short. She wanted to be ready to start hopping across the instant she thought it was safe, so she couldn't sit on the ground. Standing still, she grew colder, but hopping around to generate body heat made her legs that much more tired. As she had waited, two cars had passed, each one shattering her resolve, requiring her to rebuild it from scratch.

Across the street, there were the two houses on opposite sides of the creek, the nearer one about a hundred feet to her right. To her left, again on the opposite side of the street, was a third house about twice as far from her as the others. She had to stay farther from that one -- there was greater danger of being seen from that one. The moon, still a few hours from setting, cast its light down from that direction, and its soft light would make her more visible from that side as she crossed. There were streetlights on either side of the creek bridge, in front of the houses to her right, but she was far enough from them -- she hoped -- that they were a less significant problem than the moonlight. Crossing here

was her only real option -- beyond the house on her left, in the direction towards town from which she'd just come, the houses and streetlights were closer together.

The front windows in the house to her left, the one from which she thought she was most likely to be seen from here, were dark. Those in the houses adjacent to the creek were still lit, but Susan felt safe from them here. Her earlier judgment about moonrise and moonset implied it must be about 1 a.m. now. She would prefer to wait another hour or two, but as inconvenient as the moon was right now, she had a feeling she might need its light later.

The "Go now, go now!" imperative was growing louder in her head, her own self-exhortation that owed nothing to Suzy, as far as Susan knew. There were no human-generated sounds in the vicinity that she could detect, only the chirp of crickets and the riffing of leaves in the slight breeze. She hated that breeze. Intermittent though it was, it made her colder every time it sighed past her.

She was aware of her thirst, on top of everything else. She had gone longer than she should without drinking, after all her exertion. She still held one full water bottle and one partly filled. She considered finishing off the part-filled one, which would not only refresh her but also relieve her of having to carry that bottle any longer, but the process of getting a drink was so elaborate -- dropping to her knees, uncapping the bottle and setting it upright carefully behind her, then dropping to lie on the ground, clamping her teeth around the neck of the bottle and lifting and tilting it with her mouth -- that it took some determination to do it, and the process of getting back upright so strenuous as to worry her about her ability to do it in her exhausted, muscle-fatigued state. And she recognized the wish for a drink as one more way of putting off the terrifying prospect of the street-crossing. It had been scary enough doing it last weekend, and that had been in a less busy, less well-lit area. She promised herself a drink after she'd crossed.

She looked left and right one more time, for any sight of a car in the distance, or sound that would indicate that one might be about to turn one of the corners of the side streets onto Stockhouse. Finally, biting her lip, squeezing her eyes shut for a moment to concentrate on providing herself the mental impetus, she hopped forward into the street.

She was appalled by how loud the repeated thumping of her feet hitting the pavement seemed. She nearly turned around to hop back to the safety of the trees, but reminded herself forcefully this was her only way of getting home.

Her breath caught in her throat as she saw, to her left, a glow telling her a car, exactly as she had feared, was approaching Stockhouse from a side street. Again she nearly turned around, but at this point she was nearly at the halfway point in her crossing. But the break in her rhythm of hopping interfered with her balance, and in her concentration on recovering it the fingers of her right hand, curled around the neck of the partly-filled water bottle, lost their grip. As the bottle slipped downward she instinctively tried to close both hands around it, saw her mistake an instant too late, and lost her hold on the full bottle as well, both of the bottles hitting the pavement a split-second apart. The instinct to reach for them before they fell away nearly caused her to pitch over to the side and go sprawling full-length on the pavement, and she battled with all her concentration to maintain her balance -- if she fell now, with a car already approaching, she knew she would never have time to get back on her feet before it arrived.

She righted herself at last. With no way to pick the bottles up other than dropping to her knees in the middle of the street, and with the glow brightening to her left, she suppressed a squeal of frustration and resumed hopping. She saw a light come on in the window of the house on the left -- they must have heard the bottles hit, she screamed to herself, they heard it! -- and she leaned farther forward, her hopping barely under control. By the time the glowing headlights to her left became visible as the car reached Stockhouse, she was across, onto the dirt, leaning too far ahead to keep her balance. She went tumbling in the dirt, and wriggled several feet farther ahead until she was past the front line of trees.

She watched from the ground as the car turned in the direction towards her onto Stockhouse. She rolled quickly, farther behind the trees, twisting afterward to look again at the newly-lit house to watch for any movement. The car passed. As she waited, her heart pounding, unable to breathe, she saw the window in the house darken a few minutes later. Apparently whoever had heard the sound of the bottles dropping had not reached the window in time to see any movement.

Susan lay still, her heart only very gradually slowing, nearly crying from mingled relief and lingering terror. She looked back into the street, and could make out her two bottles lying there, almost exactly in the middle of the street. She couldn't possibly retrieve them without spending a far longer time in the street than she just had, since she had no way to pick them up without sitting on the pavement. They might as well not exist.

She was far more conscious of her thirst, now that she couldn't do anything about it. Most frustrating of all, she could hear the murmuring of flowing water from the nearby creek, yet that water was just as inaccessible as the bottles were. She could get to the creek quickly, at the price of risking exposure, but the water itself was out of her reach other than by diving into it, and its rapid flow, and her inability to use her hands, still presented that deadly risk of being swept away helplessly until she drowned.

She might, she thought, drink from one of the puddles on the ground. It was too dark to see any from where she lay. There might not even be any left. They had been fewer and smaller as she had traveled this far from the park, and by now the water may have all been absorbed back into the ground.

With no way to satisfy her thirst, she worked to put it out of her mind. Finding a way home was the priority.

And the only way, she moaned to herself, was to cross the footbridge that may not exist.

Time, like the creek water, was flowing past quickly. As she had so many times before, she rolled onto her front side, pressed her head against the ground to lift the middle of her body until she was up on her knees, and rocked back to her feet, at first in a squat and then, almost beyond the strength remaining in her leg muscles, rising to an upright position. She began hopping among the trees towards that nearer house.

CHAPTER 6 – Monday Morning

Susan stopped, looking at the house in front of her, and stood shivering, biting her lip. Her trip from the park had been a succession of choices of the least-bad option. Hop or knee walk? Hop under the cover of the trees, exposing her to the danger of unseen obstacles, or nearer the street in better lighting, exposing her to possibly being seen? Risk death crossing the creek, or near-certainty of being caught hopping across the bridge, or look for a footbridge that might not be there? She had made all those choices so far.

She was about fifty feet from the house on the near side of the creek. It was as close as she could get before making another decision.

The trees had been cleared away from the property up to a point just in front of her. She could see the side of the house, and it had two windows on this side -- dark, but uncovered by curtains or blinds, so she didn't want to come out of the trees anywhere near them. The side yard was illuminated partly by moonlight, partly by the streetlamp, the latter being cut off behind a certain point by the corner of the house, the light being much dimmer behind that point.

She could see what appeared to be a fence enclosing the back yard. She had hopped slightly closer to it. It looked like it began at the back corner of the house, with a length of it parallel to the street which, she assumed, would contain a gate into the yard, then turned at a right angle to form the side boundary of the back yard. She was seeing only the top of the fence, if that's what it was, about six feet high, a straight line illuminated by moonlight to a shade just slightly lighter than the blackness below it. Even that amount of light faded out after about twenty feet or so, probably due to the trees coming closer to it and blocking the moonlight. She assumed fence went on farther into the blackness, because it seemed certain the yard would be more than twenty feet deep. But that was just a guess.

Susan had to get past the house to reach the creek. Hopping across the well-lit front yard, in full view of the house's occupants, was out of the question. But going behind it presented problems as well.

She could see absolutely nothing in that direction, beyond the point where the moonlight showing the top of the fence ended. If it was because the tree line was closer to the fence back there, then visibility wouldn't get any better as she came closer to it. If there were gaps in the fence, she should be able to see the yard through it, lit by moonlight. There seemed to be no such gaps. It seemed to be an unbroken wall, most likely of wood. She had anticipated something more like a short picket fence, which would have been *much* better, but a tall solid fence made sense as she thought about it. With the property right at the edge of a dense forest, the purpose of the fence would be to keep large animals out.

She hoped any such large animals were asleep at present.

If she went that way, it looked like she would be completely blind: being behind the fence, she would get no light from the house itself or the moonlit yard because the fence was blocking it, no light from the streetlamp because the house was blocking it, and no light from the moon because the trees were blocking it.

And the area behind the house was no place to be blind. The creek generally followed a line that would take it directly behind this house -- and not very far behind it. The depth of the yard, in fact, would be limited by the creek, and it was possible that the yard went as far as it could in that direction, to within a few feet of the creek. And the creek was not, of course, a perfectly straight line. It took unpredictable twists and turns. It wouldn't be possible for Susan to know exactly where it was. She could *hear* it, but the sound would not tell her exactly how close to it she was, and most importantly, wouldn't tell her whether she was just inches from stepping -- or hopping, rather -- over the edge of the embankment to plunge into the rapidly flowing water. Earlier, the creek had been visible by moonlight because it flowed through a break in the trees. But the moon was getting lower in the sky by the minute, and less able to illuminate any such breaks.

That last thought made up Susan's mind for her. As dangerous as the situation was right now, any amount of delay made it worse.

She would have to go directly to her left, staying within the trees, to avoid any chance of being seen from those windows. At her feet, the ground was nearly invisible, with the tiniest amount of streetlight glow to show Susan her surroundings. She hopped tentatively in that direction, and immediately nearly tripped over an unnoticed root. She fought for balance -- if she fell here, she could be heard. Okay, she thought. Knee-walking it is. She dropped to her knees.

As she moved ahead a few inches at a time, detouring around trees and bushes, the ground soon completely disappeared. She continued until a black wall to her right blocked her view of the side of the house behind her. The fence. A few feet farther, and as she'd feared, she was completely blind. She could still see dimly behind her, but that wasn't helpful. She angled towards the fence, knowing she would need to stay next to it to remain oriented. She brushed up against it with her shoulder -- it was indeed wood, it turned out -- and continued on.

