

The Test of Courage

by Anonymous

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“You want to try it?” Gabi could not believe it, but the blonde brat nodded affirmatively. With her petite, slim figure, her long blonde hair and those big blue eyes above a straight, pointed nose, which to her own chagrin was still decorated with freckles, Rachel Fowler looked more like a cute, innocent country-bumpkin, than a high-ranking member of the coolest sorority on campus.

“Only if I’ll belong to you as a lieutenant afterwards, with all rights and obligations of this rank.” The craved rank of a lieutenant offered several amenities and last but not least the kind of reputation she longed for. Those sisters, who had

reached this rank, did not have to endure the humiliating rituals and enjoyed a number of privileges in their official duties, against the ordinary sisters or sister contenders, which was the lowest and beginner’s rank.

“You can wait and climb up the ladder like everyone else’s here did,” another member of the inner circle, who had guethered here, suggested.

“That’s nothing for me,” Rachel replied haughtily, “After this stunt I’ll either be accepted as equal to each of you or...” She trailed off and left the rest of her sentence deliberately to her counterparts imaginations.

“... or what?” One of them nevertheless dwelled on the topic.

“... or I’ll join another college. I’ve no desire to become a philistine,” Rachel announced with utter conviction. More than one of her future would-be-equals was sceptical.

“You know what you’ve to do?”

“Sure, I’ve to walk to that hat shop on the top floor of the local shopping center and buy and pay for a simple straw hat there. The catch is, that I’ve to be completely naked, dressed only with garters and panties, only covered by a thin trench coat. One of you will constantly keep an eye on me all the way and tape it in order to document it to the others,” she answered quick as a shot and added. “Clear as mud.”

“But that’s not everything,” one of her future sisters replied slowly in order to let the pig out of the poke.

“So, what else shall I do?” Rachel asked. “When the conditions were stated yesterday jointly, all here’ve agreed, it’s a suitable test of courage.”

“That’s right,” replied the older student, who had stated the objection, “but we’ve changed our mind, and it’s us, who make the rules. To do it covered by a coat isn’t really a big deal for such a big promotion.”

“If I go without the coat, the security will arrest me,” Rachel replied dryly. “I may be crazy, but I’m not a criminal. Theft or indecent exposure is definitely ruled out. I’m studying economics. I must and will not acquire an entry in my certificate of good conduct because of this.”

“We’re not talking of anything like that,” said another classmate, “but to give the whole thing a little pizzazz, we’ve decided, that you’re going to wear high heels – you own some?” Rachel nodded, “and that you’ll be completely tied up under the coat.” Thus the pig was out of the poke. Her future sisters did not want to make it too easy for the newby to obtain the rank of lieutenant.

“So what,” replied Rachel, who had prudently expected this or that complication, without batting an eyelid, “if you promise to untie me afterwards, everything’s fine with me.”

“It’s okay with you?” Pure disappointment was written in the leader’s face. She could not help to admire the boldness, with which the new-comer had reacted on this opening. Her sisters and she had seriously believed, that the sassy newby would finally pinch, facing this tightening of conditions, they had agreed on yesterday after a lengthy discussion. After all it was a matter of reputation. They could not promote every hill-billy girl, fresh at the university, immediately to the rank of a lieutenant.

“If that’s all,” Rachel enjoyed the small triumph, to have puzzled her future sisters, although she still had not achieved anything at all. However, the latter also regained their composure quickly. When the new one was as cool, as she pretended to be, they wanted her to prove it.

“Okay, we’ll meet tomorrow at ten forty-five here in ‘The Menhir,’” the leader said, as if she was explaining the preparations for a picnic. “Bring your raincoat and the heels, three inch minimum. You can switch clothes in the bowling alley. There won’t be anyone, at that time. Then you’ll go by subway to the shopping center, buy that hat and come with it on your head back here. You must not tell anyone about it. In order to ensure, that everything will be done correctly, at least one of us’ll always have an eye on you. If you should actually make it, you’ll be introduced into the sorority as a lieutenant, if not...”

“... I should not show up here again,” Rachel finished the half sentence with a grin. Self-confidently she added: “Don’t cheer up too early. I managed other things than this.”

“We’ll see!” With these words, she was dismissed. She was still not even a contender and therefore according to the strict trules of the sorority had no formal right to be there at all.

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“Here I am,” Rachel greeted her expectant classmates promptly late in the morning. The petite, blonde girl carried a black trench coat casually on one arm. High-heeled shoes she normally loathed to wear made her a fine looker and brought her with the taller ones of her fellow students at

eye level. She also featured black silk stockings, a skirt that barely covered her knees, a white blouse and no bra underneath, ready to undertake, what was demanded by her classmates.

“Follow me to the bowling alley,” Angelica, the leader, invited her, “and undress there down to your stockings and panties.” Rachel did without a single comment, as she was told.

“Let’s come to your *bondage*, now.” Gabi, more or less the right hand of Angerlika in the matters of the sisterhood rummaged a clanking bunch of *chains* from her gym bag. Among them were also a couple of “charm bracelets” of the kind involuntarily worn by criminals after arrest by the police. Rachel gulped at the sight.

“*Handcuffs?* You want to put me in *handcuffs?*” This was an unpleasantly surprise. She had expected cords and/or leather straps, which could be cut by a knife in an emergency. But *handcuffs* were a completey different matter. Without a matching key there was no way to get them off.

“Are you already about to back down?” Asked Angelika with relish. It would have been a personal triumph for her, if the newby should actually retreat at the very last moment.

“No, of course not,” Rachel replied with feigned indifference. “I just thought that a few leather strips would do. This iron stuff makes a lot of noise. I’ll jingle like a tambourine, if you’ll put all this stuff on me.”

“That’s actually your problem,” Angelica replied. Maliciously she added: “Either you’ll wear these under your coat, or the deal’s off.”

“I didn’t say, that I won’t wear them,” Rachel replied proudly, eliminating any doubts that she might not be ready to take on the new challenge.

“Okay, then take a stand right here in front of me,” ordered Gabi. Challenged by Angelica Rachel followed this order without hesitation.

“Lift your hair on.” A metal collar, she had not noticed yet was put around her neck with one click. Two *silver chains* were affixed to its front ring by small small padlocks. There were two larger metal rings incorporated into the latter which came to rest exactly above her small breasts.

Another cold *chain* was wound tightly around her flat stomach, to which the former two were also attached by further padlocks. Finally one more *chain* at breast height complemented, what could best be described as an improvised *chain harness*.

