

Andromeda
a novel
by Joe Nobel

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First Movement

Anna Consumed

Budapest, November 5th, 1956

She, bound in manacles, would be hanging from the ceiling if not for her precarious stance on either of two chairs; two chairs places as far apart as could be while still allowing a foot perched on each one. Knowing all along if she should slip, she'd swing by her arms, wrists cutting into the irons until her captor would decide to lower her back to the floor.

His whip cracked by her right ear. Despite knowing it would, sooner or later, she almost lost her foothold as she jerked to the opposite direction away from the sound

It was a large, if drab, office on the top floor of the dreaded address 60 Stalin Street, know to all as the house of terror; the address where dissidents are taken for questioning before they disappear. She was facing the window, looking on at the grey afternoon with the sun refusing to come out. There was a dying plant in the corner. Behind her was his desk and the coat stand by the door.

She couldn't believe this was all real; that this was actually happening to her. Just a few, short hours ago she was above it all, an American in a far off, exotic land. As an American, she had her privileges, packages from home containing western good, a generous stipend from her employer, and her faults were overlooked by the locals when she strayed from the unwritten party line. Yes, she enjoyed her time in Budapest. But, she realized how young and foolish she was when the secret police came to pick her up as she was leaving her apartment with one hastily packed suitcase. She regretted everything then, wished she could do it over as they led her away in handcuffs.

This time, she couldn't simply talk her way out with a smile as the Hungarian secret police, the feared AVO, turned her over to the Soviets occupiers. And they, in turn, passed her on to successively higher men until she found herself in the hands of their top officer who took the time personally to interrogate her.

He was a man with blue-grey eyes that pinned her in place whenever he looked directly at her. He moved with the natural grace of a predator as he pulled in his whip after the last crack. Briefly, she imagined his muscles, firm and defined, under his uniform.

His face was clean shaven and had no scars of battle, but he did have a sadness to him of living through too many campaigns. He appeared to be the right age to have been a young officer in 1941 when the Germans invaded the Soviet Union. No doubt he fought on the front.

“Come now, my dear.” He spoke in impeccable Oxford English but with a Russian accent hinting he had been far a field since his early days. This made him sound all the more menacing to her. “Just tell me who you are and we can clear this up.”

“I told you a dozen times already,” she sobbed. “I’m Anna Singer. I’m an aid worker on an exchange visa. I’ve been here in Budapest for only two months. And, I don’t know anything about this stupid revolution.” Then she added, “I come from Watertown, Massachusetts,” as if

that would imply a working class upbringing and mitigate whatever Communist sin she had inadvertently committed.

“An aid worker.” His scorn was transparent, yet his voice controlled.

“My father knows the number of my senator,” Anna said. Her words hollow, far off the mark she’d hoped to convey. Petrified of him and his whip, she dared not turn to look at him as she spoke. “Why can’t you just let me go?”

She felt his eyes on her during his silence. It seemed an eternity ago that he’d removed her tailored grey suit jacket and matching skirt. Then he used a double edged knife to cut away her white silk blouse and slip. He left her wearing her brassiere, underpants, nylons with their garter, and her high-heeled shoes.

“I’m afraid there are a few discrepancies in your story, my dear.”

“You’re acting like I’m a spy or something!”

“A spy,” he echoed, “or something.” Then in his calculating voice he said, “If it turns out that you are a spy, you certainly wouldn’t be a very bright one, allowing yourself to be so easily apprehended.”

With all the emotions already churning within her, embarrassment was added to the mix.

“Look, sir,” Anna said, “my papers are in order. They can vouch for me at the children’s hospital.”

“Please, call me General Konstantine. Of course, if ‘sir’ suits you, go ahead. I suppose after we get to know each other better, I might permit you to address me in the familiar, at which time I’d let you call me Uri.” He walked up to her, admiring her fear of him as she stood frozen in place. “But we’re here to talk about you, Anna Singer. You, the idealistic little American girl who came to this backward land so far from home, overrun by us primitive Russians. Your cause to teach hygiene at the children’s hospital is noble.” Scorn filled his voice as he spoke.

A tear ran down her cheek. She was glad he was behind her and didn't see.

“Let me tell you something, my dear. These people already know how to wash hands.” He stroked the back of her neck, admiring how she tensed to his touch. “I think the real reason you are here is so you can boast to your fellow students back in your pristine American university. You'd be able say ‘look at all the poor and primitive people I've helped’. No, I don't have to check your papers, I'm sure they are in order.”

“So, what do you want from me?”

“The trouble is, I don't believe you are an aid worker at all. Anna, tell me, who is Andrew Locket.”

“Who?” Her heart stopped for a moment. She felt the blood draining from her face. She was glad he was behind her and didn't see her reaction.

But he did — her reflection in the window across the room gave her away. “Don't play innocent with me!” he said as he grabbed her hair from behind. He pulled back, forcing her mouth to open and her back to arch. They locked eyes, seeing each other upside down.

“Anna, try to understand my position,” he finally said, letting go of her hair. “My responsibilities are many. Ending this uprising is just one of my tasks, albeit my primary one at the moment. I am also pitted against a most worthy adversary, one of your master operatives, Locket. He's here in Budapest, and I'm dying for a collegial chat with him.”

“I told you, I don't know any —”

“Anna, you don't mind if I call you Anna, my dear? You're a simple child. Perhaps simple isn't the right word. Naïve, innocent. This is your first mission, is it not? Perhaps you had a feeling of giddy excitement as you boarded the aeroplane that took you away from your home; and you felt that excitement once again at the border crossing with your made-up persona —”

“No!”

“You may have even thought you were doing something important for your cause as you filed your reports by a shortwave radio hidden in some attic —”

“You don’t understand —”

“Oh, I do. Locket, he's charming and charismatic. And, I'm willing to wager that he took you as a lover when you were posted here. I can imagine the thrill of that clandestine liaison. Or, perhaps he already seduced you before this mission?”

“You've got it all wrong. It's not like that!”

“Let me play a recording for you.”