I really don't think Suzy meant for it to be this hard, Susan thought to herself. I'm pretty sure she thought it would be straightforward getting across the creek. But it's turned into something harder, and there's nothing she or I can do about it now except try to find a way across.

After about twenty knee-paces, not counting a couple of detours around trees, Susan lost the light completely, even from behind her. Everything would have to be done by feel now, and by, she hoped, hearing the creek well enough to stay away from it. She hated the detours. Whenever she lost physical contact with the fence she feared she'd never find it again, and she could easily wander in circles, totally lost. But sometimes the trees were too close to the fence for her to be able to squeeze between the tree and the fence.

It took longer than she'd believed possible to arrive at the back corner of the fence, where it turned at a right angle and ran along the back of the property. As soon as she turned the corner, the babbling of the creek became noticeably louder. It was hard for her to make herself move forward.

She wondered whether she'd be able to find a footbridge even if there was one. But it should be between the properties -- there was no reason for it to be here, where she was now -- and that area should be lit by moonlight. If she got there soon enough.

Her left knee, on her next step, sank into a shallow depression in the ground. Susan could easily have accommodated it if she had known it was there, but it threw her off balance, and to her horror she found herself toppling to the left, in the direction of the creek. It took all of her focus on where she was to stop herself from crying out in alarm.

She hit the ground hard on her left shoulder, and froze, statue-like, to keep herself from rolling any further left. The force of her left elbow digging into her side paralyzed her diaphragm, and she struggled unsuccessfully to breathe for ten seconds before it finally began functioning again. She lay still, breathing in small sips of air as the pain subsided.

She didn't think she'd had the wind knocked out of her since she was five or six. She hadn't been a terribly active child. She'd forgotten how really unpleasant it is.

As she worried over how close she might have come to falling into the creek, it occurred to her how stupid she was being. If you're scared because you don't know where the creek is, Susan, she told herself, then *find out* where it is. You can wiggle up to it feet first, slowly, so you won't fall in. And you can keep yourself oriented by following the creek just as easily as following the fence!

She rolled onto her back and sat up. She listened carefully for a moment to make sure about the direction, and swung her legs around so her feet were pointed towards the creek. Then she lay back on her elbows and started making her way towards the sound: digging in with her elbows, she lifted her butt off the ground and moved it ahead a few inches; then she straightened her legs back out, tightened her stomach muscles to bend at the waist and lift her upper body, getting her elbows elevated, and putting them back down a few inches ahead of where they'd been. Then repeated the sequence of movements. It wasn't easy on her stomach muscles -- she'd never been good at sit-ups in gym class -- but it was better than rubbing the skin off her elbows by dragging them along the ground.

After about twenty such moves, she felt her feet go over the edge of what had to be the embankment. She continued farther, until her lower legs could dangle down the embankment and her toes dipped into the water flowing by.

Her thirst flared up again at the feel of all that water, so close she was literally touching it, yet unable to drink it. If there had been something she could hold onto to keep from falling in, then she could have got her head, and her mouth, down to the water. But as it was, there was no way to balance on the edge and reach down to the water head-first.

Keep looking for the footbridge, Susan, she ordered herself. If you find that, you can get home and drink all you want.

* * * * *

Moving sideways along the bank was much easier. Susan simply pressed her fists against the ground, lifted her butt and moved it to the right, slid her legs to the right along the edge, moved her fists over and did it all again. Up until she came to the first bush adjacent to the bank. She tried to push past it, but it was much too firmly rooted. She carefully checked with her legs to see how much space there was between the bush and the edge of the creek. Not enough for her to sit on without danger of falling in, so she had to back away from the creek to go around the bush, then find her way back to the creek. Each time she reached another bush, she had to either pass in front of it or, more often, go around it.

She wasn't worried about losing track of where the creek was -- she could always hear it -- but she did worry about the amount of time the detours were taking. She was sure there wasn't much left. She was cold; she had no idea where she might find any food; and she had not run across any puddles since she had crossed Stockhouse and lost her bottled water, nor in fact for some time before that. She was shivering, starving, and parched. She worked to push all of that out of her mind and concentrate on the one thing she had to do. She couldn't afford to let her mind wander to any of those things.

To her right, was that...? Yes!!! She could see, as she got past what must have been the corner of the fence blocking her view, another fence that was dimly lit in the moonlight -- and at some distance along it, in front of it, she could see a horizontal surface that looked the way she would expect a footbridge to look. It's there! It's there!

Excitement flared in her, and brought a familiar feeling with it. Every movement she had been making reminded her of her bondage: her limited use of her hands, locked behind her to the chain around her waist, her inability to separate her feet, and especially the chain that played with her sex constantly as long as she was moving. The background arousal that never went away had been muted by her fear that she had no way home tonight, that she faced another day of hiding out from discovery, without any food or water available that she knew of. But the footbridge she had hung all her hopes on -- she had found it! Now the curtain of fear was thrown aside, and the thrill of being in bondage instantly demanded her attention. She wanted another of those orgasms so badly! Her hips started twitching without her conscious awareness, her breathing accelerated, the flush of anticipation pushed the cold away.

She fought against the oncoming loss of control.

She knew exactly what the aftereffect of one of those powerful orgasms would be now: as she usually did, she would fall asleep. It was inevitable: she was way beyond exhaustion from shortage of sleep and endless physical effort. Sleep would come over her after climax no matter how hard to tried to fight it off -- she wouldn't have the strength left to resist it. And she wouldn't wake up for hours, long after sunrise -- and here, of all places, between the yards of neighbors, within sight of the footbridge they would almost certainly use today to share a holiday barbecue.

Another consideration was the noise she would almost certainly make. She wouldn't need to wait until morning to be discovered. The people in the houses would come out to see what was going on.

Just get moving, Susan, she told herself. It's too cold to sit here.

As she prepared to move, she realized the significance of the fact that she could only see the last few feet of the footbridge on the far side. Most of the bridge was in the shadow of the fence on the near side. The moon was near setting. The longer she waited, less and less of the bridge would be visible. It didn't surprise her to see that the bridge was nothing but a flat walkway -- no handrails or similar type of support, no raised sides. On the first part of her crossing, she would have to use a bridge she couldn't see that had nothing to prevent her falling off. At least it looked decently wide, about five feet or so.

She resumed her sideways motion, her lower legs again hanging over the edge of the embankment.

After a few feet, she bumped up against the corner of the fence, where it turned to run parallel to the creek -- it was as invisible as everything else on Susan's side of the creek. The fence forming the side boundary of the back yard, she discovered, was set back only about two feet from the edge of the creek. There was that much of a shelf between the fence and the drop-off into the water.

Moving forward, pushing her legs farther out over the edge of the creek, so that she could get her butt past the corner of the fence, Susan discovered she no longer had enough room to move the way she had been: the edge of the embankment now was underneath her mid-thigh, and way too much of her legs hung over the edge with only rushing water underneath. She pulled her feet back to get her heels onto the shelf, but then her back was pressing her arms too tightly against the fence, and she couldn't find a way to move.

She backed off beyond the corner of the fence, and stretched out on her back parallel to the creek, her feet pointed in the direction she wanted to go, to move the way she had earlier. She moved herself back onto the shelf, but by the time she was fully onto the shelf her left elbow was barely an inch from the edge. She wasn't able to get her elbows any closer together, and any movement seemed likely to send her falling over the edge.

Her stomach knotting painfully in fear, she considered the possibility that the shelf might be too narrow for her to navigate, especially given that she couldn't see any of it. The visibility problem could be solved by waiting until dawn, and she might be able to get across before the people in the houses woke up, but just crossing the creek left her still a long way from home, a distance she couldn't possibly cover in daylight without being seen. And, as she reminded herself once more, that represented an entire day without food or water.

I'll have to knee-walk it, she told herself. She remembered vividly why she had abandoned that method of movement earlier -- falling over when her knee went into a depression -- and if the same thing happened again she'd plunge into the creek.

I'll be more careful than I was before, she promised herself. I should have enough room if I keep my knees together.

She backed up beyond the corner of the fence again, and laboriously got up onto her knees.

And then could not move. Absolutely could not make herself take the first step.

She knew she could easily be facing in a direction slightly different from what she believed it to be. She had a general idea where the creek was, based on the sound, but it was approximate. She wasn't sure exactly how far from the edge she was. She only knew that her first step might send her over it. She wasn't sure of the exact direction of the shelf from her, or the corner of the fence. She would have to search for them, and the distance she'd have to go to get to either one was farther than her distance from falling into the creek.

Ironically, she *could* still see the shelf and fence on the far side of the creek, still lit by the moon. That wasn't helpful.

She thought about lying back down, and starting over from a safer place. But she could only lie down by falling, and while she knew she could fall away from the creek, she wasn't positive she was far enough from the fence to avoid bashing her head against it when she fell.

She could protect her head if she bent forward and touched her head to the ground before falling. But the ground might not be there. It might be open space above flowing water instead.

She shook herself. Susan, you forgot already! You already figured out if you don't know where the creek is, then find out! Do it again!

Moving her knees the tiniest distances, the left forward, the right back, she slowly turned right so that the creek was directly behind her. Already she felt safer. She began taking tiny steps backward, waiting to feel her toes go over the edge.

There, she thought, found it.

This will be safer than what I was thinking, she told herself, cautiously feeling better about it. I need to keep track of the edge the whole time, so I'll walk sideways, not straight ahead.

She began shuffling to the left, keeping her toes out just beyond the edge as she moved. After a few moves, her left shoulder bumped against the fence. Okay, she thought, that's where *that* is.

She would have to back up a little.

Her stomach twisted again. There would be so little margin for error, so much work to stay balanced. What she was going to do, she understood perfectly, was exactly like negotiating a ledge on the side of a fifty-story building. If she failed, she wouldn't be able to start over and try again. She would be dead. She would die of drowning rather than impact, but it came to the same thing.

There weren't any other choices. There was no other way to get home. She had to cross the creek, and this was the only way to do that.