In this combination the *steel chains* formed a kind of bra, which framed and accented her not very big, but quite respectable female attributes advantageously without leaving anything to the viewer’s imagination. Up to now this was just a nuisance. This “hardware” would of course produce nasty, tinkling sounds, but apart from this did not really impose restrictions on her freedom of movement.

The *chain*, which was put through her crotch afterwards, was much more unpleasant, and the purpose of the heavy *security handcuffs*, which now dangled paired up in front of her navel, did not require an explanation.

Soon her narrow wrists were enclosed uncomfortably tight by the latter. Those were no regular *police handcuffs* with ratchets. They looked like big black padlocks, an also black, tight fitting metal insert on the inside of the solid silver brackets made sure that she could by no means pull her fairly small wrists out of them.

The *restraints* utilized here reportedly had come into the possession of the sisterhood many years ago and had been in use until now for the ritual punishment of sisters, who had violated one of the numerous rules.

“Well, how do you feel now?” Angelika asked with a grin. Rachel tried to turn around her captured wrists in the tightly fitting *brackets*, only to find out that the unyielding *steel bands* were much too tight to allow for this.

“Like tuna in the can,” she replied in an effort not to appear uncool.

“Fine, now we’re only missing the *leg irons*,” her counterpart stated.

“How shall I walk?” Slowly but surely the whole thing started to become queasy. “Besides the *chain* of such will be visible under my coat.”

“Don’t worry, we’ll lift the connecting *chain* a little bit with another one that will lead to your *bracelets*,”

Gabi replied, “if you walk neat and slowly, like you’re supposed to do, no one will notice your *anklets*. To Rachel’s chagrin these were afixed on her with small, sturdy padlocks, too.

In contrast to the *handcuffs* the *leg irons* were probably standard police equipment. The latter were at least closed by ratchets, which allowed to adjust the diameter exactly to that of her slender ankles. However this also did not make them more comfortable for the one on the receiving end.

Equipped this way, she was encouraged to make a few turns in front of the assembled crew, in all her naked glory, before the rain jacket was laid above her shoulders, buttoned and additionally fixed at the neck by a decorative brass chain. Afterwards the mirror showed only a slim blonde girl in high heels and a long coat. Checking her sight, or better the fact, that one actually saw nothing from her *restraints*, after the coat had been applied, as her sisters had promised, gave her a big relieve.

“You’ve forgotten one minor thing,” she remarked sheepishly. “I’ll have to pay for the hat. How am I supposed to do this with my hands tied to my belly under my coat?”

“Very simple,” Angelica replied, “we’ll hang your purse around your neck. You’ll have to convince the salesclerk, to take the money out of it and to put the change back. Maybe you’ll be generous and dis-

pense with the exchange money.” Rachel nodded. Under these conditions that ought to be the best solution, also her budget was not exactly exuberant. “Let me go now,” she said nervously. A slight tingle under her coat revealed to fine ears that she was not as calm, as she pretended to be.

“No, we’ll wait ’till ten past eleven. The subway arrives at a quarter past, or do you like to wait ten minutes on the platform in your cape for the train?” Angelica asked. It was a rhetorical question. “Besides do you have your student ticket?” Until now nobody had thought about this. Ticket inspections were not uncommon particularly at semester start.

“It’s in my purse,” Rachel replied.

“Maybe you should clip it on the breast pocket,” Gabi suggested reasonably. “The inspectors nowadays don’t like to open foreign bags.”

“Can you do so?” Rachel asked.

“Sure,” Gabi took Rachel’s student ticket out of her purse and clipped it to the breast pocket of her raincoat. The next ten minutes were the longest in Rachel’s young life. She was not sure, if she actually wanted to join the sorority anymore, but knew that it was too late to back down now.

However, when the time was right, she rose bravely and tripped in short, measured steps to the subway station. In her hyper-sensitive perception the clanking of her *chains* should be heard for miles. In reality

the soft ringing of her mainly taut *steel bondage* was almost completely covered by the natural ambient noise.

Her arrival at the subway station was well timed, and the train arrived immediately, after she reached the platform. Politely Rachel deferred the other passengers. Her biggest concern was, there could be someone, she knew. She knew hardly anyone here, but if the devil wanted...

But the devil did not want – at least not yet, and everything went well. She did not dare to sit down, because the hem of her coat might have been raised and someone might have noticed, that she wore *leg irons*. Instead, she leaned back against a railing and tried to attract as little attention as possible. She did not have to wait long for the first challenge.

“TICKET CONTROL” The elderly woman spoke out loud- and clearly, “ladies and gentlemen my colleague and I’ll now check the tickets. Please keep them unsolicitedly ready.” The semester ticket with student’s bonus was fixed to her breast pocket. Theoretically the only thing she had to do was to stretch out her chest.

It suddenly occurred to Rachel, that although these tickets came along with pictures, strictly speaking, they were only valid in conjunction with her student ID. But the latter was in the breast pocket of her coat, directly above her pounding heart, but well of reach of her bound hands.

She had not wasted a thought on this until now, but in case the inspector should not be satisfied with her display, it would become quickly apparent, that she could not supply her ID, simply because her hands were trapped before her body, and then...

Fortunately for her, this did not happen. The elderly lady bitched a little, because she refused to remove her ticket from her coat, but accepted it without further complaints.

A few minutes later the subway arrived at its predetermined stop at the shopping center. In small measured steps Rachel threaded herself into the stream of visitors. The millinery was on the top floor. She would have to take four escalators, not a simple task in her high heels. The short *chain* between her ankles allowed only for a very short stride.

Despite her petite figure Rachel was fairly athletic. She had managed to reach the platform of the subway without difficulties. Four more escalators should not pose a problem, she thought. But contrary to the station, in which she had entered the train, this one was well frequented.

Not all people were so considerate to give the hampered young lady the space, she needed in order to proceed safely from one escalator to the next. But she managed it up to the top floor somehow without betraying herself, that means to disclose the conditions under her thin trench

coat. The millinery already firmly in focus and thus by now completely unexpected the feared disaster struck.

“Rachel, Rachel Fowler, what a surprise,” she knew the voice and the tall, brown-haired man with the military short hair, to whom it belonged.

Harold, usually called Harry, Smith grew up in the same village as Rachel. Four years older than her, he had visited the same schools and a sister of her age, who was accidentally a close friend of hers. She had apprenticed for book keeping, while Rachel had made it to a renown university.

Actually she knew from his sister, that Harry was here, too, but at a different school. To her secret chagrin he had never shown any interest in her as a woman, and therefore she had not considered to contact him. Nevertheless, it might have been nice, to meet him casually somewhere. Here and now he was the last, she wanted to meet. But Murphy had no mercy with her. Dumbly she stared past him to the ground.