Anna turned her head to watch him walk back to his desk and press play on the reel-to-reel recorder.

“The name 'Andrew Locket' doesn't ring a bell?” he asked again.

Anna just listened in silence, half knowing what would be on the tape, wondering what she'd say when it was over.

“Hello, Anna, it's me.”

“Andy, Hi. I thought you were never going to call me here.”

“I know, I know. Listen, we're pulling out. Meet me at the drop point at the agreed time.”

“Okay.”

“And one more thing Anna, stay low. And don't answer the door, no matter who. I think the Soviets and the AVO are on to us. And another thing, don't take any more calls — they may have the line tapped. And Anna,”

“Yeah?”

“I love you.”

General Konstantine cleared his throat.

“He’s just a friend,” Anna said, trying to sound matter-of-fact. “He’s another American I work with at the hospital. This Andy, he isn’t the Andrew Loki of yours. He’s certainly not a spy. And neither am I.” She knew he didn’t believe her. She wouldn’t have believe her either. And what was Andy thinking? calling like that, he knew perfectly well that she knew when and where to meet up.

“And Locket, what was he thinking,” the General yelled, “calling you when he should have known the phones were being monitored!” He was more upset at Locket’s out-of-character incompetence than with anything Anna did.

General Konstantine walked back to Anna and stood in front of her. He still had his whip in hand.

“Anna, talk,” he said, almost imploring. “Save yourself from this.”

“I have nothing to tell you,” she said, trying to sound defiant, but coming across small and empty.

He ordered her to face forward and not to look back. He watched as she turned her head forward, focusing her gaze out the window. The muscles on her back tensed.

Anna heard the crack of the whip from behind and a moment later felt the sting on her left shoulder blade. Anna did everything in her power to not kick the chairs out from under her as she spasmed in pain.

He cracked the whip again, this time the throw landed on her right shoulder. “It’s not too late to end this. Just tell me what I want to know.”

“I don’t have anything to tell you!” she yelled back. Anna realized that she had to pull herself together. She understood now that until this point she’d been nothing more than a child. If she were to survive this, she’d have to grow up, and she’d have to do it now.

He asked where her handler was waiting for her after the next throw landed squarely on her

back. She yelled the same response as before. Her resolve doubled with each lash, despite the cutting pain.

And his whipping continued.

He whipped her back, and then her bottom. When he stopped, he admired the artistry of his work — how he'd cut her black silk underpants yet barely marked her flesh beneath. Then, of course, he admired Anna's choice to wear silk.

“You have certainly dressed alluringly for a quick getaway,” he said. “You had your lover in mind, yes? Perhaps you had planned on giving yourself to him once you were away, in a sleeper car in Vienna bound for points west, away from all this madness.”

“You've got it all wrong,” she said, trying to muster what resolve she could. She turned her head back to him. She wanted to think of something clever to say. Something he'd believe. Perhaps to plead with him, to tell him that she knew nothing, that she was a simple girl from Massachusetts, and this was her first time out of the country. But as she turned her head, the room started spinning. It looked to her that he was sideways — and so was the floor. Her entire universe had consisted of enduring his pain. And now that the whipping had stopped, that universe started to unravel.

Two other people stood behind the General against the wall. She just noticed them for the first time and didn't know how long they were there. One of them was a gnarled old man in a tattered blue robe. He had a patch over his right eye. His hair was long and tangled, the color of grey mud. And he had an equally long grey beard. A woman was with him. She wore a low-cut black, sleeveless dress with arm-length gloves. Anna felt she should somehow know this woman, but her mind wouldn't cooperate. The old man was explaining something to that woman in black; telling her something about Anna. The woman turned her face into the man's robe, no longer able to watch Anna's torment.

“Face forward,” General Konstantine ordered.

Anna obeyed, the frightened little girl inside taking hold again. The possibility of hallucinating these characters, when she needed her sanity more than ever, made it harder to live up to her new found resolve.

She felt the sting of his whip land in the middle of her back. She felt her brassiere lose its hold over her breasts. His whip had cut the strap of her bra. It also cut into her back. Writhing in pain, she turned to face him. That's when she saw that the old man and the woman in black had disappeared. Any words of protest she was going to say evaporated when her mind started to spin wondering how the two could have slipped out of the room so quietly. Who could they have been? she wondered as the next fall of the whip cracked on her back. She decided she was definitely hallucinating. Maybe. Yet the woman looked so familiar.

“Give this up, Anna,” General Konstantine cried from behind. “Only you can make it stop.”

That woman had a strong family resemblance, an aunt or an older sister. Yet all her aunts were way too old and she didn't have an older sister.

“Tell me what I need to know, and this can end!” he said with an urgency, a plea for her own welfare.

Anna didn't speak. It was difficult to switch from her vision of the hallucinations to his reality of the interrogation. But despite going crazy, she knew she must hold out.

General Konstantine took her silence as a sign of defiance and had no idea of the storm raging in Anna's head. He just knew she was close to breaking. “You'd do anything for him, you love him that much. Don't you, my dear? You'd even sacrifice yourself for him.”

Anna said nothing.

“I'm sure he'd protect you the same way if the situation were reversed. Wouldn't he?”

“Of course he would,” she said, but started to wonder if Andy had sold her out.

“Ah, undying love. I envy you for finding someone so special.” He stroked her back where he had whipped her. This time his touch was gentle. “Especially when life is in the habit of taking away those we love so dearly, and without any warning.” He walked around in front of her. “Anna, you two were lovers before you even went on this mission, yes?”

“Yes,” in a whisper. Okay, she'd concede that one point to him. After all, it was true.

“Tell me, Anna, how did you two first meet?” he asked, as if he were her priest or psychiatrist: a kindly man to be entrusted with all her secrets.

Looking ahead, without betraying emotion, she automatically said, “He recruited me.”

“Into the CIA?”

“Yes,” as if on autopilot. Then her anger welled up when she realized what she had just told him. Now resisting him would be all the more difficult.

“You’ve held out longer than I thought you would. But you must understand, you would have slipped sooner or later. There is no shame in that.”