Susan wondered, again, whether this had really been part of Suzy's plan. Maybe Suzy had assumed Susan could wade through the creek, as it had been yesterday, even bound this way. Suzy almost surely hadn't waded through it herself. It may have looked much easier to her, walking over it on the street bridge.

In any case, it was no longer like it was yesterday. It might be days before the water flow receded to a point where she could cross it -- and only if it didn't rain anymore before then, here or upstream.

She couldn't survive that long. She needed a bridge. Not the traffic bridge. This bridge. She would die if she tried this and failed, but she would very likely also die if she *didn't* try it.

The thought of giving up and calling for help never presented itself. Susan's conscious mind knew better than to bother to entertain the idea. Being found in her current condition, being looked at, talked about, being the center of so much attention, becoming a story that people never stopped telling, was lower on her list of priorities than dying. She understood that many people -- perhaps most people --

would rather go through that humiliation than die. Susan couldn't understand how those people thought.

Renewed consideration of using the street bridge, in front of the houses, was out, for the same reason. The chance of being able to cross that bridge, without being seen by anyone in either house or in a passing car, was almost zero. As dangerous as what she was about to do was, it was still preferable.

A tiny distance at a time, Susan moved each knee back. The edge of the embankment was up to her ankle cuffs now, her feet hanging completely over the edge. Her knees could clear the fence now, but she needed to give them still just a bit more room. They needed to be a few inches out from the fence, so she could lean her upper body against the fence. It would be much easier to avoid falling over backward that way.

She moved her knees a tiny bit further back. The cuffs went out beyond the edge; she could feel the edge now against her lower shin.

Taking a deep breath, which revealed to her how much she was shaking, and not from cold, Susan moved her left knee a few inches left. She could reach the corner of the fence with her chin now, and kept it pressed against the corner as she brought her right knee over to join her left. She moved her left knee a few inches to the side again.

She decided to keep the top of her head against the fence, rather than her chin. She didn't want to be scraping skin off her chin as she moved along. She didn't want to scrape her breasts either. She had to push them against the fence after each step to feel safely balanced, but pushed them barely out of contact at the start of each step.

She was cheered by the fact that after a few steps, the shelf widened slightly, the edge once again under her ankle cuffs. Not surprisingly, it wasn't perfectly straight as the fence was.

A few steps later, the variation in width worked against her. In mounting alarm, the shelf narrowed until the edge was nearly at mid-shin. She wasn't surprised to find her bladder letting go once more, spattering urine on her calves. She made herself ignore it, and its consequences. In a few more steps, to her relief, the shelf widened a bit once more.

If I'd been knee-walking straight ahead as I'd first planned, she thought, I wouldn't have made it past that narrow spot.

It was obvious a gate in the fence would be coming up soon, of course, which would be next to the footbridge. Not only had she heard a slight metallic clinking sound from the latch as the light breeze stirred it, but even that confirmation wasn't necessary. How else could the walkway possibly be used if there wasn't a gate at both ends?

Even while expecting to reach it, she realized that when she did actually encounter it, it might disrupt her concentration. She worked to steel herself against that. No distractions, she told herself. No surprises. You will get to the gate soon. Expect it. Don't flinch. And you will feel the walkway when your foot hits it. Don't flinch. You know it's there.

She had been counting steps, one for each time she moved her left knee to the side. Maybe three inches for each step, she thought. Four steps for a foot. She'd moved twenty steps now, and felt as though she had been doing this forever, that it couldn't be much farther. Her heart sank as she realized twenty steps meant she had only come five feet since she'd started. How many, then? Twenty feet, do you think? Eighty steps? Just concentrate on the steps. You're not there yet. But expect the fence. Expect the walkway. On every step. Don't flinch. You shouldn't have estimated the steps. Forget the count. No surprises on any step.

Don't count. Step. Gate? Walkway? Step. Step.

She wasn't able to stop counting. She told herself it would give her a better idea when to expect the gate.

Twice more, the shelf narrowed. She whimpered in terror, but kept going. There was no point in turning back. There was no other way home.

Ninety-three.

The fence yielded slightly. There was a slight rattle. She smiled, proud of herself. She hadn't flinched.

Three more steps. Her left foot pressed against something.

Okay, she thought in intense relief. I'm there.

She bent her legs to lift her feet, and rested her toes on the surface of the footbridge. She took several more knee-steps to the left, then thought about what to do next.

No part of the footbridge was visible by now. The moonlight-shadow cast by the fence on her side of the bridge was halfway up the fence on the other side. She not only couldn't see the bridge, she also couldn't see any of the shelf she was going to have to walk along on the far side to get to safety, after she'd crossed.

I need to keep track of where the edge of the footbridge is, she told herself. I've learned that lesson. I can't see it, and I'm not going to know where the edge is unless I keep in constant contact with it.

She made a left turn, and backed up carefully. With her toes over the edge of the bridge, she could tell she hadn't quite completed the turn. She did so, and then took a step to the left, moving her right knee after to close it against her left. Then another step to the left. She let her feet keep up, keeping herself perpendicular to the edge.

She had to go a little slower than on the shelf, with more concentration on keeping her balance. She didn't have a fence in front of her to lean against. She remained just slightly bent back so that she wouldn't fall forward. Ten steps. Twenty. How far? she wondered. Stop thinking about that. And definitely stop thinking about being on a wooden plank bridge that you can't see, above rushing water that will kill you if you fall in. Don't flinch when your foot reaches the embankment. It could be there on any step, the next or the one after. Concentrate, no distractions, no surprises.

Sudden agony shot through Susan's left calf muscle as it seized up in a cramp. Automatically she straightened her legs, sending her falling forward. As her mind exploded in terror as she began falling, she pushed down hard with her right knee, changing her straight-ahead fall to a fall to the left. She crashed down on her left side, knocking the wind out of her for the second time. She rolled onto her butt, kicking out with her left leg to straighten it, using the top of her right foot to pull her left foot back to stretch out the muscle. Unable to breathe, she waited out the pain in silence, until the muscle slowly unclenched, the knife-like pain passing into a dull ache.

Somehow she hadn't screamed in pain from the cramp or the fright of the fall. The need to stay quiet, so close to people who might hear her, had overridden her reflexive shout. She could not, of course, cry out afterward once her diaphragm was paralyzed.

She was sure the fall itself had made a lot of noise. As she recovered the ability to breathe, she did so very quietly, listening for any sounds that might indicate alarm or curiosity in either house.

She waited for assurance that she was still safe, breathing with her mouth open, not making a sound. Several minutes passed. There was no sound of doors or windows opening, no sign of lights going on.

If she hadn't pushed herself to the left, she realized in amazement, if she had simply fallen straight ahead, the far edge of the bridge would have caught her just below the breasts, and her momentum in that direction would almost certainly have made her slide a few inches farther, enough to carry her over the edge. Into the water.

As her breathing returned to something resembling normal, she told herself forcefully that she couldn't stay here. She had to get moving again. The leg cramp was a sign of things to come tomorrow if she didn't get home tonight. She was dehydrated, and if that wasn't the direct cause of the muscle spasm, it had certainly contributed to it. There would be more cramps tomorrow if she didn't get home tonight, to the point where she would be unable to move at all. As a way to die, drowning would be much more pleasant.

First, she reminded herself, I need to know where the edge is. She squirmed back a few inches in the direction her feet were pointing. Her toes slipped past the edge. Okay, found it.

She began to work out how to get back onto her knees, and stopped, her breath catching in horror. There could be no more knee-walking, at least not until she had found her way off the shelf of land in front of the fence on the far side. Putting herself back in that same physical position, standing on her knees, would invite the cramp to return. She could feel how much the muscle wanted to tighten up again, and it would as soon as she was in that same bent-legged physical position, using her muscles in the same way as before. And she couldn't let that happen. Even on the bridge, where she had more room than on the shelf, another cramp could easily pitch her helplessly into the creek. As for knee-walking on the shelf -- if that cramp had hit five minutes earlier, when she had still been on that narrow strip of ground, she would definitely have ended up in the water.

Yet there had been no other way Susan had found of making her way along the shelf, other than walking on her knees.

She hadn't given any thought to standing upright. Her legs were so tired she didn't see how they could hold her up in such a tense situation. But now it was her only remaining alternative. But she wasn't sure she could get up on her feet in the amount of space she had. Her most-often used way was to get onto her knees first -- inviting that cramp again -- and then throw her weight back to get her feet under her. She could easily fall over while doing it, especially as exhausted as she was. And the effort would test the remaining strength in her legs to the utmost.

Worst of all, her only realistic way of traveling on her feet was by hopping, and she wasn't about to go hopping around on the shelf. As for "walking," she could barely put one foot more than an inch in front of the other. The ankle cuffs were joined by a single padlock, rather than two linked ones as they had been last weekend.

Susan shook her head. Stop stalling, Susan, she told herself. If it's your only choice, then you have to do it.

I should, she told herself, be able to get standing using the gate to help.

She looked toward where the gate should be, and saw that she had finally lost all of the moonlight. There was also no light from either house to backlight it, nor any glow from the streetlights, which were blocked by the house the creek was passing behind. There were no clouds to reflect the glow of city lights. Starlight was negligible, at least for the purpose of allowing Susan to see anything. There might still be a little residual moonlight elsewhere, where it wasn't cut off by trees to the west, and certainly she would be able to find electrical illumination elsewhere. But that did her no good here. Here she was completely blind.

You were wishing earlier you could be blindfolded, she reminded herself, as her stomach twisted yet again in recognition of one terrible new complication. You've got it now.

Get moving, she ordered herself. She was lying on her side, her toes still over the edge of the bridge. Rolling left would put more of her leg over the edge. Not liking that idea, she rolled right, and over onto her back. The gate she wanted was now to her right. She sat up, and pressed her fingers down against the wooden bridge surface to lift her butt, moved a few inches right, then moved her heels an equal distance that same direction. Repeat. Repeat.

She grew cautious about the possibility she was approaching the other edge of the bridge, and began reaching back with her fingers to feel for it before lifting herself. She found it after a few moves, lifted herself once more with her fingers, and began aligning herself parallel to the sides of the bridge, her back facing the gate she wanted. She made sure with her heels where the side edge was, and began moving herself backward towards the gate. She backed up against the gate at last.