“You must be mistaken, sir,” she said, while her heart was patting up to her neck. He looked at her from one side, trying to fix her eyes. She looked strictly away from him in an attempt to avoid his questioning gaze.

“What’s up, Rachel? Come on you know me.” It was no question. Harry was just trying to be nice. “You don’t have to be embarrassed. Come on, I’ll get us a coffee for sake of old times.”

“I beg your pardon, but you’re mistaken, sir,” she repeated and kept staring away from him. It was terrible. Harry Schmidt was not just anyone. On high school he had been her secret crush, although he had never seriously regarded the girlfriend of his sister, who was four years younger.

“And why’s your name ‘Rachel Fowler’ or did you steal her ticket?” He blocked her way and sought actively the eye contact, she tried to avoid so desperately. The blood rushed to her head. She lost her head. In despair she tried to surround him vigorously avoiding to look at him.

“Let me alone,” she gasped in vain. “I’ll cry for help!” It was a bluff and the last thing, she could do. He just shook his head searching for words.

“I wouldn’t have believed, that you could become such a bitch.” he finally said, before he turned away. She did feel like crying. Desperately she tugged at the *steel bracelets* – to no avail. This must not have happened!

She had beavaged impossibly. Harry would never talk to her again. She wished it could be undone – someday, somehow, but she could not see a way how. She cursed the sorority, but it was too late. Bravely she gathered herself and headed for the shop in the tiny steps, which her *restraints* allowed, accompanied by small, jingling sounds. She wanted to go through with it now, although she felt more miserably than ever.

"ATTENTION, ladies and gentlemen," came a loudspeaker announcement, "this is an evacuation exercise, no emergency. Please go slowly and controlled to the next emergency exit. The emergency exits are signposted. All shops will close immediately. Please follow the instructions of the staff. There is no reason for concerns. This is only an exercise!"

Rachel froze in shock. Everyone around her ran to the next emergency exit. She had all hands full, to dodge the people around, which was not easy, because the latter were not available to her and the short *chain* between her ankles allowed only for very small steps. She had been so close to the shop, which was nevertheless completely out of range now, because the saleswoman was already about to close it from the outside.

Slowly, but determined she tried to reach the next emergency exit. Where were her sisters? Weren't those responsible for her now? Suddenly the tall man, she had suspected to have left already, was at her side again, and he was determined not to let off her again. He grabbed her rather roughly at her shoulders.

"What to hell's wrong with you, Rachel?" He asked in anger. "You're moving like an old woman!"

"Harry, I... I CANNOT move," she gasped and gathered all her courage. Her vow of silence, the admission to the sorority, it was not longer impor-

tant. "I'm *chained* up under this coat. PLEASE help me to get out of here."

"WHAT?" His eyes widened.

"Open my my cape," she said, "carefully, just a little bit. But you've to close it immediately." He hesitated in doubt, she might have lost her mind. But then he opened the top buttons and saw her bare breasts encased in the improvised *chain* harness. Now it was his turn to blush. Hastily he buttoned her raincoat again.

"Oh, shit, Rachel," he muttered, "what... Are you completely nuts?"

"It was a test of courage, Harry," she whispered meekly. "I know it was stupid, but can you get me out here?"

"Sure," he said, "I'll take you on my arms." With these words, he lifted her up as if she weighed nothing. She wanted to hug him, the very same guy she had secretly wished to hell a view minutes ago. But this was impossible, since she was quite literally tied up.

"You are strong," she said and blushed without knowing why.

"You know that this is not an exercise?" He asked, and she nodded. For some reason he held her tighter than necessary. It did not enter her mind to complain about this.

"Well, probably it's just about some fool, who forgot his bag somewhere. Probably right now a squad team prepares to blow his purchases up," Harry guessed, and she agreed inwardly with him. Since September eleven, the whole world had become

a little bit paranoid. “Nevertheless, we’ve to get you out of here.”

“Do you think that they will control us, when we leave?” She asked anxiously. “That would be a disaster.”

“Because of your body jewelry?” He asked. “No, I think the authorities are happy, if they get all the people out in time. But I can hardly leave you alone dressed up like this.”

“It would be very nice, if you would not do that,” she admitted. In Harry’s strong arms she felt safe.

“Well, this staircase leads to the exit at Jefferson Street. My car’s in the Woolworth garage. Do you want me to carry you up there, or could you wait for me, until I can pick you up at the exit? The latter’s faster. My car’s on the top floor, and no elevator goes up this far. But it’s up to you...”

“I’ll wait for you downstairs,” she replied confidently, “up to now nobody except you’s noticed, that I’m almost naked under this coat.” This way it was done. Without another word he carried her downstairs.

Naturally, they were among the last to leave the building. But no one asked awkward questions. The Security forces were in fact only concerned to get all this people out of the building. She might as well had bent over and therefore not been able to walk on her own feet. When they finally managed to escaped the crowds, he placed her again on the latter.

“Don’t run away,” Harry said to

her jokingly, in an attempt to cheer her up and loosen the situation, when he left her at the boardwalk and disappeared in order to fetch his car.

“Wag,” she replied dryly but with a smile on her lips. She looked, if one of her would-be-fellow sisters was around – but to no avail. Probably it had not even occurred to them, that they had left Rachel in the lurch.

A little bit away from the turmoil of onlookers, she did not attract attention, as could be expected. Angrily she yanked on the tight fitting *handcuffs* hidden under her coat. Of course the latter did not budge an inch.

After what felt like an eternity a blue, old Ford turned around the corner, a tall, well-known brown-haired man got out, opened the passenger door and assisted her quietly in order to get into the passenger seat.

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“Where’re we going to?” She asked, when he buckled her seatbelt.

“To my room,” he replied. “For the time being you’ll be save there.”

“Agreed!” He did not answer and she hesitated. “Harry?” She asked, pausing for effect, and when he looked at her, she continued: “Thank you very much for the help in need – especially after I was so nasty to you.” It was no smalltalk, but a confession.

“We’ll talk about it, some day,” he replied, but there was a warm smile

on his lips. His apartment was a typical male dorm room, not properly cleaned with textbooks – he studied Engineering – spread everywhere.

“It’s a little messy, I did not expect someone...,” he tried to explain.

“I’ve seen worse here,” she played it down sympathetically. Then with her consent he took the cape off in order to, as he called it, get a picture of the extent of her *steel bondage*. Although she did not admit it to herself, she was visibly uncomfortable in standing almost completely naked in front of him. Harry said nothing and pretended to take only a look at the *shackles* and decorative elements. But he could hardly overlook, that the naughty little girl, he once knew, had become a damned pretty woman.