But his words had the opposite effect; Anna now felt all the more inadequate. She looked out the window, trying to estimate the time of day by the strength of the cloud-diffused sunlight. Andy would wait a little while past three o’clock. If she wasn't there, he would assume the worst and leave without her. She wanted her ordeal to end; she wanted to tell her captor everything so he would stop whipping her. If only she could know what time it was for certain. Then she’d be able to tell him everything and make it stop.

“Anna, you are mine to do with as I will. And you will talk eventually, but I need the answer now. Where is Locket? And how long will he wait for you?”

“General, please, I can’t tell you.”

“Admirable. I respect such loyalty. I’m sure your lover would do the same for you.”

“Of course he would!” she snapped. Would he? she wondered again. She thought of that

phone call. It was so uncharacteristic of Andy to make that kind of slip. Why should she protect him if he betrayed her?

He walked up to her, standing inches from her. He removed what was left of the brassier. He ran his hand around the outline of her breasts; watched as she turned her head away from him.

Be strong, Anna told herself. Don't tell him anything. No matter what he does. And, yes, Andy is worth protecting. General Konstantine is twisting things, planting doubts. Andy did not sell me out. He'd never do that to me.

As Anna pondered, he ran his hand across the back of her shoulders. Each cut from the whip stung as his fingers passed over them. She imagined her back covered with blood as he drew circles in it with his palm.

Then he ran his fingers across her neck and over her face.

"Where's the blood?" she asked, noticing his hand was dry.

"What blood?" he laughed. "You have a few minor welts on your back. They should be gone in a day or two. I didn't draw any blood."

Suddenly, her back didn't hurt as much. Instead, she felt foolish from how he'd been playing her.

"You know, Anna, I could have been a lot harder on you. And I will, if I don't get answers." He continued to caress her body. "But I can also be gentle," he said, as his hand made its way down to her shredded underpants.

Her loins quivered as he ran his hand along her flesh beneath her silk underwear. He's finally going to take me, she thought, just when I'd prepared myself to take whatever he may do with his whip, he's changing everything. Oh God, is it three o'clock yet! I can tell him everything he wants to know if it's three.

With a tug, the shredded silk of her panties gave way, leaving her sex exposed to him.

“Your panties are moist.” The General looked at her inquisitively. He rubbed the material between his fingers. He held it under his nose and smelled the undeniable scent of sex.

Then he touched her, cupping his hand over her pussy. He felt her heat. Felt the moisture on his palm.

She, in turn, quivered as he kept his hand on her for these few moments. She gasped at his touch. She fell back, letting his hand alone hold up her body.

“Anna, you’re burning hot!” he said, pulling his hand away. For the first time today, this interrogation was not progressing according to the script.

“What are you implying!” she hissed. It was as if he were asking her if she enjoyed the whipping. Although the thought was shocking, and she most certainly didn’t enjoy one moment of her torment, her body had responded in a way she never imagined. It was true, she was hot and wet. And, she was stimulated. But why? Certainly, growing up, she’d looked through the illicit men’s magazines, with girls like Bettie Page, tied up and being whipped. The thought of bondage thrilled her as she flipped through those pages, but that was all theatrics. In her real-life situation her body wasn’t supposed to be doing this, not with this man.

General Uri Konstantine kicked the chairs out from under Anna, leaving her to dangle with the manacles biting into her wrists. But he didn’t make her suffer; he promptly lowered her to the floor, cranking the chain down from a winch on the wall. He undid her manacles, freeing her arms. There was anger in his actions, but not directed towards Anna, per se. Rather, it was anger with himself for not knowing what he’d done to create this reaction in her. Certainly, he’d been toying with her, enjoying her predicament. Why not? Although unconventional, he was within the bounds of interrogating a spy. After extracting his information from her, he had intended to scare this child so badly that she would never leave American soil again. But now, he was puzzled by her; he didn’t understand this arousal within her. By this stage in his career, he was

sure he had seen every dimension of the human condition. He calmed himself. Yes, it was true that he'd never seen anything like Anna before, but here was a chance to add to his body of knowledge. If it's arousal she wants, he told himself, it's arousal she'll get.

Anna cried out as he grabbed her by the hair and pulled her along with him as he took a seat on one of the chairs. He forced her to lie over his knee. She cried out again when his hand met her bottom with a resounding smack.

"What the hell are you doing now!" she screamed instinctively when she realized he was hand-spanking her. Has he gone crazy? she wondered. If I didn't talk while he was whipping me, what makes him think I'll talk when he does this?

But the spanking was harder to take than she anticipated. She felt herself reduced to the status of a bad child. She didn't think herself bad for revealing information to him. Rather, bad, because of the way her body had reacted in a way it wasn't supposed to.

Anna screamed, Anna kicked, Anna protested as blow after blow fell on her whip-stung bottom. She squirmed to tear free of his grip. But all her efforts were to no avail. She felt her butt cheeks grow hotter with each successive slap of his hand. To her dismay, she was growing hot deep within her body, too. As she struggled to free herself of his grasp, she ground her sex against his knee. At first she didn't realize how her breathing had grown deep and fast. But then she felt her loins begin to betray her. Soon she gave up struggling and rode out his spanking with her pussy on the ball of his knee.

Then her body started to tense, and as she lost herself in the delirium of the oncoming orgasm, she realized then that he could make her do anything he wanted. And right now that was making her rise to orgasm against her will and it had nothing to do with making her talk.

She grabbed onto his pant leg where moments before she was pushing away from him. Her back arched, her breathing grew deep. He stopped spanking her and caressed her bottom as she

quivered in orgasmic ecstasy.

When her orgasm ebbed she released her grip on his leg and just lay on his lap, breathing slowly, motionless. He pulled her up to sit on his knee.

Anna sat there, cradled in his arms. She didn't push him away, nor did he attempt to pull her closer.

After a while he whispered in her ear, "Tell me your code name, Anna." He spoke as if he were a lover telling her she'd been very good.