Let's see if we can do this, now, she said to herself.

There was no way around having to bend her legs for this. She took several deep breaths, trying to will herself to ignore the pain if the cramp returned.

She drew her feet in towards her, nearly up against her butt. Pressing down with her feet, she pushed her back hard against the gate -- she did it gradually, hoping she wouldn't make the latch jingle. The

sound was minimal. She started walking her finger up the gate's surface behind her, alternately pressing the back of her head and her shoulders against the gate to anchor herself each time she made progress a little higher.

The cramp returned, but she was ready and ignored it, telling herself the pain should abate once she was standing and had her legs straight. Breathing in and out in tiny sips, she felt sweat break out on her face from the pain, but she continued pushing herself slowly upward.

At last she had her legs straight, and moments later, still pushing herself upward along the gate and walking her feet back, she was standing upright leaning against the gate.

Her legs shook with muscle fatigue. She felt dizzy for a moment, and feared fainting. But the lightheadedness passed. The cramp, now that she could stretch the muscle, let go and the pain receded once more.

Now that she was standing at the gate, a new possibility for escape occurred to her: enter the back yard, go through it and find the other gate, the one the homeowners would almost certainly have for passing between front yard and back.

She couldn't believe she was considering going through someone's yard, in her nude-and-bound state. It was fantastically dangerous. But she had to weigh the danger against the danger of trying to walk to safety along the shelf at the edge of the creek.

In the case of passing through the yard, the danger was of discovery. In the case of walking along the shelf, the danger was deadly.

She had already been down this road before, weighing the preferability of discovery versus death. Her entire being resisted the consequences of being found, naked and handcuffed, becoming a worldwide Internet sensation and focus of ridicule. She knew which she preferred.

But the likelihood had to figure into it as well. How likely was she to be discovered in the yard -- she would try as hard as she possibly could to avoid it -- and how likely was she to die if she tried the shelf? She had been threatened with discovery constantly for nearly sixty hours now, and had avoided it through sufficient care. Going through the yard increased the danger. Too much? The back yard would be moonlit, but being seen was far less likely in the back yard than in the much-better-lit front yard, and certainly safer than using the Stockhouse Boulevard bridge, which was permanently out of consideration.

As she considered the options, she began leaning towards going through the back yard.

At that point, the question arose as to whether it was even possible. Can I open the gate, she asked herself? How?

From the sounds the gate made when she leaned against it, clearly it had a metal latch. Most likely it was one of the standard self-latching types, and probably one-sided. And it would be on the inside of the yard, not the outside. Normally a string would project through a hole to the outside. You'd pull on

the string to unlatch the gate from that side -- and the string could be withdrawn when the homeowners didn't want anyone outside opening the gate.

All of that was Susan's best guess, anyway. There could be something more elaborate, and she could probably find it if there was. But very likely she was looking for nothing more than a bit of string hanging down the gate from a hole.

Whatever the latch consisted of, a string or something more fancy, almost certainly it was up higher than Susan's hands could reach.

She tried locating it with her hands anyway, and realized in the process that she had a faster way to travel from side to side than moving one foot after the other. If she turned on both heels and swung the fronts of both feet to the left, or to the right, then raised up on her toes to move both heels, she could move several inches in the time ordinary "walking" would take her half an inch. It was a method of locomotion that would only work because she had something to lean back against while she was doing it -- the fence.

She began doing that, with her hands flat against the gate, trying to find a latch. Or a string.

On finishing examining the entire gate at hand-level, finding nothing, she came back the other way, with her whole back pressed against the gate. At least she could find a metal latch that way, though probably would not feel a string.

When that yielded nothing, she decided to try one more thing. She turned to face the gate, and pressed her lips lightly against it -- the most sensitive part of her face, probably the only way she would be able to detect something as light as a string -- and, maintaining the "kiss" very lightly out of fear of splinters, she moved from one side to the other, bent over to what she considered the mostly likely height for a string.

She found nothing.

She sighed. The drawstring might not be out, she told herself, or it's there and I somehow missed it. I don't have any more time to keep looking.

In a sense, she was relieved that the decision had been taken out of her hands. But it left her death-defying 50th-floor-ledge-walk as her only option. Blind.

Turning her back to the gate once more, she was scared by her perception of how tired her leg muscles were now. Her legs were still trembling with fatigue, and she couldn't be sure how long they would hold her. At least she would be leaning back against the fence, and locking her knees would help.

She tried to clear her mind of distractions again. The cold, which was adding to her trembling; her hunger; her thirst; the pain in her calf, which still felt like a knife was stuck deep within it. I can take care of all of that later, she told herself. I can get home, inside my warm apartment, toasty under the covers of my bed, after I drink all the water I could ever want and put together a huge roast-beef sandwich. And the water will help with the aftereffects of the cramp. That's for later. Concentrate on now. Be where you are.

To negotiate the shelf, she needed to keep her heels several inches out from the base of the fence. She hated giving away that much of the shelf, which was narrow enough as it was, but she needed to make absolutely sure her weight was pressed back against the fence so that she couldn't overbalance and fall forward.

She began her sideways shuffle again, twisting on her heels and then on her toes, repeating again and again. It took what seemed to be a long repetition of moves like that before she finally left the gate behind and was on the shelf, with nothing in front of her but a plunge into the creek. At least the shelf was wide enough get keep her full foot securely on it, even with her heels a few inches out from the fence.

Until it wasn't. On each step she curled her toes to make sure she could still feel them brushing the ground. And now, after her latest step, it wasn't there. The ball of her foot rested on the ground, but her toes did not.

Maybe, she thought, it doesn't get any worse than this. I can still move if it's like this.

Carefully, she raised herself on the balls of her feet so she could move her heels just a little farther right. Then she put her weight back on her heels again, and rotated her right foot, only her right, into the questionable area.

There was nothing under the ball of her right foot. She pulled it back quickly. Once more, for a better reason than ever, she lost control of her bladder, the pee running straight down both legs.

She couldn't move if the balls of her feet weren't on solid ground. She had to rise up on them in order to move her heels.

She couldn't pull her feet back any farther. She had them just far enough in front of the fence so she could lean back against the fence and have no tendency to fall forward.

She'd already decided she couldn't get through the gate. Now it appeared she was blocked from escaping from here along the shelf of ground.

At least, she was blocked from going in this direction. She could try going the other way from the gate. Which would take her to the *front* of the house. In the front yard, well lit by streetlights, in full view of passing cars.

She rejected, once more, forcefully, the idea of being so exposed. It occurred to her, then, that she still did have a way to move along the narrowed shelf, even if the ends of her feet were hanging over the edge. The much, much slower way: keep her feet pointed straight, move her right foot as far as the padlock would allow, then her left foot, to close the gap, then her right foot again. Moving half an inch with each step.

She decided to try it. If going to the front of the house was out, and going through the back yard had been stopped by her inability to open the gate, this was her only remaining choice.

She moved her feet back an inch -- it was the closest she could bring them to the wall and still feel safe from falling forward. Then she began moving to her right: right foot, slide to the right until stopped by padlock; left foot, slide right to close up feet. Repeat. Repeat. It took her several steps to get the right feel for it. If she slid her right foot too abruptly, too hard, then feeling it jerked to a stop by the padlock threatened to disrupt her balance; if she slid it too slowly, then her weight was all on her left foot too long, again throwing off her balance. She tried to blank not only her mind but her senses of all possible distractions, all thoughts unrelated to the rhythm of her motion. She kept her weight mostly back on her heels, just lightly sensing the ground under the front part of each foot, or lack of it. If the edge of the shelf were to recede to a point more than an inch or so behind the ball of her right foot, she would stop at that point and decide whether to go on.

One fleeting thought did cross her mind: that it was a very lucky thing she was blind right now. She was sure she couldn't go on if she could see how close she was to plunging to her death in the rushing creek. If she could see that metaphorical fifty-story plunge off the ledge. She pushed the thought away as the worst of all possible distractions.

She fought to keep from doubling over in pain as her stomach knotted in cramps, a combination of dehydration, hunger, and tension. She pushed any consideration of physical sensations, other than the sense of touch in the soles of her feet and the feel of the fence behind her back, off into the future. She could worry about them later. Not now. Her legs continued shaking from fear and muscle fatigue, while all of her shivered from cold. Think about those sensations later too. Not now.

After many steps, she didn't know how many -- she sensed that it might be twenty or thirty, but it could have been more -- there was solid ground under the balls of her feet once more. She bit her lip. The possibility that the worst might be over threatened to burst the dam of concentration she had built up.

Another three steps, and she felt ground under her toes when she curled them downward. *Now* she let herself to consider that she might be allowed to think about other things. Home. Warmth. Food. Water. Water. Water.

She could resume moving faster now -- faster in a relative sense, of course. Moving three inches at a time: twist ankles to the right, let the balls of your feet slide along the ground. Stand on tiptoes, swing your heels right to catch up. Repeat. Repeat.

Now that other thoughts were allowed to intrude, she admitted a fresh worry: If there was another narrowing of the shelf ahead, this time to a point impossible to pass, she would have to turn back -- and go through that terrifying section again. She wasn't sure she could make herself do it.

She allowed herself to start counting again. Her steps were, she thought, probably a little shorter now than when she had been knee-walking. Three inches might be an overestimate. After ninety-five of them, beyond the narrow patch, she felt the corner of the fence behind her back. She didn't let herself think it was over, or change her motion -- she was still just inches from falling into the creek, and celebration could kill her.

A few more steps, and the fence was gone. She felt around the corner with her fingers to make sure it wasn't just a missing section of boards. She could feel the right-angle turn the fence had made, to begin its run across the back of the yard.

A few more sideways shuffles and she was beyond the edge of the fence. She sat abruptly, her momentum rolling her onto her back with her feet in the air, not even considering what she might be sitting on, simply knowing that whatever it was, it probably wouldn't kill her. She took deep breaths, her mouth curling into a smile as relief cascaded through her body, her stomach unknotted. I did it! I did it! She wanted to shout it aloud. She had literally spent hours trying to move twenty feet from one side of Louris Creek to the other. The effort had occupied her entire world, been her one single goal in life during that time. And she'd done it!