“I have a bathrobe,” he had offered her after the screening, she had endured quietly. “It might be a bit large and you can’t close it, but it will keep you warm if you wrap yourself into.”

“That would be nice.” He went to the bathroom in order to fetch it.

“The question is, how to proceed in order to get you out of all this *chains*,” he said as he reappeared and wrapped the promised garment not without secret regrets around her almost naked form. “I suppose you don’t want to wear them any longer?” It was a rhetorical question. Nevertheless, she shook her head quietly.

“Well, I’ve a toolbox here. It contains among other things a bolt cut-

ter, we might get through some of the stuff with, if it doesn’t bother you, that I’ll see you almost nakedly?”

“You’ve already seen me like this a minute ago,” she replied with a grin, which nevertheless looked more forced than cool. He put his hand under her chin, and she blushed.

“We’ll make it together this way or another,” he promised assuringly and left her again, this time in order to fetch the mentioned tool box.

It was an unpleasant procedure. The bolt cutter was cold and not too big. It had to be used at least a dozen times with all might at different locations, before at least some of the *chains* around her slender but well-trained body finally gave way.

“So that’s it. The rest is of a different caliber. Against the remaining ones my tools are useless,” he stated. “I’ve no angle grinder here, and honestly I wouldn’t like to try such a tool on you. It’s simply too dangerous.”

The remains were the sturdy *metal collar* with its built-in lock, the heavy *hand* and *ankle shackles* and their *connection chain*, which, like the professional *restraints* and unlike the ones, he had cracked, was hardened, as he explained to her, and could not be tackled with his light bolt cutter.

The disappointed woman lifted her still forcefully connected wrists slightly above waist-level. That was it. She had at least gotten rid of the decorative *chain harness* and in particu-

lar of the unpleasantly tight crotch *chain*, and her hands were no longer attached to the front of the abdomen, but apart from this she was still sufficiently restrained in order to qualify for a chain gang. Better than nothing, but secretly she had hoped for more.

"I can hardly attend a lecture like this," she remarked aptly after a test.

"It would attract quite a bit of attention," Harry admitted dryly, "but shouldn't, whoever has put those stuff on you, have the keys to them?"

"I think they're still in 'The Menhir'. But how can I go there like this in order to pick them up?" Rachel asked. It was not really a question but a hidden plea to Harry to become active once again in order help her.

Sure, theoretically Harry could simply wrap her in her trenchcoat and drive her there, but, if she was honest to herself, she was not very eager to confront Angelica and the others and plea to them to free her.

Her future sisters were not only cool but could sometimes also turn quite ugly, when one of them failed, in particular if this one had somehow overstated herself. That in this particular case the whole mess was not her fault and the observing sisters had left her cowardly in the lurch, would probably not earn her enough credit in order to hold her head high.

"I think, you should stay here and wind yourself back in my robe, while I'll collect them together with, what

you must have been wearing before you took up this stupid dare," Harry suggested, and with this offer he took a fairly big load from her heart.

"You'd really do this for me?" She had obviously been successful in wrapping him around her finger. Harry gave her a weird look. As she knew very well, he was good-hearted in general, but not stupid. In fact, he was the smartest guy, she knew.

"Sure," he replied, "for sake of old days. Although, when I think about this, it calls for a consideration."

"What do you want?" Now she was alerted, that the yearned help might not come totally for free.

"I haven't an idea, yet," he replied. "But, Rachel, you can be sure, I'll think of something." She understood immediately. It was his way of telling the friend of his little Sister, who had become a pretty darn thing, that she could count on him and that he would do, what she wanted, but not make a fool of himself on her behalve.

"You still want me to go?" he asked, after he had drawn this line. She nodded. "Just give me the address of this restaurant, and I'll fetch the keys and your stuff from there."

"Guys must not enter there," she replied timidly. "They're pretty tough on it." This objection was justified. On the other hand she did not really want to talk him out of this good idea.

"So am I," he said boastfully with a grin, "just give me the address, and

I'll deal with the rest," and so she did. The sisters were quite tough. It was clear, this trip would not be a picnic.

"Please, make yourself at home here," he simply said. "The fridge is not completely filled, but maybe..."

"No thanks, I'm not hungry," she replied. "Harry, it would be really great if you could get my clothes and especially the keys for these things."

"I'll do my best," he promised with a smile and left. After the door was slammed shut, she rose slowly, put the improvised robe, into which she had wrapped herself during the conversation, off and surveyed the rest of her remaining *bondage*. The *arm* and *leg bands* were stuck like a glove. The vague idea, to apply a little liquid soap and to try to pull her hands or feet out by force was a hoax. Her fellow sisters had done a good job.

But she was up to something different. Rachel slipped back into her high heels and coyly regared her naked self in the bathroom mirror. With those heels on her feet, wearing only panties and garter belts, her small but firm breasts out of reach for her own hands, which were constrained to a little bit above waist-level, she looked like a cheap hooker. Her father might kill her, if he could see her like this, and what was Harry thinking about her, right now?

The damned *handcuff/leg iron* combination could be neither teared nor stripped off. In retrospect, to take on

this dare was the most stupid idea, she ever had. She had done so in order to appear cool, cool and grown up. Instead she had brought herself into the biggest mess of her young life.

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In the meantime, Harold Smith had arrived at "The Menhir", where the sorority, he thought of as a Girly Gang guised as such, had its club room respectively headquarters.

"No trespassing, fellow, it's private there," an artificial redhead with a blue streak bluffed at him, when he headed for the the back room's door.

"I know," the tall man replied friendly, while she tried to block his way, "this is about a serious concern."

"As yet no guy goes in there," The brat was persistent. He simply shifted her aside without much effort or wasting a second thought on her.

"Sorry, but I've to go in there," he muttered. Inside were only two sisters with tattoo-covered upper arms. One of them wanted to excel in particular and pulled out a switchblade knife. A click and the blade flashed.

"Out, guy or you'll miss something..." Quick as a flash he grabbed for the champagne bottle that served as a makeshift candle holder, smashed it at the table and brought his back with a jump away from the door – it was better to make sure, that there was no one in his back right

now. He had seen this in an American gangster movie. The sharp jagged bottle's rest in a tall man's hand raised against her face did not fail to make a strong impact here as well.

"The last one, who said this to me were three Taliban," he declared pompously, "but when I walked away, all three of them were dead." This was not exactly the truth. He had not left the Afghan inn upright, but crept outside, and the last of the three Taliban had died two days later in a Canadian military hospital.