Anna, not ready to confront his intrusion, looked ahead, out the window. As she did, she saw the reflection of that phantom man and woman standing behind her. The woman stared open-mouthed at her, not believing the gift Anna's body had bestowed for her captor's amusement. The old man betrayed no emotion. Anna turned quickly to look behind her. There was no one there.

Then she realized General Konstantine had asked a question and was waiting for an answer.

"What is your code name?" he repeated.

"Andromeda," she said, then for some reason she would never understand, added "sir." He laughed.

"Why are you laughing at me, General?"

"Andromeda, the chained maiden; how appropriate. I will call you that from now on. I absolutely love the name." Despite his laughter, he continued with his questioning. "Now, Andromeda, tell me when and where were you going to meet Locket?"

"Stop laughing," she said. "What will you do with me if I talk?" Anna couldn't hold out any longer. She hoped it was after three and Locket had left without her.

"If I receive a satisfactory answer, you'll be on your way to Vienna tomorrow."

She took a deep breath before speaking. "We were to meet by the banks of the Danube, in

front of the Gellert Hotel and Baths.”

“When?”

“Three o’clock.”

The amused expression washed off his face, and he let her roll off his lap when he stood.

“Why, what time is it?” she asked looking up at him from the floor.

“Four,” he snapped.

She was victorious. She outlasted him. At least her mission handler and lover had gotten away.

“Guard,” he called in Russian, “take her away!”

“What!” she cried. “I thought you were going to let me go.”

“If I’d have received a satisfactory answer.”

“No, you can’t do that!” Anna cried as a armed guard dragged her away in handcuffs.

Before she was led out, General Konstantine had enough sympathy to cover her back with an old blanket.

Anna spent the night and the next morning in a cell in the basement of the building. She was kept awake by the sound of interrogations. Real interrogations, as young men cried and begged to tell their captors anything they wanted to know just to make the torture stop. She knew now that he’d only been playing with her, and could have been much more brutal and efficient if he wanted to. She didn’t know whether to hate him or thank him.

Late in the morning she was brought back to General Konstantine’s office. The guard pushed her in and made her stand two paces in front of his desk.

“Good morning, Andromeda,” he said when they were alone. He didn’t look up from the dossier he was reading.

“Good morning, sir,” Anna replied. “How was your night? Mine was hell, thank you.” She tried to show she wasn’t afraid of him. This time she may have succeeded.

“At least you had a bed,” he said. “I slept here on this desk. I gave you my only blanket.” He scribbled a note in the margin of one of the pages. “Anna, this just arrived from Moscow. It has some interesting information about you.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“Yesterday, I had intended to let you go.”

“But?”

“Information has come to me which would make your release undesirable.” He made another note on the next page. “I have decided what to do with you. It will seem to the outside world that you’ve disappeared in the churn of this revolution. You will, instead, be taken to my flat here in Budapest where you will live among my household staff.”

“You can’t be serious!”

“I most certainly am,” he said. “Accept your new lot in life with the grace and dignity I know you have.” He closed the report, stood, and walked around the desk to her.

“And what will I be doing for you in your apartment?” She already knew the answer.

“You will,” he said, “amuse me.” He stood face to face with her.

Anna slapped him across the face. It was a hefty slap that would have left a lesser man staggering.

Why, she wondered. Could there really be anything in that dossier? It was too early in her career for them to have anything interesting on her.

He looked at her, piercing her eyes with his gaze.

She realized she had crossed an invisible line; broken a rule. But that would imply rules existed between them.

“Lie face down over the desk,” he commanded. His voice betrayed no anger or rage.

“Do you really expect me to go compliantly as your slave?”

General Konstantine didn't answer. He just instructed her to lie with her bottom over the edge and her feet apart and grab hold of the far corners. He watched as her breathing grew deep in anticipation of what might happen to her. He rummaged through his top desk drawer and pulled out a rattan cane.

Anna thought about running out the door. But where could she go? Being naked, she wouldn't get far before being noticed. The dossier was lying half exposed and half covered by her left breast. She reached to grab it and have a look while he was turned in the other direction.

“Keep still,” he snapped when he looked back to her.

She didn't even have a chance to put a finger on it. Now, she'd never know what made her so attractive to him. Anna quickly grabbed the corners of the desk again.

She gulped when he whooshed the cane in front of her. It was thick and sturdy, and as long as his arm. He bent it into a bowing arc, demonstrating its suppleness for her.

He walked around the desk and stopped behind her.

“Please don't,” she begged, not daring to move.

“You will receive three strikes,” he said. “Each one will be solid and firm.” He positioned himself slightly to her right. “Do not move or squirm,” he commanded, then he told her to count out each one

Anna waited for the first blow, trying to control her breathing. Soon, she heard the whoosh and, an instant later, the sound of the smack against flesh. It took an additional moment for her brain to register that it was, in fact, her flesh. She felt the pain twice. The second sensation came after the initial sting of the impact. It was a lingering, throbbing feeling that faded away slowly.

She resisted the urge to cry out, or to twist away. “One,” she whimpered.

Just as she was preparing herself for the next blow, she saw that old man and the woman in black standing in front of her. Both looked into Anna's eyes, shaking their heads disapprovingly.

The hallucinatory man reached for the dossier under Anna's breast. "Mind if we have a look at that?" he asked. It was the first time she'd heard a sound from either of them. As he tried to grab hold of it, the folder clung to Anna's perspiring skin. The old man just pulled out the pages instead, leaving the empty folder sandwiched between the desk and her body.

Why did they always appear when she was at her weakest?

Whoosh. A second smack hit her bottom. Again, the jolt of pain coursed through her nervous system, and again, she felt the throbbing after-pain in its wake.

"Two," Anna said between gritted teeth. She clenched both fists.

The old man in the tattered blue robe flipped through the papers, ignoring Anna's plight. He pointed to a certain section and explained something to the woman standing beside him. The woman nodded, acknowledging him and glancing at Anna occasionally. Anna wished they'd show her what they were reading.