And I'm sorry, Suzy! I shouldn't have doubted you! I was thinking you gave me too much to handle, but I did it!

Susan let her feet back down to the ground, and lay flat. So nice not to have to be in the Now, to have to clamp down on her thoughts. So nice to let them wander. To think about being warm, being fed, being watered. Though her eyes were doing her no good anyway, it felt nice to let them close...

NO!! She sat upright, breathing hard. You're not done! she screamed at herself. You almost fell asleep! You have no idea how near dawn it is, but you know it has to be close! You can't sleep, not even for a minute!

She felt for the fence with her left shoulder, turned her back to it, and began working on standing up. There was less pain in her calf muscle now, and that made it easier. But she knew knee-walking would bring the cramp back. She didn't know how she would find enough remaining strength in her legs, but she would have to push them to their limit and past it. She was going to have to hop the rest of the way home.

Still shivering from the cold, as she felt she must have been doing forever, she finished getting herself standing. The cold may actually help, she thought. I won't be sweating very much. I need to keep whatever water I have left.

With her right shoulder brushing the fence, she hopped forward tentatively. She leaned her head forward to feel for any tree she might be about to hop into. Finding none, she hopped again.

She did come up against two trees, and between them a bush, that she had to detour around, finding the fence again afterward each time.

She gasped. There was a slight glow in front of her. Now she could tell there were no trees in the way, allowing her to move faster. Hopping further forward, the glow brightened. She recognized it, at last, to be coming from one of the streetlamps shining into the side yard of the house.

The fence came to another corner, and turned right. Beyond it there was a small cleared area, the side yard. She retreated a short distance into the trees behind it, and hopped until the clearing ended. She turned then and hopped towards the street.

CHAPTER 7 – Coming Home

Susan peeked out from behind the tree line, looking down Stockhouse Boulevard, ready, as always, to retreat as soon as she saw headlights approaching. The lights of her apartment building had drawn steadily closer in the minutes she had been hopping after leaving behind the houses on the creek. They were probably a hundred yards away now.

She had, as she had so many times over these days in the woods, a decision to make.

Added to the hunger, the thirst, the cold, and the effects of lack of sufficient sleep, the pain and muscle fatigue in her legs had been joined by a throbbing in her lower back from the slightly bent-forward posture needed to keep her balance while hopping, and a growing ache in her unsupported breasts from all the bouncing. Yet Susan felt mentally energized, with her goal now so close, and to a sufficient extent the energy had flowed out into her body, battling against all of the physical discomforts. She knew that she probably shouldn't be able to stand upright, let alone hop forward, without collapsing, yet somehow she did. The internal mandate to get home, to safety from observation, from the disaster she had managed to avoid for nearly sixty hours now, somehow sustained her. There were limits. She wasn't able to stand still for any length of time. Her legs couldn't hold her, standing in place, without locking her knees and leaning against a tree, and such inactivity allowed the cold to bite once more. She couldn't afford to sit on the ground to rest, because she was sure she would fall asleep, and even if she were somehow to avoid that, the effort to rise back to a standing position was probably beyond her. So she had to make her decision quickly.

When she had first reached the street after passing the creek and was able to get a look at the western sky unblocked by trees, she saw that the moon was just reaching the horizon, and 4 o'clock had been her best guess for the time of moonset. She thought she might have spent ten minutes making slow progress down the street since then: she wasn't able to go any faster, with the near-absence of moonlight and the relative rarity of streetlights this far out of town. So it should be a bit past 4 now. In another sixty or seventy minutes, the sky would start lightening.

She had not, until after she'd passed the creek that had occupied so much of her attention, thought about getting back into the woods adjacent to her apartment building, from where this whole adventure had begun and where she now knew her means of releasing herself from bondage lay. She would have to get past the building itself, either in front of it or behind it, and neither course was acceptable. Passing in front, across its frontage on Stockhouse, was obviously impossible: it was well-lit by streetlights, with windows looking out on it from apartments, some of whose occupants might well be waking up by now.

But passing behind the building was just as problematic. The parking lot was even more well illuminated than the front side, had an equal number of windows looking out on it, and she couldn't retreat farther into the woods beyond its illumination because of the ravine that angled in to the very corner of the lot at its far end: at that point the area of safety from observation available to her pinched off to nothing. And it was more than a matter of crossing through a brightly lit area knowing there were people around to observe through windows as a naked bound girl went hopping past. It was *her own apartment building*, in which people would not only see the astonishing sight she was presenting to them, they would *know who she was!*

There seemed only to be one other option. And Susan hated it. At a time when her fuel tank was running far beyond empty, it would add still more intense physical effort to the trip home.

She could hop back across Stockhouse, retreat into the woods for the remaining distance to her apartment and beyond, then hop back across the street once more.

She was coming up on Banner Street, the one side street between her present position and her apartment, from which cars occasionally emerged onto Stockhouse. The street, like all the other side streets, didn't continue past Stockhouse, to the undeveloped side of it. If she crossed Stockhouse now, then at least she wouldn't have Banner to deal with. If she delayed her decision to cross Stockhouse, she then had that one further additional street to cross.

She couldn't stand here long deciding. Every minute closer to dawn brought her closer to the increase in traffic that the onset of the morning rush would bring.

There's no other way, she told herself, and she closed her eyes, trying to summon up her last reserves of energy and courage one more time.

The last time she'd crossed Stockhouse, she'd nearly fallen, and she'd lost all her remaining bottled water. Remembering that didn't help.

She looked left, and right, then left again. Then right again. There were no headlights.

Chanting Go! Go! Go! in her mind, she hopped out into the street. Once she reached the street, it was hard to look to either side, because it took away from the concentration needed for maintaining the physical effort to keep herself from collapsing. Only when she was across, and reached the tree line, and stopped to lean against a tree, her heart pounding from exertion and fear, did she finally look back down the length of the street and see that there was an approaching car just now appearing atop a slight rise about a half-mile away. She retreated a little farther behind the trees, safely hidden from view by the time the car passed.

* * * * *

Minutes later -- she assumed, since it was hard maintaining any time sense in her current state -- she stopped just short of the bridge where Stockhouse crossed over ravine, some distance beyond her building. This is it! thought Susan. Almost there! Susan, leaning against a tree, looked once more for traffic coming from either direction.

She hadn't been sure she could get this far. Her mental exhaustion approached the level of her physical depletion. Even the concentration required to complete a hop was, in itself, a drain on her mental resources, in a way it would never be if she were wide awake and rested. Several times she nearly forgot to tighten her leg muscles to receive her weight at the end of a hop, only catching herself at the last instant as her legs began to fold on impact.

Suddenly Susan, looking straight ahead, saw shadowy tree branches before her eyes that hadn't been there a second ago. Without any awareness of a transition, she realized she was on the ground, looking

straight up. She had the sensation of waking up from sleep. Her left shoulder hurt. She couldn't remember why.

I did fall asleep! she told herself in astonishment. I was standing, and I fell asleep! And I hit my shoulder when I fell!

She hadn't simply fainted -- she hadn't experienced any lightheadedness before it happened. Somehow she had just nodded off while watching for cars.

A car was coming now, with Susan on the ground in front of the trees. She rolled quickly to her right, farther into the woods.

How long was I out? What time is it now?

It was still dark. She had no way to be sure, but sensed somehow she had only been out a few seconds.

She labored to sit up. Backing herself up against a tree, she brought her feet towards her, and tried to let her hands walk up the trunk behind her as she pushed down with her feet, tensing her legs, trying to get standing.

Her thigh muscles quaked. They seemed to be able to push only for a fraction of a second, give out, resume their tension, give out again.

This isn't working, she told herself. Try it the old way.

She rolled onto her stomach, pushed down with her forehead and knees, walking her knees towards her as her midsection rose from the ground. She could rise only so far and no higher. Her muscles gave out again, and she collapsed on the ground.

She gritted her teeth. No! she shouted at herself. I can't get this close and then not make it. I just have to get across the street. I can't be stuck on this side at dawn. I'll have to stay here all day! And I can't make it across if I can't get standing! There's no other way I can move fast enough!

Try it again!

She rolled back onto her stomach, pressed down again with her forehead and knees. Before her body could give out again, she gave one extra hard push with her forehead, throwing enough of her weight behind her knees that she was able to remain standing on her knees.

She worried that the muscle cramp in her lower leg would return, but it seemed the kink must have worked itself out, for the time being -- she was feeling only a modest amount of residual soreness by now.

One more step, she told herself. And this better work on the first try. I can't make it this far again if I fall over and have to start over.

She counted One, Two, Three and heaved her weight back, pivoting on the front of her feet and up into a standing position. She felt herself overbalancing, and hopped backward a couple of small steps before managing to regain equilibrium.

Let's get across now, before I fall asleep again, she exhorted herself. She looked left and right along the street. Seeing no cars, she immediately hopped into the street, risking a quick look both ways after the first few hops, hoping she wouldn't have to turn and go back. Just past the halfway point, a car turned onto Stockhouse from Banner Avenue, but she was across and into the woods before it became a threat.

She felt a sudden burst of adrenaline, which she certainly could have used earlier, accompanying the joy of reaching a point where there were no longer any hard parts left. And she suddenly realized that in her mental focus on all of the decisions involved in the task of getting to one particular place within this narrow triangle of land next to her apartment building, the place where her briefcase was hidden, she'd completely forgotten what else was here. Something far more important, just now, than freeing herself from her chains and cuffs. She wondered how she could have forgotten, but a lot had happened in the two-and-a-half days since she'd left it behind, and she hadn't realized how important it would be at the time.

She began hopping forward excitedly, in the direction towards her building, feeling frustrated at being slowed by the need to plan her hops carefully, always being alert for obstructions. There was less light here than at any point since she'd left the creek behind, just small amounts of it finding its way through the trees from the sparse streetlamps and the lights around the building ahead. She slowed still more when she came to the right area, looking to see exactly where it was -- she'd spent considerable time in it Friday night, but most of it blindfolded.