This incident had actually been the ticket home. He had been patched up in an army hospital first in Germany and then in Washington. His words did not miss the intended effect. Both of the cool brides looked a little pale around their noses.

"I don't want trouble," he tried to ease the situation, "I'm here in behalf of Rachel Fowler. You've *chained* her up and sent her to the shopping center. I'm here to fetch her clothes and the keys to her *shackles*. Give them to me and I'll be away, if not..."

"What do you've to do with her?" The second brat, he judged to be the leader, had also drawn her knife, but it was more or less an expression solidarity. The girls seemed not to be very skilled with these weapons.

If he would set aside any consideration, he would be able to take on all three of them – the third, which had tried to hinder him on trespass-

ing, had meanwhile joined her sisters. That this was not exactly, what he had in mind, was a different matter.

"I'm Rachel's big brother," he lied. "Either you hand me her clothes and the keys out, now, or this stall will need a renovation very soon, and the police will be on my side, when the whole thing should come out."

"Why didn't you go to the police?"

"Because I don't want unnecessary attention on behave of my little sister. But if I don't get, what I want, these premises could be of interest to the police. The grass that's stowed her, is detectable, even when the booth is burned down," he threatened – a bold bluff. The smell of grass was in the air. Whether this would still be detectable, if he would have burned the shack down, as threatened, was beyond his knowledge.

"Nobody here's any interest in that shit of this fucking bitch," the girl with the blue streak threw in, her eyes contradicting her language, "no reason to make such a fuss here."

"Give me her stuff and the keys, and I'm off again immediately."

"Get the blue bag from the bowling alley," the leader addressed the redhead, "it's hers." The latter was glad to obey, turned on her heels and disappeared through the door.

"You know, that your little sister's failed the entrance test and should better not show up again?" It was a lousy attempt to show leadership.

“If I should hear, that she’s reentered this establishment, she’ll regret it,” he stated with utter conviction.

He was well aware, that he had no influence on Rachel’s future decision making, but the credibility of his rôle demanded a certain theatricality, and somehow the nice and sweet, little Rachel Fowler did not fit into this environment. He did not bother should she complain, that he had queered her pitch, in fact he felt even pleased about the actual development.

“Her clothes are in there.” A kind of duffel bag indeed contained a few carefully folded garments, which could well be of Rachel’s child size.

“Good, and the keys to her *shackles*?” He asked the crucial question.

“Here they are,” the leader rummaged in the pockets of her jeans and threw a bunch of keys clattering on the table. “A few of them should fit.”

“They’d better do,” he said. “I’ll take all of them.” He grabbed for the duffel bag and put them inside using his left hand without taking his eyes away from the three graces or laying the remanent of the bottle aside.

“I can’t say, it was a pleasure, ladies, but nobody’s been harmed yet, and we should try to keep it that way.” He avoided to turn his back on them, while he moved to the door, opened it, without turning around, and slipped backwards out of the room, the rest of the broken Champagne bottle still in his right hand.

He closed the door behind him, took a deep breath and was just about to leave the student pub when he caught a silver flash in the corner of his eye. Instinctively, he rushed aside and evaded the small projectile. One of the three graces had opened the door and thrown a penknife at him.

With one fluid motion he turned around and hurled the remains of the bottle against the door, before it was fully closed. It splintered into pieces and left a deep mark on the door.

There was silence in the bar, but no one dared to block the angry, tall man’s path. Probably the brave sisters, who had hastily closed the door, had barred it already from the inside. Harry did not show it, but inwardly he was glad, that the whole affair was born out without further casualties. With his “prey” at hand he went back to, where he had left his car, and headed for his apartment.



Rachel awaited him impatiently wrapped in his bathrobe. She was barefoot, now. With her big blue eyes and the high heels taken off, his little sister’s best and oldest friend looked smaller and more delicate than ever.

“Did you get the keys?” She anxiously raised her *chain*-linked hands.

“I think some of those might fit,” he said, digging a formidable collection of keys out of his pocket. He

fished for one, which looked like an ordinary *handcuff* key, knelt down and grabbed her ankle. The key fitted into the corresponding keyholes, and after a turn back and forth, both *steel circllets* popped open up with a click.

"Thanks," she whispered relieved, "I honestly don't know, what I would have done without your help."

"I thought about something, you could do for me," he said in passing, while he grabbed for a key that looked like a small safe key, which according to his perception might fit to the heavy, old-fashioned looking *handcuffs*, which literally still held her slender wrists in their iron grip.

"And what would that be?" She asked tentatively with uncertainty in her voice. She had not expected him to take anything at all, let alone ask for it. This had not been his style.

"Well, since it's me who releases you from all that stuff, you could in return allow me to put you in this *bracelets* again if I think that this is right." He had developed the idea on his way back more or less in order to tease her and to punish Rachel a little bit for her behavior in the mall. He had not considered this a serious demand, but after all the fuss, she had made up there, this not completely serious proposal, meant to be a salutary shock to her, was adequate.

"WHAT?" Quickly she drew her still *shackled* hands out of his range.

"I want you to promise to let me

put those back on you voluntarily without discussion, when I say so," he repeated his unusual proposal.

"You really want to *shackle* me?"

"Rachel, you ARE *shackled* already, and I've never seen anything more beautiful and dearer, than you're now, when you're a little bit helpless. I like you very much the way, you're now," he tried to explain his point of view, "but I definitely didn't like the girl, who picked on me in the mall, and I just want to make shure, that I won't have to meet this Rachel again."

"I don't know if I can commit myself to it," she replied. Unaffected, he took the key to her freedom and put it into the breast pocket of his shirt.

"Well," he said, "if this is the case, you'll certainly find a locksmith or a lock service, who can help you."

"That's not fair, Harry," she objected. "With those *handcuffs* on I can't even dress." She tried her little-girl voice, and this did not miss the intention. He fought to stay hard.

"Above all, a locksmith will inform the police that he had to do a very delicate job," he managed to say quite seriously, "and your parents..." He did not have to finish that sentence.

"My parents must not know this!" In her panic she had not realized, that he was just mocking her as a little retaliation for her behavior in the mall.

"Well, your secrets're safe with me, if you promise this," he offered seizing the opportunity. But some-

thing in his voice had raised the suspicion, he was only fooling around.

"I could lie to you and neglect the promise afterwards," she claimed.

"Not you!" He replied very seriously now, "everybody, but not you. You promised my sister some time ago to take the whole blame for the bad joke, which she had played on the old Reynolds, and you kept it, although the undeserved penalty was a full week of house arrest for you."