The last blow struck her in a most sensitive spot, the line separating her bottom from her thigh. It was the hardest of all to take.

"Three," barely audibly.

When Anna looked up, the two phantoms had once again disappeared. But that was quite alright, because they weren't supposed to be there in the first place. The only evidence that they had been there at all, was the empty dossier.

"Will you slap me again?" She heard General Konstantine's voice filter in from a distant corner of her mind. She forced herself to focus on his words.

Unable to speak, she shook her head to tell him 'no'.

"Very well," he said. He offered a hand to help her up. When she took it, he added, "Go and

get dressed, there's your suitcase."

She was relieved he didn't take her sexually as she suspected he would while her bottom was exposed for him. But at the same time, she felt a strange feeling in her body, the same feeling that she didn't recognize until too late yesterday. Yes, she had been aroused again by him; by his physical domination over her. And just as yesterday, it all happened against her will.

"Get dressed," he said to her again, not realizing that Anna would have submitted herself to him then-and-there if he wanted her.

"Yes, General," she said, trying to wash all those renegade thoughts from her mind.

"I've already spent more time with you than I should have." General Konstantine picked up the dossier; all the pages were in it, of course. He locked it into the top left drawer of his desk. "I have to leave soon for the town of Szeged; to one my field commands; having problems there; always are in an uprising."

Anna looked at him, still speechless. For what could be said when he'd captured her; won her; and an instant later, abandoned her.

"I'll have a driver take you to my apartment here in Budapest," he continued. "Actually, you'll see it before I will. I've just arrived from Moscow myself and have been camping in this office for a week. You can help my household staff move in until I return in a day or two."

She wondered if the pleasure of slapping him again would be worth the punishment.

- 2 -

Anna was led out the front door of 60 Stalin Street. A Lada — she'd later learned it was Uri's staff car — was waiting at the curb. A Soviet Lieutenant who spoke broken English escorted her into the back seat. As she sat down she felt every cut of the whip, every spot he spanked her, and all three lines left by the cane that crisscrossed her behind.

As they drove off, Anna noticed how the young officer sitting beside her made every effort

not to look at her legs. It was all but impossible to miss her hemline, with the way she fell back into the seat, her dress skirt bunched up and came to rest halfway up her thighs. She wondered if word of untoward behavior would cause this young officer unimaginable problems with General Konstantine.

As they drove off, Anna looked out at the bleak Budapest streets as they passed through one intersection after another. The sky was just as grey and somber as the day she was arrested. The streets were damp and cold; the trees had shed all but the most tenacious dry autumn leaves. Even the people standing in bread lines were grey and bleak. There was the only car on the street.

They drove past the ornate Opera House, which was shuttered as if it was going to be a long off-season. Shortly after, the driver pulled to the curb. Anna was familiar with the neighborhood. They were close to the intersection where Bajcsy-Zsilinszky met Stalin Street. Had they continued onto Jozsef Atilla Boulevard, they would have seen the view of Buda Castle Hill on the opposite side of the Danube. St. Stephen's Basilica was just off Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street. She wondered if she could see its dome from her new apartment.

"You will walk rapidly!" the lieutenant commanded, as he jumped out to the curb and held the door for her.

Anna climbed out after him, dragging her suitcase with her.

"Must to hurry," he said, grabbing her by the arm. He pulled her along towards a grand, but ill-maintained entryway of the apartment building on the corner. "Sniper maybe to shooting from roof."

Once they were inside, Anna gasped at the ceiling, a throwback to a more glorious age, with ornate gold paintings in the baroque style on the vaulted dome. With chips and cracks in the plaster, the artwork of cherubs and leaves had seen better decades. Two Soviet guards perked up

as they passed by.

The lieutenant escorted her past them, along a hallway that opened to a courtyard. The summer plants had long since died. Leaves gathered in the corners, rotting and damp. Yet she saw this to be a serene place, excusing its water-logged disguise as just another symptom of this depressing season. How odd, she mused, how out of place this was, its serenity clashing with all the chaos outside.

A grand staircase opened on their left just before the courtyard. The marble steps were worn and rounded where a century of foot traffic had left its mark. Even though a caged elevator lay in the middle, her guard took the stairs.

"Lift not work," he said looking back at her. He wasn't apologizing, just stating fact. And, he didn't seem to care if Anna followed or not. Since she'd have to get past the guards at the entrance, Anna followed him.

They eventually arrived on the second story — the third floor by the way Americans counted floors. The lieutenant waited for Anna to catch up at the landing. Startled pigeons flew off the iron railings that bordered the gallery around the courtyard. She looked down. From here, a fall — or a jump — would mean certain death. She followed the lieutenant to a door almost half-way around. He fumbled with a key and held the door open for her. Once inside, she heard the click of the tumblers as he locked her in from the outside.

Anna tried the door. It was indeed locked and was too solid to force open. She turned away from it with a sigh and decided to survey her new prison. Any thoughts of escape would be premature anyway until she could understand this situation better.

The apartment had high ceilings in the same regal style as the entryway. The windows were taller than the doors in her parent's old house in Watertown, Massachusetts. She thought theirs was old, but that triple-decker was just a passing fad compared to this once-grandiose dwelling

from a century long past. Looking beyond her immediate surroundings, she saw a train of rooms connected by double doors with frosted glass. They were opened wide, letting her see deep into the flat. The image created a flowing space that drew her in. Sounds of activity emanated from the far end.

She followed her ears, cautiously entering the cascading rooms. The furnishings were all draped with sheets. The former occupants had taken care when leaving, perhaps expecting to return after this revolution died down. But now, wooden boxes lay stacked atop of one another showing that Uri's household staff was still in the process of moving. As Anna got deeper into the cascade of rooms, she recognized the sounds of clanking pots and pans. She heard voices and a woman's laugh. Anna turned the corner to a wide, airy kitchen and saw a girl, naked save for her apron and slippers. She was stirring a pot on a wood-fired stove. When the girl saw Anna, she jumped back with a shriek and nearly knocked her cooking over.