There!! She hopped ahead a few feet more, and dropped to her knees beside the water bottles, the three full ones she had left behind here, unable to take them with her in her hurry to vacate the area before sunrise Saturday morning.

With practiced motions, she lowered her butt down far enough to reach one of the bottles, twisted off its cap, set it upright on the ground behind her, turned and picked it up by the neck with her teeth. Tilting her head back to upend the bottle, she let the water flow into her mouth. She forced herself to drink slowly rather than letting it pour down her throat at full speed, unsure what her stomach would make of having water inside it after such a long time without it. She didn't pause until she had drained the full bottle.

She dropped the empty bottle, then fell forward heavily onto the ground next to the pile of trail mix. She decided it didn't matter that it had sat here for days and survived a torrential rain that had left its lowest level caked in drying mud. She buried her face in the pile, gulping down mouthful after mouthful, barely stopping to chew.

She felt better. She felt alive again!

With her body's most basic needs finally met, to a minimal extent, she recognized sleep stealing towards her. She fought it off. Not yet! she said to herself firmly. I can't let myself fall asleep here! I still have one more thing to do.

She got herself standing again -- easier than it had been a few minutes ago, with the renewal of some of her energy -- and began hopping away from the building once more, angling towards the ravine, to a point some distance short of where it met and went under Stockhouse Boulevard. She was looking for a particular configuration of bushes... there!

Susan recognized the place, despite the near-darkness, or perhaps because of it -- it had been like that before. She remembered being here. Or that is, Suzy had been here, and it was the memory of this place, as the hiding place for the briefcase, that Suzy had given Susan as her reward for hogtying herself with the chains in the park.

There were the three large bushes, grown so close that there was no longer a gap between them, the three forming a wide V as seen from above. The edge of the ravine ran a short distance behind the bushes.

Susan rounded the end of the trio of bushes, and dropped to her knees behind them, within the V. There, covered by loose dirt and brush to the point of near-invisibility, lay a rope stretched out along the ground, running to and over the edge of the ravine. It was anchored to the bushes, snaking through the root system of the middle one and tied to one of the roots.

Susan dropped to a sitting position, and carefully butt-walked back to the point where the rope went over the edge of the ravine -- she could more or less see the edge, but was still wary of the possibility of falling into the ravine. There at the edge, with her back to the rope, she grabbed hold of it with her hands and pulled upward on it. With a crunching, scraping sound, the rope pulled its burden up over the edge of the ravine: the briefcase.

Even in daylight, with all of the entire triangle of woods bounded by the street, the ravine, and the building to search through, Susan didn't think she would ever have found this rope, or the briefcase it held onto out of sight just over the ravine's edge, if she hadn't known they were there, and certainly not in the very few minutes of darkness she'd had left to her on Saturday morning. She had made the right decision, at that time, in abandoning this piece of land for the wider woods across Stockhouse, where she was far safer from being seen during daytime.

She pulled the briefcase onto the flat ground, laid it on its side, and fumbled with her hands behind her to open it. She slid her clothes out onto the ground: her jeans, her shirt, her bra, panties, shoes. In the right front pocket of the jeans, closed up within a handkerchief with an easily untied knot, were all the keys she needed.

Heaving a sigh of relief, she took the padlock key and unlocked the one between her wrist cuffs, that had held them together and to her waist chain. With hands free for the first time since Saturday night, she shook her arms to accustom them to movements they had forgotten they could do and to loosen up stiff joints, especially in her shoulders.

Her glance fell on the rope, which had held the briefcase, like a ripe fruit, hanging into the ravine over the weekend. Her eyes froze on it, and a mental image flashed through her mind and flooded her entire being with need, with compulsion so powerful it was immune to any resistance. It was that same inner drive to experience the ultimate in bondage that had nearly led Susan to trap herself in her shelter by the park Sunday night, after she'd already spent nearly a full day there -- she would still be there *now*,

waiting for daylight to make it possible to escape, if she had closed that padlock. She had been unable to stop herself, unable to reason with her inner demon, unable to make her arguments heard against it, and she had required Suzy's help to stop her from doing it.

That same compulsion had her in its grip now. That familiar tingling began between her legs.

I'll need the knife, she thought. And the string. They're right over there. And I ought to bring the water back with me too, for after. Oh! And the gag and the blindfold!

Still holding the padlock key, Susan quickly unlocked the one holding her ankle cuffs. She crawled, on hands and knees -- it felt so strange to have that much physical freedom! -- towards the tree where she had spent Friday night. It was about fifty feet closer to the building. There was no activity in the parking lot at present, nor around the building, and no apartment windows facing this direction, and it was almost certainly still too dark for anyone to see her, but it came naturally to her to be careful -- she would have been still more so if she had been more likely to be visible. She gathered up the required articles and crawled back to the bushes.

As she reached the bushes, where she was close enough to the ravine that overhead trees didn't interfere with her view of the eastern sky, Susan saw that the sky was purpling. Dawn's getting started, she thought. She marveled at how close she had cut it, how arriving at that point where she could cross Stockhouse to get here had so very nearly come too late.

She checked the rope that had held the briefcase. She couldn't quite see, in the still-dim light, how it was anchored to the bushes, so she got down on her stomach to trace the rope with her fingers. She found that the rope was woven through the base of the root system near the front of the ravine side of the central bush. She found the knot, and decided she wouldn't be able to reach it to untie it when her hands were cuffed behind her back. She untied the other end from the handle of the briefcase, and dropped it on the ground for the moment. She tied all of the keys back up in the handkerchief, restored the hanky to the pocket of her pants, slid her clothes back into the briefcase and closed it, then pushed the briefcase far enough away to be out of reach from where she would be, yet still protected from view by the triangle of bushes.

Susan became aware of a clamor in her head. She identified it as Shy Susan weighing in, arguing with Bondage Susan against her present plan. You need to get the cuffs off, get dressed and get inside your apartment! You don't want to be out here in daylight!

Bondage Susan had her counterarguments ready. There's no problem with daylight, she pointed out to Shy Susan. I have everything I need here, including my clothes, in the briefcase. And nobody can see me, or the briefcase, behind these bushes no matter where they are! They cut off the view from the building, the parking lot, from the street, from anywhere anyone is going to be! And I've got the ravine right behind me. Nobody can come at me from that direction. At any hour of the day I can get the briefcase, unlock all this bondage gear, get dressed, all without anyone seeing me, and then walk into the building without causing anyone who's around a second thought. This is safe!

The internal argument subsided. As much as Shy Susan disliked being seen in daylight, even fully dressed and doing nothing to attract undue attention, she couldn't muster any continued objection more weighty than a plea to get home, safe, and out of sight, as she always wanted to be.

Bondage Susan, ignoring the plea, had gone on with her preparations as the argument had proceeded.

She was a little concerned about the string; it could easily have gotten tangled during her earlier use of it a few nights ago. If so, it wouldn't interfere with her escape from her upcoming bondage, other than to make it a little easier than she wanted it to be -- if it was tangled she would be able to pull a knotted glob of it to her faster than if the entire 400 foot length was free. Though it was in an unruly pile on the ground, it appeared all of it would come loose when pulled.

She checked to make sure the far end of the string was still tied to the ring in the handle of the knife, then she tossed the knife some distance away, far enough that she wouldn't be able to reach it except by reeling in the string.

Susan's excitement built as she came closer to finishing her task. She barely felt the cold anymore -- all her focus now was on her internal need, the craving for sexual release she had suppressed all through the night in her fear of not being able to get home.

Preparations were nearly done now, and Susan's breathing and heart rates both increased as her anticipation built. Looking to the east, the glow in the sky was increasing, taking on an orange tinge. It occurred to her she had gone without sleep through the night all the way to daybreak, yet right now she didn't feel tired at all. Only excited.

She picked up the loose end of the anchor rope, and sat with it a moment, considering just how she wanted to use it. She realized she couldn't use this single rope alone for everything she wanted. She quickly crawled back to Friday's site, untied one of the ropes that had held her ankle cuffs, and returned with it.

She was barely able to breathe now: preparations were done, and it was time to get started.

She found the padlock that had held her ankle cuffs together, and restored it to its place. She picked up the gag, and examined it as well as she could in the dim light. It was a little muddy, but she decided it be all right to use if she cleaned it first. Pouring a small amount of bottled water into her cupped palm, she rolled the gag ball around in it until she'd washed off the surface all the way around, then repeated the process with a fresh palmful of water to rinse it. She drank the rest of the water in the bottle, leaving herself with one final full bottle. Her residual thirst satisfied, she inserted the ball into her mouth and fastened the straps to secure it in place. There was a renewed wave of tingling between her legs.

She lay on her left side, facing the bushes about a foot in front of her, and picked up the rope she'd retrieved from Friday's tree. Passing it through the ring of the padlock holding her ankle cuffs together, she pulled it through until there were equal lengths, passed both ends behind her waist chain from above, and pulled them through, drawing her feet towards her butt. She continued pulling until her heels were as close to her butt as she could get them, gritted her teeth and pulled still harder, wanting to take away her ability to unbend her legs at all. She then pulled both ends of the rope through her crotch, and tied them in a knot around the front of her waist chain.

She pulled the other rope, her anchor to the bushes, between her legs, looped it around the hogtie rope, pulled it forward between her legs again, and pushed it in among the roots of the central bush and around one of them, well within the bush. She pulled the end back towards her, taking the slack out of

the rope, and wriggled up against the bush, pressing the front of her body against it. She continued pulling on the rope, making it pull her still closer to the bush, unable to back away. Satisfied, she tied the end of the rope to another root, well out of her reach.

She tied the free end of the string around her right wrist. Don't want to forget about this, she said to herself. It's my only way of getting free.

The blindfold! She'd nearly forgotten! She picked it up, rubbed the inner sides of the leather eye coverings against her arm to remove any remaining grit and mud, put them over her eyes, adjusting their distance slightly.