"You still remember this?" It had been their secret, but his little sister had never been able to fool Harry.

"Sure," he replied with a smile. "After all I know you since you were a little baby, who screamed louder than all other babies in the neighborhood, including my little sister."

"You don't really consider to insist on this absurd promise?" She asked.

"Otherwise it would be pointless," he said, "a little punishment is quite okay for me". She looked at him, still not sure if he was serious.

"But you won't embarrass me in front of my parents and friends by demanding from me to wear these things in front of them?" She asked, indicating, she might be willing under certain conditions to accept this unpalatable compromise from him, undermining her weak bargaining position, so that it became unsustainable.

"Of course not!" Harry retreated tactically, actually wondering how far Rachel might be willing to go.

"But you want me to put them on, if you ask for it?" She asked slowly.

"Right!" She fixed him with her eyes and he showed his poker face.

"And if I don't give you this promise, I won't get rid of these things today?" She asked. He nodded.

"You can still hire a locksmith," he said. "I'd even drive you to one."

"You're mean!" She stated stomping her food without looking at him.

"Are you going to promise it or not?" He asked the crucial question.

"Well, since you don't give me a choice, I'll promise," she said blushing, "but only if you free me now from these things and promise, that you'll never force me to wear them, if anyone else, one of us knows, can see it?"

"I think, that's a wording both of us could agree on," he replied and she extended her hands in his direction.

"Lock them off then! I promise it under this condition," she said firmly. He actually could not believe it.

"Really? Without crossed fingers and so on?" He asked doubtfully.

"I promise," she repeated, "but only if you take these things off." The key, he had suspected to fit, actually did and she rubbed her freed wrists. Two red welts on her wrists showed clearly, that she had tried more than once to get rid of the *bracelets* by force against her own better judgment.

"A REAL gentleman would've done this without demanding such a promise from me," she rebuked him

afterwards stressing every word.

“You can be glad, I’m not a gentleman,” he replied, while she already closed her bra and reached for her blouse, while he watched. “Incidentally your fellow sisters were not only impolite, but also not amused, that I dared to fetch your stuff from them, and they suggested that you shouldn’t show up again there.”

“They can go to hell altogether,” she exclaimed to his relief. “To leave me in the lurch like this, was the meanest thing, anyone’s done to me!”

“However, be careful. They might be resentful,” he said, “I had to handle them rather roughly, in order to convince them to handle your stuff out to me.” She had already pulled up her skirt and was about to affix the ankle bands of her high heels. He took the *handcuffs* and put them together with the corresponding keys in a drawer.

“Do you’ve any use for this stuff?” He asked with respect to the rest of the *shackles*, he had released her from.

“No,” she said acidly, “also not for the *handcuffs*, but I suppose that I’ll have to wear them again sometime.”

“Only, if you should treat me, like you did in the mall,” he said. “I’ll throw the rest of your ‘jewelry’ in the garbage, otherwise some potential burglar might get silly ideas.”

“I don’t think, that someone could be so stupid to burgle this place,” she said smugly referring to the disorder in his student flat, before

she expressed, she wanted to leave.

“May I give you a ride home?” He asked gallantly ignoring her rudeness.

“In order to know where I live?” She asked back tartly. “No thanks, I prefer to walk.” Apparently she felt tricked by him because of the the promise, and she wanted to play it down by her cool behavior now.

“Okay,” replied Harry, who had read her face, “but if I’d invite you to a pizza on the weekend, you’re probably not going to say ‘no’ after I’ve quarried you out of all that?”

“I’ve promised to go home the next weekend,” she replied evasively.

“Would you then please say ‘hello’ to my sister from me?” He asked and, when she did not answer he added: “May I nevertheless hope, that you won’t be overwhelmed by homesickness again at the over-next weekend?”

“There’ll be a party of our student body on this weekend.” Of course he knew. Since there was a deficit of women among engineers, these administered active and vivid contacts with student bodies, in which this was vice versa or at least different.

“According to the official announcement, this is scheduled to end about five o’clock,” he said. “If you shouldn’t hate me now, I may pick you up afterwards at the cafeteria.”

“I don’t know...,” she hemmed.

“You could tell me for example, what’s been going on at home in the last four years,” he tried to encourage

her, "I mean, the things my sister and my parents didn't want tell me."

"That can't be much," she replied. "Live at home's as boring as ever."

"It may be a short rendezvous then," he said. "Come on, Rachel."

"You don't give up?" She looked at him, and this time he actually did not know how to interpret her gaze.

"Never!" He replied with a grin.

"Well, I might be willing to talk over-next Saturday. I'll be waiting for you at five at the cafeteria entrance," she said with a tone that should suggest, that he could regard this as a blessing, and added: "But if you won't be there in time, I'll be gone." But Harry could not be deterred easily.

"Agreed," he accepted her schedule, and up to this day he should indeed not see her once more.



However, on the over-next weekend, when he parked his car in front of the cafeteria in a barely frequented short-term-parking zone, she appeared five minutes later in a white blouse and an elegant black leather skirt. This time a matching black leather cape, not a simple raincoat loosely put over her shoulders covered her, she was a jawdropper. Doubtlessly she had noticed him before he saw her. He started the engine, drove next to her current position and opened the side window.

"High, Rachel," he greeted her, "punctual to the tick as ever."

"Punctuality is a prerequisite for a successful career," she said, and in his ears that sounded plenty cocky, not like the mischievous, but always nice and humble Rachel, he had known from home, more like the new Rachel, he had met in the mall.

"I can remember, that you've been quite fond of me not long ago," he tried to regain the upper hand.

"Taste develop's with sophistication!" This was a classical knock-out. Quite obviously she had no intention to spend a pleasant evening with him. Carefully she folded her elegant leather cape and put it on the back seat of his car, before she sat down.

Again she was wearing the same high-heeled shoes, she had worn in the shopping center, but this time a black leather skirt barely covered her knees, and a push-up bra accentuated her natural, small breasts under the white blouse quite favorably. She was definitely a little bit overdressed. Harry asked himself quietly, if she had done so for the party or for the following rendezvous with him?

Since the day of their reunion he had kept the heavy old-fashioned *handcuffs*, she had worn, in the glove compartment of his car together with the corresponding key. If she felt bound to keep her promise, and this was something the Rachel, he had known, could be credited without

limit for, she could prove it right now.

“Would you please open the glove box and give me the ‘bracelets?’” he asked her. She opened the box and saw the the well-known *handcuffs*.

“You want to put these things on me?” She asked almost casually, took them out – the key was afixed by a clip – and handled them to him. Harry had expected a serious discussion.