"Ahh!" she cried and tried to pull her apron down to cover her genitals, but was just too short for that, leaving her dainty curls of blonde hair exposed. She was tall and skinny, with short straight hair of the same flaxen-blonde. She had a long, thin neck and tiny breasts.

"Hello?" Anna ventured. The girl spat something back in Russian. Anna shook her head. "I'm afraid I only speak English, and a few words of Hungarian."

"Who are you?" the girl asked again, this time in English. Her Russian accent was thick and heavy, yet charming in the way she forced her pouting mouth to conform to a foreign language.

"I'm Anna Singer," Anna said. "I was sent —"

"Don't explain," she said holding her up hands to silence Anna. "Master left a message saying we should expect a surprise. I see it's you. My name is Liudmila Bustov. Welcome."

"What did you say?" another voice spoke from the pantry. A girl emerged with a handful of eggs. She was even younger than the first, just as skinny, but a head shorter. She, too, was

wearing only a kitchen apron. “Oh, look. What did Uri get for himself this time!” she said as she looked up and down at Anna. Then she added, “Hi, I’m Aida.”

“She’s French,” Liudmila said, as if that should mean something, perhaps an excuse for some yet-to-be-revealed fault.

“He gave me a note for you,” Anna said, when she finally stopped staring at the two. She fished into the inner pocket of her suit jacket and handed them a sealed envelope.

Liudmila grabbed it and tore out the letter. The two girls kept glancing at Anna while they read it together.

“What’s it say?” Anna asked.

“Here, read it.” Liudmila said, holding the letter out.

“Could you read it for me?” Anna asked, when she saw the page filled with hastily scratched Cyrillic letters.

“Hfff. Very well.” Liudmila looked the letter over again, as if deciding what parts Anna should be privy to. “He says that you shall be living with us permanently, and we are both in charge of you until he gets back. We get to whip you, or do anything we like to you, if you should misbehave. We’re supposed to be strict with you.”

“It does not say any of that!” Anna cried.

“Actually, it does,” Aida nodded, eyes twinkling with possibilities.

“It also goes on to remind us that you, as the newest slave, have the lowest possible status in the house, with no rights or privileges. He specifically mentions that you must be kept naked until you earn your clothes.”

“What!” Anna reached for the letter. This time Liudmila kept it away from her. “I know it doesn’t say that.”

“Don’t worry,” Liudmila said. “That will be the first privilege you get to earn when he

comes back.” Anna didn’t like the Russian girl’s emphasis on ‘earn’ and all its implications.

“Have you two lost your privilege of clothes?”

“Non, non,” Aida said, “we go around naked just as often as not.”

“We’ve lost our clothing privilege so many times we’re used to it, and he can’t use it against us anymore,” Liudmila explained.

While the Russian girl was speaking, Aida lifted Anna’s skirt from behind. “Look at this!” she said pushing Anna’s underpants to the side. Despite Anna’s attempt to shoo them off, the two girls got their way and examined the marks crisscrossing her bottom. They exposed one cheek, then her other, no matter how much Anna protested. Aida then lifted Anna’s shirt to reveal the marks on her back from the whipping.

“Look at that one,” Aida said.

“And this one over here,” Liudmila said, pressing her finger on a spot below Anna’s shoulder blade.

“Ouch!” Anna flinched as the finger stung her. “He said they would go away.” She wished she had a mirror.

“Be tough,” Liudmila chided. “These little chicken scratches will be gone in week or two.”

“He said a day or two!” Anna protested.

“Mon dieu! I bet no one cleaned you up after he had his fun with you,” Aida said.

Anna shook her head, no.

“Go, prepare a bath for this pretty little creature,” Liudmila said as she caressed Anna’s face. “I’ll finish cooking dinner. Privileges or no, your can still have a nice long soak in the tub.”

Anna lay in the tub for what seemed like the whole afternoon, soaking away the assaults on her body. In actuality, it was for less than an hour. Aida kept adding kettles of hot water, keeping

the bath hot so Anna had no inclination to get out until she noticed her puckered fingertips. But before she could say anything, Aida brought some towels and helped her out.

“He does pick up the most interesting souvenirs wherever he goes,” Aida commented, as she wrapped a warm towel around Anna’s hair and another over her shoulders. The towels warmed over the oven seemed heaven-sent. “Liudmila was a local girl in Leningrad,” Aida said, as she gently pat dried Anna’s back, not allowing her to do it herself. “Master Uri met her when he was assigned to the military base there. She was the first; didn’t know what she had gotten into until it was too late. She was so naïve back then.”

“Hey, I heard that!” Liudmila called from the kitchen.

“What about you?” Anna asked as she allowed herself to fall back into this girl’s arms, letting the warmth of the towel surround her.

“He was doing some undercover work in France when he took one look at me and decided to take me back home with him. He didn’t even ask if it was what I wanted,” Aida said.

“Just like that! He kidnapped you?” Anna asked, not believing what she was being told.

“In hindsight, he saved my life. I’d have been dead in a month if he hadn’t. But you couldn’t convince me of that at the time.”

“Like us, you will learn to obey him,” Liudmila added from the kitchen.

“And then what? If I become a good little slave girl, like the two of you, he won’t whip me?”

“Oh, he will whip you whether you’re obedient or not,” Aida answered. “But there’s a big difference when he does it for play and when he does it as punishment.” She got on her knees and dried Anna’s legs with a towel. She took her time, especially around Anna’s inner thighs, giving them her tender attention.

Anna stepped back. “Okay, I’m dry. Thank you.”

Aida quickly stood and wrapped the towel over Anna's shoulders. Anna even allowed the girl to give her a hug in the guise of patting her back dry one last time. Before her familiarity got to the level where Anna would consider protesting, Aida broke the embrace and said, "But no more talk of Uri. Come and eat with us."

"Sure, let me get dressed."

"Sorry, as Master said in his letter, you haven't earned those privileges yet."

"Oh, come on, do you always do what he says when he's out?"

"Always."

"You never cheat on his rules when he's not watching?" Anna grabbed Aida by the arm turning the young girl to face her.