She became aware of a slight feeling of unease, a vague sense that she might still be forgetting something. She paused, her fingers holding the straps of the blindfold, and did a mental inventory. Got the string tied to my wrist, she told herself, starting the inventory. Other end still tied to the knife. Pull the knife to me, and I can cut the hogtie rope. The anchor rope is looped around the hogtie rope. Not secured to me in any other way. As soon as I cut the hogtie rope, I'm not anchored here anymore. Briefcase is over there... Susan pushed the blindfold away, raised her head, nodded when she saw the briefcase. Briefcase, she went on, has all the keys in it, clothes, everything.

She looked again at the briefcase. Yes, she told herself, location is okay. It's still, like me right now, in a place that can't be seen from the building, parking lot, or street. I'm fine.

She put the blindfold back in place. The feeling of unease returned. It's Shy Susan again, she told herself. She won't give up.

Susan buckled the blindfold tightly in place. The unease became something like an alarm bell.

It's natural to feel like I'm forgetting something, Susan told herself. But everything is in place. To be certain, she went through it all in her head one more time, all of the steps required to free herself, get dressed, get home. Everything was where it needed to be. She forcefully thrust the alarm down, out of her awareness. I'm doing this, she told herself, almost defiantly. I *want* this!

Patting the ground behind her, she found the free padlock she'd retrieved from Friday's tree, and picked it up -- and her fingers, shaking from excitement, lost their grip, and she had to pick it up again -- and threaded its shackle through the D-rings of her wrist cuffs, then through one of the links at the back of the waist chain.

Her excitement nearing a peak, she stopped to savor her last moment of freedom before locking herself in an inescapable hogtie, anchored to the bush. She would not, once she clicked the padlock closed, be able to untie either the hogtie rope or the anchor rope -- the hogtie rope was knotted only at her stomach, and both ends of the anchor rope were tied to roots of the bush, all of these knots impossible for her to reach.

The alarm bell pushed back into her consciousness again. It angered her. It was diluting her excitement. She gave herself fully to the excitement once more. Her whole body was trembling.

With a squeak that represented only the barest trace of the thrill flooding through her body, as she ignored a sudden pain in her fingers, Susan firmly clicked the padlock closed.

Instantly her entire being was flooded with awareness of her bondage. Every movement, every slightest wiggle, focused her consciousness on the chains, the ropes, the locks, her inability to separate her feet, to straighten her legs, to pull her joined hands from the small of her back, to move away from the bush in front of her, whose tiny twigs were tickling her stomach and breasts intimately, her inability to speak, to see. She felt the rope through her crotch, so much more responsive to her movements than ever before, every movement of her legs pulling it tight against her most sensitive place. And hovering over all, she had an intense awareness of how long it would take, once she began trying, to free herself.

She fought to remember the need to stay quiet, to keep from making noises that could be heard by her neighbors, and discovered something new: that the effort to bottle up the sounds of her heightened excitement added still further arousal, like a tea kettle prevented from whistling as the pressure within built higher and higher. She allowed herself only the slightest grunts of effort as her muscles strained ever harder. And as the orgasm exploded within her and consumed her in a flash of fire, she held back the scream that wanted to tear her apart, and it stayed inside her and became part of the climax, making it stretch out longer than ever before. Until at last it spent itself, and left her a burnt ash from the furnace settling slowly, slowly to the ground.

Smiling around her gag, Susan drifted into sleep.

* * * * *

Susan awoke. For the first time, she didn't experience any disorientation. She expected to be naked and bound outdoors, as she had been for nearly three days. She almost laughed, wondering if she would be totally confused the next time she woke up in her own bed.

She did try to stretch automatically, and discovered, before specifically remembering it, that she was hogtied. At once the excitement of being bound in her favorite position flared up again. She had never actually experienced a hogtie before last weekend, but she had so often fantasized about it that the degree of restraint involved came automatically loaded with a high sexual charge.

She wondered how long she had slept. Probably hours, she told herself. She did recall dreaming, though not the specific content. Wait, no, one dream did come back to her, vaguely, of having a holiday dinner with her parents and her grandmother. Nana had died five years ago, but in the dream that hadn't struck Susan as odd. She'd been uncomfortable during the dream dinner, feeling sure somehow Nana would read her mind and be shocked by Susan's inner fantasy life.

Susan's jaw ached from encompassing the gag -- another suggestion that hours had gone by. She was also very hungry and thirsty again. She told herself that she could take care of all those discomforts soon. Her legs ached from overuse as well. That would take longer to recover from, probably several days. At least at the moment it didn't feel as though a muscle cramp was imminent.

She had no way to judge the time of day -- the blindfold, as before, let absolutely no light in -- but knew it had to be broad daylight, perhaps around noon, based on traffic sounds and the renewed warmth that daytime brought. She hadn't anticipated being found in her hideaway, but was still relieved to find she hadn't been.

Actually there was one way to judge the passage of time. She needed badly to pee. Susan sighed. Unable to move any distance forward or backward, with the anchor rope holding her against the bush, and with a certainty she wouldn't be able to hold it during the time it was going to take to free herself, she knew she had to let go. She didn't really care for this part of prolonged outdoor bondage, but it was unavoidable. She couldn't change the laws of biology. She released the warm liquid, feeling it jet out between her squeezed-together thighs and down the front and back to pool on the ground under her.

At least, she thought, it's nearly over. She was eager to get home and safe. The thrill of bondage remained undiminished, but the constant fear of discovery was getting very old.

That it was daytime was acceptable. Susan knew how invisible she must be, lying where she was. It felt safer than the park had. She did hear the back door of her building open, followed by footsteps heading for the parking lot, which did make her tense up, but the standard sounds of a car door opening and slamming shut, engine starting, and car driving away told her that particular danger had passed. None of the sounds had been as close as the joggers or tennis players in the park. There was traffic along Stockhouse Boulevard as well. Not heavy -- it was never heavy -- but cars were passing far more frequently than during the night. Susan knew she was out of their sight as well.

All she needed to do was to reel in the knife, use it to cut the hogtie rope, the breaking of which would also free her from being anchored to the bush in front of her, and use her increased freedom of movement to retrieve the briefcase.

That first step would take some time. Four hundred feet of string.

As always, the physical feeling of restraint, in that favorite position that had always been the most frequent focus of her fantasies, coupled with the awareness that getting free involved a lot of upcoming work, made her arousal flare up again, and it was intensified immediately, as she began wriggling with excitement, by the crotch rope, much more directly related to her movements than usual, rubbing her intimately and insistently. She forced herself to distance herself from the feeling, freezing every muscle, waiting for the tingling to die down. Now was not a good time. She had managed to stay quiet during her last orgasm, but she recalled clearly how much conscious effort that had required, and wasn't completely sure she could repeat it. Though invisible, she wasn't inaudible at the distance where foot traffic in and out of the building was passing by, especially if she made as much noise as she probably would. She told herself she had had enough climaxes this weekend, every one of them of unimaginable intensity compared with any she had ever had before her bondage adventures. And she could have more the next time she let Suzy take over. She would have to settle for whatever relief she could give herself after returning to her apartment, barely adequate though she knew that would be.

She felt around her right wrist with the fingers of her left hand. She felt a pang of worry for a moment when she couldn't locate the string instantly, but then found it. She began reeling in the string. It went a bit faster than it had Friday night, as she was able to use both hands more easily. As before, she had to pause frequently to brush the recovered string away to keep it from piling up underneath her hands. Her sex was still tingling intensely.

The tickling of the leaves of the bush against her stomach and breasts reminded her once more how helpless she was to move away from her present position, or to escape the restriction of movement forced on her by the hogtie. The sensation of being bound flared into the forefront of her

consciousness, along with the knowledge she was just getting started freeing herself. Long way to go. Her hips twitched, her feet kicking outward against the hogtie rope, pulling the crotch rope tight against her sex once more.

Her resolve to postpone sexual release evaporated. She wriggled breathlessly on the ground, testing every bond, making her intensely conscious of how tightly she was bound, how inescapable the bondage was.

As the convulsions overtook her, she held, barely, to enough of her rational mind to remind herself: no noise! No noise! She clamped down against the scream seeking to tear its way out of her throat.

The orgasm hit her, as intense as ever, waves of heat radiating from between her legs rushing outward to every extremity and reflecting back. She felt her body bouncing on the ground. She held her breath, clamping down on her throat, and felt, as before, the effort taking her to a still higher level of ecstasy.

Calming then, the wave spending itself and washing away, leaving her bathed in sweat, her side against the ground caked in mud she had created herself. Breathing again at last, deeply, trying not to faint.

Her thirst, inevitably, had intensified. It was another of those sensations on her list of “non-favorite parts of prolonged outdoor bondage,” but, like the need to urinate periodically, she found it tolerable in the pursuit of the sexual satisfaction that she knew would be part of her life from now on.

She felt with her fingers, making sure the string was still in her hand. Somehow she hadn't lost hold of it in the throes of orgasm. She resumed pulling it in.

After a seemingly endless, almost hypnotic interval, Susan finally felt the sudden slight resistance that told her she had finished taking the slack out of the string, and that it was now pulling the knife towards her. Minutes later she had the knife in her hand.

She opened out the knife blade very carefully, and began sawing at the hogtie rope, wishing again for one of those Hollywood ropes that seemed, on film, to burst apart the instant a knife touched them. She had to stop, periodically, to wriggle her fingers to ward off cramps, and each time would feel the rope with her finger to determine progress. She decided she would need to sharpen the knife as soon as she could -- it seemed almost to make no headway against the smooth fibers. And each time she drew the knife across the rope, the part of it that continued on between her legs was drawn tight against her sex, and she fought off the tingling of sexual arousal once more.

It must have been half an hour before the rope finally parted and her feet, released of their hold, kicked outward, sending a bolt of agony through her legs after being held bent so long. She finished straightening them more carefully, breathing in small sips until the pain let go at last.

The breaking of the hogtie rope released the anchor rope as well, and Susan backed away from the bush and, with some effort, sat up. Now, she told herself, just get a drink, then the briefcase, and get out of here.