“Yes, please put your hands behind your back,” he said puzzled. To his surprise, she turned away from him and did so without hesitation, offering her wrist in close proximity.

“I’m just curious, how will you explain those to the waiter,” she said with a mischievous grin he could not see, while he closed them snugly around her deliberately offered wrists. After that she turned back to him and he took advantage of her current defenselessness and stroke her gently over the straight nose bridge.

“There are restaurants, where it is not uncommon, that the guests develop some ‘creativity,’” he replied with a broad grin. He had not had in mind to show off his date in *handcuffs*. But after she had made clear, that a date with him was well below her standard, it was not inconvenient, that the “Rochester Castle Inn”, where he had reserved a table for two normally well above his budget, accepted extraordinary requests by its guests without questioning.

“You don’t want to show me off

publicly like this?” He noticed with ample satisfaction, that the exaggeratedly shown off self-confidence of his date had vanished, after he had taken this measure. “Harry, you promised,” she pleaded rather meekly.

“Well, I intended to spend the time as Van Helsing, who’s dating a vampire – that’s you – who has to be secured very well for the safety of the other guests,” he invented a makeshift cover story in no time.

“You can’t do that,” she tried to turn her small hands in vain in their narrow steel rings. It did not work. They were too tight. “What, if one of my professors shows up?” She asked.

“Well, He’d like, what he’ll see.”

“Harry, take these things off me, please!” She ran out of arguments.

“No,” he replied sternly, “you wanted to show me off a little bit, and now you’ll pay for this a little bit.”

“I’ll never do it again.” She was almost down to tears. There was not much left from the self-conscious lady, who had called it under her dignity to date an engineer. “Please, Harry, take these things off.”

He did not answer. Her sudden uncertainty was not unpleasant, quite the opposite. As she fumbled with the unyielding *bracelets*, she had no hope to get rid off on her own, she looked more desirable than than ever. Nevertheless, he suppressed the strong urge to take her in his arms and tell her, that everything was fine.

This honest confession would have brought back immediately the new cool-on-losing side of her ego, the one he did not like at all. He stopped the car in a free parking lot of the restaurant and got out to open her door gallantly. Rather than to get off, she turned away from him and presented him her closely *chained* wrists, demanding release once more.

"Please, Harry, get me out of these things." Instead he opened the rear door and took her fine, smoothly coated leather-cape out.

"No one will see your *bracelets*, if I put this over your shoulders," he said.

"But I'll know that they're there. I promise to behave. Please, Harry, take these *handcuffs* off," she begged.

"Come on, Rachel. Get out, you might catch a cold," he said, without paying attention to her objections. Reluctantly, she crawled out of the car and allowed him to put her cape around her shoulders. She looked around almost anxiously. No one seemed to have observed this.

Harry put his arm around her shoulders, what she might have regarded as a violation of her dignity and would not have tolerated a few minutes ago. But now his big hand prevented reliably, that the leather-cape might slide from her shoulders and reveal the condition of her hands.

"But at dinner you will release me from these things, Harry, won't you?" She whispered as he led her to the en-

trance. He did not give an answer.

"A table for two in the name of Smith," he said to the waiter, who welcomed them, "Harold Smith."

"Please, follow me, sir" The waiter led them to the upper floor to a well-shielded table, which could not be envisioned from the rest of the room. "We hope, this table satisfies your requirements, sir. You asked a secluded table, didn't you?" He nodded.

"This one's excellent," Harry affirmed. Although he had envisioned this evening differently, his original reservation came in quite handy, now.

"May I take your cape, ma'am," the waiter addressed Rachel galantly, who suddenly became very pale.

"Thank you," Harry intervened immediately, "but I'll do that myself."

"As you wish, sir," relief was written in Rachel's face. She waited until the waiter was out of an earshot, before she whispered, "I almost died, Harry. Enough is enough, unlock these things from my hands." He took the cape from her shoulders and put it on an empty chair, before he lifted her chair to ease her to take a seat, but pretended stobornly not to have heard her proposal. Desperately she extended her *shackled* hands around her hips in his direction.

"Please, Harry, this would almost have gone awry. Take those off, now." He ignored her request, reached for the menu and flipped it for her.

"The food here ought to be excel-

lent,” he said. Nerviously she fingered on her *chain-linked steel bracelets*.

“... and expensive,” she finally said, developing another idea. “Do you think, you can afford lobster?”

“Not really,” he replied slowly, “but if you insist, it may be lobster..”

“I don’t like lobster,” she said – in fact she had never even tried it, “but if you won’t take these *bracelets* off very soon, Harry” she threatened, “I might be tempted to order it.”

“Well, it might be worth the money to watch, how you try to eat lobster without hands,” he countered.

“Damned, Harry. I don’t want to order lobster. But, if I order something less pricy, you’ll take them off?” She did not want to give up so easily.

“We’ll see,” he left her deliberately in the dark. Finally they agreed on two pizzas, a coke and a water, typical student meals, although they were more expensive here than in the typical student pubs, this was not out of the ordinary. On Harry’s note Rachel received a straw, what she exceptionally did not comment on.

When the pizzas were served, she had changed tactics and noted, that she would like to give the waiter a helping hand, if she were not tied up right now. But to her chagrin the latter did not respond at all, and Harry Smith just grinned impertinently.

“How should I eat like this?” She asked, after the waiter had left.

“You’ll eat out of my hands,” he

said with an even brighter grin in the face, “this way I can tell my buddies later about the super-bride, who ate out of my hand at the first date.”

“YOU’RE DREAMING!” she said with real outrage in her voice, but it did not escape him, that a smile had rushed over her face, when he had designated her as a “super-bride”.

“Well, how’re you going to get out of here with those *steel bracelets* on?”

“You cannot do that, Harry!”

“I won’t,” he assured her much to her relief, “but I’m going feed you with some pizza, and you’ll eat it.”

“Why should I?” She asked.

“Because you definitely don’t want to attract any attention, that might do harm to your precious career,” he replied, “and because you know also very well, that I’ll never do anything, from which you could really suffer.”

“You brought me here *bound* like a criminal and now you want to feed me like a pet,” she accused him.

“I could as well have left you in the mall, as you were,” he reminded her. “Come on, Rachel, eat a little bit,” he smiled and held a piece of pizza with a fork in front of her closed mouth.

“Just because I’m really hungry, now” she gave in and took the piece of pizza with her teeth from his fork.

“Sure,” he replied, and although she continued to bevave a little bit crabby, he actually selected the best pieces of both pizzas, and she let him willingly slide them into her mouth.