"Never." Aida pulled away despite her earlier desires to be close.

"And you accept this kind of life? Haven't you tried to escape?"

"Once." Aida shivered. "Four years ago. I'll never try again."

"How long have you been his slave?"

"I've been with him for five years." Aida broke eye contact with Anna and looked beyond the ceiling as she continued speaking. "Liudmila and I take comfort in each other. We get along well. Maybe we can be friends, too? You seem such a grown-up lady; so sophisticated. Maybe you can tell us what it's like in America?"

"I don't know how sophisticated I am. I'm twenty-seven. True, I'm a few years older than you two. But, I'm just a plain girl from a suburban town. This is my first time out of the country. And, I guess I did a lousy job; look where it got me!"

"I don't think it was your fault that you got caught. General Konstantine is a crafty tactician. He can match wits with the best of the commanders from the West. So it's no disgrace that he captured you. But enough of this kind of talk. Come, the food smells delicious and you must be

hungry.” Aida pulled the towel away from Anna’s body and draped it over a hook beside the tub.

As they ate a simple dinner of homemade noodles and sour cabbage, Anna decided that Liudmila and Aida were both quintessential wild children. They could have been born of a moon goddess who one night came down and decided to grace the Earth with the two of them.

Anna studied the two as they sat at the table together. Liudmila had a round face with high cheekbones and wide lips. Her ice-blue eyes were intense when she stared at Anna, which she didn’t do as often once she sat down and concentrated on her meal. She was a young woman with a narrow waist with prominent hips which accentuated her more-than-slim figure.

Aida’s had curly auburn hair cascading down past her shoulders. Before sitting down to eat, Aida ran around with it freely trailing behind her like a bridal train as she set the table — a task Liudmila hadn’t bothered to do while she cooked. Aida’s coal-black eyes complemented her hair as if her features were selected by a painter from the 18th century. Her nose was classically French, and her lips were full. Anna guessed she was a brooding melancholy type of beauty, but tonight, with an additional guest for dinner, she had the nervous excitement of a schoolgirl.

“A move to a new town and an addition to our family, all at the same time. So many changes,” Liudmila mused.

“Imagine how different things are for me,” Anna said quietly.

“It is for the better,” Liudmila said with her mouth full. “I am sure an exciting career as an international spy, traveling to exotic locations, the thrill of the hunt: it is all overrated. Forget London or Barbados, this flat is where all the excitement is.”

It occurred to Anna that Liudmila was mocking General Konstantine. Aida started laughing, then choking on a mouthful of noodles until she coughed it up. Then she laughed all the harder.

Anna realized the joke was all for her amusement. She couldn't help but join in. She saw then that Liudmila's tough bravado was only there to mask her immature side. Perhaps immature wasn't the right word, Anna thought, yet neither was childish. No, childlike would describe her best.

The two girls ate in the nude in solidarity with Anna's plight. Anna's eyes darted from one naked body to the next, despite her attempts not to stare. Liudmila's breasts consisted mostly of two well-defined areolae in sharp pink and perpetually erect nipples, all on an otherwise flat chest. In comparison, Aida's breasts were round and upright while being dainty and small. They too, ended in sharp little nipples.

"He loves playing with mine," Liudmila said as she caught Anna comparing. "Flogs them all the time."

"But I enjoy it more when he does it to me," Aida said. "Wish he'd do it more often."

"Anna, you have really nice breasts, full and firm," Liudmila spoke again. "He will love them."

"Is that what's in store for me?" Anna kept her gaze above their shoulders from then on.

"Actually, you will cook, clean, and keep his appointments in order," Liudmila said with a wry smile, unable to keep a straight face.

"No, really," Anna insisted

"In the mornings, he likes to be awakened with a kiss," Aida said. "We take turns on alternate days. Now, we can split the duty three ways. Are you good — with your mouth?"

Anna swallowed what she was chewing. She couldn't bring herself to answer.

"Look at her, she has never done oral," Liudmila declared. "These American girls are so simple. We will have to show her how it is done."

Anna was tempted to say, "I'm pretty good at going down, thank you very much," just to put

them in their place, but instead she mumbled, “I’ve had no complaints,” into her napkin. She wished they’d stop these taunting questions. She even wished the General were here instead of off in the countryside someplace.

“So you think you’re pretty good?” Liudmila kept asking.

“I’ve been around,” Anna said, trying to be noncommittal.

“Are you good at sharing?” Aida asked.

“You think he’ll want all of us at the same time?” Anna dared ask.

Liudmila and Aida both laughed.

“You naïve thing, he keeps us up all night,” Liudmila said. “It’s all the two of us can do to satisfy him. He calls me to his bed; his commanding eyes look into mine, and I melt; I am his; then before I know it, I’m on my back, and he’s driving his wadpole into me, I am afraid he will split me in half; he makes me come time after time; just when I think I cannot not possibly take more, he grabs me by the hips and finds his own release. But instead of falling asleep with me in his arms, he calls Aida to come join us; he takes her the same way, with all the fury of a sailor in port. When he’s done with her he takes one look at me again. ‘No, don’t you dare!’ I would scream, but he throws me on the middle of the bed and takes me again. After all, he is my master and I cannot refuse.”

“And on and on it goes,” Aida took over the narrative. “On nights like that he continues until dawn. Our whole bodies ache from pleasure, and yet Master is still eager for another go.”

“Surely he’s not like that every night,” Anna wondered, not sure if the girls were teasing her again.

“No, not every night,” Aida said. “He is mortal and needs sleep on occasion. When he does, he sleeps with either or both of us in his arms. That part is sweet.”

“But now that there are three of us, surely –”

Both of the girls shook their heads in unison.

“I know him too well,” Liudmila answered. “He will be beside himself over you! I have seen it all happen before, when he brought Aida home. You will only add to his desire, and his passion will double! Even on those occasional days when his virility wanes, he entertains himself by watching us.”

“You mean, you two, together?” Anna said, hoping she’d heard wrong. “And me?”