She shook her head irritably in sudden exasperation. She thought her meticulous planning of the hogtie had been perfect -- arranging the hogtie, with the knife to release herself from it, arranging it so the

anchor rope would automatically lose its hold on her as soon as the hogtie rope was cut, leaving her free to move to the extent her cuffed ankles and wrists locked behind her to the waist chain would allow her, which was more than enough freedom to retrieve the briefcase. She had somehow -- she didn't know why -- visualized her release from the hogtie/anchor combination as including the loss of the gag and blindfold. Yet she still had no way to untie either one, until after she'd got the briefcase and could use the keys in it to unlock the wrist cuffs.

At first Susan focused her annoyance exclusively on the gag. There was one last water bottle here, easily within reach, but with the gag in her mouth she had no way to drink.

As she began thinking past the water bottle to the task of getting to the briefcase, she suddenly thought: Oh, no, no, no...

She shivered with fear. Of all the dangerous situations she had found herself in during the last few days, this, she thought, might be the worst.

She knew exactly where the briefcase was, from where she sat now. It was perhaps fifteen feet away, in a place that would still be safe from observation by anyone walking to the parking lot or driving by on the street.

But, unable to remove the blindfold, unable to see anything at all, with all of the ground between here and there feeling the same, no tiny landmarks to guide her, Susan knew she would lose her orientation, lose any sense of where she was and exactly what direction she was going, as soon as she moved away from the bushes she was currently sitting against. She could start squirming along the ground -- blind, she wasn't about to start hopping, with obstacles all around that would send her sprawling and the ravine a short distance away -- but she couldn't hope to maintain a steady direction of travel. If she got off the track by even a few feet as she traveled those fifteen feet or so to the briefcase, she would miss it. She could be just inches away and not know it, and as she twisted this way and that trying to find it, the last shred of any sense of her location would leave her -- permanently. Any bush she brushed against might be among the ones that had been protecting her from being seen, or might be a different one, more isolated, offering little or no cover. She wouldn't know when she emerged into plain sight from the building, and had no way to prevent it happening, no way to know whether she was being watched by some astonished resident of her building. And her chance of accidentally finding the briefcase, once she had lost her sense of location and direction, was nearly zero.

And, of course, there was still the ravine to consider. She wouldn't know how close to the edge of it she was, and no matter how carefully she moved, she could still easily fall into it.

Why didn't I stop and think, Susan screamed at herself, that I still couldn't take off the blindfold after I'd cut the rope? In all the time she had spent going over her plan of release, making sure everything was where it needed to be, she had forgotten to think of whether anything was where it *didn't* need to be.

She suddenly remembered that discomfort, that alarm, that had begun at just the time she had been putting on the blindfold, and the pain in her fingers at the moment she'd started closing the padlock, which had been, this time, too little and too late to stop her. It was Suzy! she realized. Again! When I start to do something that's too dangerous, she warns me, and I keep ignoring her!

It was so hard, Susan saw, for Suzy to get messages through to her. At least when their shared body was sober. Suzy can't really talk to me even when I'm drunk, Susan saw, but she can take over control when I'm that far out of it. Other than that, she can restore memories she's hidden from me. But speak to me? No.

Susan was more aware than ever, now, of just how separate a person Suzy was. The times when Bondage Susan had argued with Shy Susan, Susan had been fully aware of the argument, had heard both sides clearly. Both sides are me, both are Susan, she realized. But I can't hear Suzy in the same way.

I have to stop tying myself up on my own, Susan told herself. I *promise* to let only Suzy do it, or do it myself by her instructions. I'm not careful like she is.

I don't know if I can keep this promise to myself, Susan admitted. I get so caught up in wanting the bondage, I can't stop myself. But I *have* to listen for Suzy's warnings, she vowed. I have to recognize them for what they are.

Suzy can't help me now, Susan observed. She can't see any better than I can. I have to get rid of this blindfold!

Susan spent several minutes, increasingly frustrated, rubbing her shoulders, first her right, then her left, against the strap along the side of her head securing the blindfold, remembering that all her attempts Friday night had failed. At least, she told herself, I have a little bit more freedom of movement than I did then.

The rubbing accomplished nothing. The strap, though she could move it a few millimeters, always settled back where it had been.

She thought about finding a tree, backing up against it and rubbing the back of her head against it. But she knew that that, in particular, wouldn't work any better than it had Friday, and the search for a tree would definitely get her lost. After failing to remove the blindfold that way, she would have thrown away any chance of finding the briefcase, or finding her way back to her shelter. She would probably end up in full view from the building.

The fear that had been gnawing at her since she had discovered the problem billowed inside her, threatening to overwhelm her. Last night, she reminded herself, trying to get across the creek was terrifying, but I knew the whole time *how* to do it, as dangerous as it was. Now I'm stuck here and have no idea what to do at all. I know where I have to get to, but as soon as I start moving in that direction I'm doomed.

I have to try it, she told herself. I don't have any choice.

She backed up against the bush, her legs straight along the ground, pointed in the direction she was fairly sure the briefcase was. Her butt felt something underneath it. She realized it was the anchor rope.

She groaned, thinking of the amount of work she had done to leave herself, unwittingly, in the situation she was in now. The anchor rope had originally stretched all the way from where she sat now to the

ravine, holding the briefcase there. If she had left it as it was after untying the handle of the briefcase, she'd be able to use it now to keep from getting lost: she could hold onto it, letting it slip through her fingers as she moved, and by feeling it, she would always know the direction back to the bush. She could use it to find her way back to her starting point, if she needed to, and even without that, holding the rope would enable her to keep her sense of direction.

But she'd made the rope double back into the bush, so that only a couple of feet of rope came out of the bush. Totally useless, now, for what she could have used it for otherwise. And she'd made sure she couldn't untie it.

She gasped. The string!! I can use it that same way!

Her heart pounding, she patted her palms on the ground beside either hip. Finding nothing, she pushed her butt outward a few inches from the bush and tried again. There! Found the knife.

Holding the knife, she backed up against the bush once more. She looped the knife, the end of the string still knotted to the ring in its handle, around the nearest root, and knotted the string around the root. Holding the string lightly, letting it slip through her fingers as she moved while keeping it taut from her fingers to the root, she began butt-walking outward from the bush.

She felt calm, not having to worry about her blindness getting her hopelessly lost in the woods. When she thought she had gone the right distance, not yet finding the briefcase, she felt with her legs in both directions. A few feet to her right, her lower leg bumped against something made of leather.

* * * * *

Susan sat rubbing her wrists and ankles, free of the metal cuffs for the first time in three days. She worked her jaw, gradually easing the pain caused by the gag over the hours. She looked up at the sun, winking down through the leaves above her. It was early afternoon, as she'd suspected. She had probably slept for about six hours, after that huge orgasm near dawn.

She grabbed the water bottle, twisted off the cap and quickly downed several swallows before she stopped herself. I can get all the water I want as soon as I get back to my apartment, she told herself firmly. Right now there's something else I need the water for.

She dressed quickly -- as she'd anticipated, it felt very strange to be wearing clothes after three days of constant nudity -- and looked at her arms, not covered by cloth. They were caked with grime. She was sure her face was as well. She knew she couldn't walk into her building looking this way. She was aware that her phobia of attracting attention was unjustifiable at most times, but anyone who passed her in the hall looking the way she did now would definitely look twice.

Rationing the water to make sure she could finish the job, she poured some down her right arm, rubbed the dirt away and rinsed it with more water, then repeated the process on her left arm. She cupped water in her palm and used it to wash her face as well as she could, using up the last of the water to rinse some of the mud out of her hair. I have no idea what I look like right now, she told herself, but I must be a lot more presentable than I was.

She looked around her. I'll pick up all this stuff later, she decided. Closing her hand firmly around her apartment key, that elusive article she had spent three days trying to retrieve, she worked up her courage -- the last three days of terror at the idea of being seen had accentuated her usual degree of fear -- and emerged from behind the bushes and walked to her building.

As luck would have it, no one happened to be on the stairs or in the hallway as she walked, trembling, to her apartment.

* * * * *

Closing her apartment door behind her, Susan felt relief wash over her with nearly the same degree of intensity as her orgasms over the past weekend. She hurried directly to the kitchen and downed two full glasses of water, followed by a hastily-assembled sandwich.

Her most basic needs taken care of, she walked into her living room, held her arms up in the air and turned several slow circles, telling herself triumphantly, No one can see me! No one can see me! She had never felt so safe, so protected! It was like the pleasure of being wrapped in a warm blanket on a cold morning. She had always appreciated her solitude, but never so much as now, after fighting so hard for it! Suzy had given her so much more than just physical pleasures to a degree she had never known before. Suzy had given her this!

Susan peeled off her clothes and threw them in the laundry hamper, took a quick shower to rinse off the grime that had been under her clothes, then filled the tub for a long, hot bath.

She looked over her body as she bathed. It was covered in scrapes and bruises, the worst of them around her wrists that had worn the cuffs for three days, but none would show in the clothes she would be wearing at work.

Not doing this again for a while, she told herself. Independence Day weekend coming up in five weeks, with July 4 falling on a Monday this year. Plenty of time to let Suzy plan for it. And I'll be healed before then.

As she soaked, she tried, without success, to massage the pain out of her legs. She tried the same with her breasts, telling herself that wearing a bra would at least help ease the ache in that area over the next few days. As she rubbed them, the tingling returned between her legs, and increased as she thought ahead to the possibilities of the Independence Day weekend. What, she wondered, will Suzy come up with in that amount of time? Memories of her favorite parts of this past weekend -- skipping past the scary parts -- flashed through her mind. She rubbed herself to a mini-orgasm. All of the climaxes I've ever had in my life until these past two weekends have been mini-orgasms, she told herself, and I never realized it until I felt the real thing. But this will do for now.

After dressing in her pajamas, she watched some television, drowsing on the couch, made herself dinner, with a couple of extras of the cookies she used for dessert, and went to bed. She slept for thirteen unbroken hours until her alarm sounded.

END