“I really have to go to the toilet,” she said after dinner, “and I would hate to go there with these things on my hands. You can put them back on me afterwards – I PROMISE.” She stood up, after she had made sure, that no one was watching, fixed him with a look, as if butter wouldn’t melt in her mouth, turned her back on him and held her *chained* hands out to him.

To refuse this legitimate plea, would cross his self-established borders. He sighed and took out the key. Without a word he opened her *handcuffs* and stored them in his pocket.

“I’ll be right back,” she said and vanished. But she stayed away unexpectedly long and he had almost accepted, that he would not see her again. But when he was already about to call the waiter, Rachel came back.



“The toilet’s in an another wing of the building,” she said apologetically with a grin in her face. She made sure, that no one was watching them, and turned her back on him, offering him her wrists close together as promised.

“I think that’s no longer necessary,” Harry replied generously.

“Don’t you like me anymore?” She asked worriedly, and this innocent, simple question struck him deeper, than he wanted to admit to himself.

“Yes, of course do I like you. You’re a great girl,” he stammered.

“Then put those *bracelets* back on me,” she said, and he had no choice than to secure her hands again. It became a very long evening. They talked about everything, in particular about their hometown, common acquaintances and friends but not about, why she had insisted to be tied up again.

Finally, the time had come when the staff prepared for closing time. He paid and added a genuine tip. Overall, spending had kept up well with his monthly budget. He put her cape over her shoulders, and she let him do it. When he put his arm around her, as he led her out, she did not seem uncomfortable about it.

“I may not be the brightest, Rachel, and I admit that I know almost nothing about the female psyche,” he said to her on their way to the parking lot, “but why did you provoke to be *handcuffed* by me tonight?”

“I don’t know, what makes you think something like that?” She was everything, but a good actress. He would have bet his life, this specific question had hit her into the mark.

“I may be only a humble engineer, Rachel,” he replied, “but I’m not quite as naïve, as you seem to think. You’ve listed yourself as a bitch and, as soon as I put those *bracelets* on you, I got back the lovely, sweet girl, I know from home.” She blushed.

“I’m not a sweet, lovely girl, I...”

He interrupted her: “Oh, yes you ARE, Rachel – you’ve always been.”

Now she looked worried, even desperately. She was obviously everything else, but comfortable with the new direction of their conversation.

"Take these things off me, now," and now she tried to put as much authority as possible into her voice.

"No," he said quietly, but firmly, "No, I won't. Rachel, you were quite eager to wear them tonight, and now I'd like to hear from you 'why?'"

"You forced me," she alleged naughtily, "you made me wear them."

"Nonsense!" He harshly rejected her explanation, "you've literally begged for those 'bracelets', Rachel, and, before you won't have told me the truth, you won't get rid of them."

"I'll go to the police." She threatened, "this is deprivation of liberty."

"Have fun!" He replied. "Shall I drive you there?" By now they had reached his car, and he opened the passenger door without making any preparation to remove her *wrist shackles*.

"Very well, Harry" she backed off resigningly, "but if you know it, you've to take them off. Promise it!"

"We'll see," he said evasively and took the cape from her shoulders in order to put it on the back seat, while she quickly made use of the privacy offered by the car. He assumed his place on the driver's seat, but made no attempt to start the engine.

"I'm listening, Rachel" he said, and she swallowed, avoiding his eyes.

"You've never noticed me at

school," she whispered sheepishly. "You had only eyes for Mary Fisher."

"All guys at school had only eyes for Mary Fisher," he said, "including the poor devil, who finally married her. But that was long ago. That was before I knew, what's important."

"But when you met me on this day in the mall," she continued, "it was different, and you can't deny this."

"I was, frankly speaking, at first delighted to see you and then rather angry about you, because you dismissed me so sillily. I was about to wish you to hell for that, Rachel," he admitted. "It was only, when this alert went on, that I realized, something was wrong with you. You've always been very athletic, and suddenly you were crawling like an old bat."

"I was completely helpless under my coat," she said. "Thanks again, for coming back. If anyone had noticed this, it would have been so embarrassing, that I still don't know, what I could have done, after these stupid bitches had simply abandoned me."

"Okay," he said, "acknowledged, but this does by no means explain, why you wanted to wear these *bracelets* again by all means tonight." She shifted nervously back and forth.

"When you realized my poor condition, you've been incredibly nice to me, although I didn't deserve it," she replied hesitantly – she whispered literally and turned beet red. "You protected me, as if I were your girlfriend."

When you carried me out of there, you held me so tight, as if I were the most valuable thing in the world.”

“Well, maybe you were just that for me, Rachel” Harry replied honestly, “at that moment – I mean – of course. I’m sorry, if I did hurt you.”

“Not at all. It was all right, Harry,” she said. “I’m not a sugar puppy after all. But, although the sorority is very tough otherwise and the sisters don’t crouch down even in front of the fraternities, ‘my big brother’ really scared them to hell, so that they didn’t dare to take revenge on me.”

“Now I begin to understand,” he said with a grin, “you think, that I’ll jump when you call ‘giddy up’, just because you’re *chained up*.” she shifted back and forth restlessly involuntarily fueling the certitude in Harry, that his guess was at least partially correct.

“It was not like that – honestly! I just thought that... well, I thought, that you would look at me like a real woman, if I would wear those ‘bracelets,’” she tried to justify her actions and added with a flirty eyelash, “and that’s what you’ve done.”

“You’re indeed exceptionally cute, if you’re a bit helpless,” he admitted, “but there was no need to put on a show like this. I’ve always liked you.”

“That’s fine,” she replied with a very relieved grin. “Then you can fi-

nally free me from these bracelets.”

“Not so fast, fellow,” he said with mock seriousness, “I think, those will have to stay on as punishment.”

“As a punishment for what?” She asked apparently glad, that he had accepted her “confession” so loosely. “You had your fun. We’re even.”

“I disagree. You deserve some punishment, because you tried to manipulate me,” he said sternly, although he could not suppress a smile.

“And what are you going to do with me, Harry?” She asked now with a wide grin above her freckled nose.

“You can be sure, that I’ll think about something,” he replied and headed for his student’s room, he had just in case cleaned up previously.

Three months later, Rachel Fowler and Harry Smith shared a small apartment. Four years after this event she wore a gold ring on her right hand, and a European customs official asked Rachel, if she was the wife of Dr. Harold Smith, who had just taken a postdoctoral fellowship and awaited her outside, and she affirmed this with a winning smile.

Minutes before a female security officer had noticed the heavy *handcuffs* in her suitcase, but did not raise an alert. After all it was not forbidden to transport those in the baggage.

THE END