“It looks like the American Lady finally understands the situation,” Liudmila said with deadpan delivery.

“No, I couldn’t.” Anna’s eyes darted between the two naked girls sitting opposite her.

“You could,” Aida corrected. “But you never have, yes?”

“No! I mean, yes. I mean, no.” Anna’s voice trembled.

“Then, come sleep with us tonight,” Aida said. “You will have a wonderful time. And when Master calls upon you to entertain him, you won’t feel awkward.”

“Aida, you dog in heat,” Liudmila said, her Russian accent thicker than ever. “You are scaring the poor girl. I can imagine she is overwhelmed already and does not need you slaving over her.”

“You just want her for yourself,” Aida pouted.

Anna expected the girls to start scratching each other’s eyes out, but they broke into spontaneous laughter again. Anna didn’t know how much she should believe.

“I think I’m done,” she said after she swallowed her last bite. Then she pushed the chair back as if it would get her away from them.

Anna spent the rest of the evening helping to put the apartment in order. Liudmila gave the orders as if she were a sea captain. Aida was her charming first mate who could do no wrong. Anna was their scullery maid.

Under Liudmila's command, the project was getting nowhere. Anna imagined the whipping their bottoms would receive should 'master' walk in on this mess. Liudmila was off on a tangent, rearranging the heavy furniture, and Aida got herself bogged down in the minutiae of counting the plates and spoons.

While the girls were occupied with the chores they assigned themselves, Anna took a dust broom and started sweeping. On her way through the flat, she checked the doors and windows for any obvious escape routes. All the windows could open, but the three-floor drop to the street was out of the question, and those that faced the courtyard had bars on them from the outside. Peering out into the darkness of the courtyard, Anna noticed the telltale movement of a glowing red spot, the cigarette a guard was smoking. But she wouldn't even get that far — the door was locked from the outside. There was a door off the kitchen, too. But she'd have to wait to check that while Aida was on the kitchen floor organizing pots, pans, and dishes stacked up around her.

She didn't know what bothered her more, her imprisonment or the girls' ineptitude.

"Help me with this trunk," Anna finally said, calling from the front room, "it looks like a man's belongings. Let's push it into his bedroom." She was surprised how matter-of-factly the two came to her aid. Liudmila's only concern was not scratching the wood parquet.

The apartment consisted of a series of rooms leading from one to another. Three bedrooms were the only rooms that didn't have to be used as a throughway to get someplace else. The two girls selected the largest for their master. The ceiling of the bedroom, as throughout the flat, was almost high enough for a second story; it curved in from the wall with baroque gold-leaf patterns formed around a crystal chandelier. As they dragged the trunk in, Anna wondered how they'd ever get the cobwebs out of the corners, or if the cracks in the plaster would ever get fixed. After all, this was going to be her prison until she found a way out.

The first item in the trunk was a carefully wrapped package that contained a framed photograph. Anna undid the wrapping paper and looked for a spot on the wall to hang it.

“Don’t unwrap that, Anna. Just slide it back into its packing,” Liudmila said. “It’s not going up.”

Anna took a look at the black-and-white picture fading on glass. It was the young General Konstantine, in a lieutenant’s uniform. He was posing with a young bride in white. Liudmila and Aida probably weren’t even born when this picture was taken. The woman looked nothing like his two slaves: she had meat on her bones, and curves, and a real woman's figure. Before Anna could study the picture in detail, Liudmila gently pulled it out of her hands.

“Best to forget you saw that photograph,” Liudmila said, as she rewrapped it.

“Who is she?” Anna asked.

“And to not talk about her.”

Not wanting a confrontation, Anna turned back to the trunk to see where else she could start. “How much time did you have to pack in Moscow?” she asked. “Everything seems to have been packed in a rush.”

“We didn’t have any time,” Liudmila said.

“We certainly were in a rush when we left Moscow,” Aida said. “Master left at the end of October, saying there was an emergency in one of the client states. He said he would be gone for just a week. At the end of that time, instead of coming home, he sent word to pack everything but the heavy furniture. We had to do it right away.”

“By that, she means there was a truck pulling up to the front of our flat while we were reading Master’s telegram!” Liudmila said. “A cadre of conscripts was waiting to take the boxes away as soon as each one was packed.”

“I picked out this apartment,” Aida announced with a proud smile beaming across her face.

“We picked it,” Liudmila corrected, “together.”

Aida put away the General’s clothes as Anna handed them to her. “Imagine us, once arriving in Budapest, without even meeting with Master, being chauffeured around by a Soviet Captain, two conscripts, and some functionary from the mayor’s office. They took us from flat to flat. You should have seen the look on their faces as we all crowded into a staff car. They must have known who we were, yet they didn’t dare say anything. I suppose if Master heard a bad word from either one of us, those people would be shot! They had to be absolutely polite. They didn’t dare stare at our boobs or hips, even though we wore revealing dresses with our coats unbuttoned.

“Anyway, we walked into the first place they showed us and saw a family cowering in the corner. It occurred to us that they were going to throw these people out if we picked the place. Imagine, we were actually expected to pick which family we were going to evict! Not wanting to throw anyone out, we turned the place down for some made-up excuse. ‘Too drafty,’ I told them. This place happened to be the third flat they showed us. We picked it only because the occupants had fled. Fortunately, it is a gorgeous place in a great downtown location.”

“I hope Uri likes it!” Liudmila added as she put his shoes in his wardrobe.

“Oh look, Liudi, I found your mother’s old magick book,” Aida said holding up a large black volume, bound with leather so brittle it was ready to fall apart.

“Great, just put it into our bedroom!”

Our bedroom: Anna rolled the words around in her head with all its connotations. She was sure she was going to hear their moans and cries all night long.

Once they finished setting up Uri’s bedroom, Aida and Liudmila set up a smaller room for themselves. After that, they helped Anna arrange the third bedroom for herself.

That night, Anna lay down to sleep in a strange, new bed. She had a goose down pillow that

surrounded her head when she sank into it, and she had a goose down comforter that she pulled up to her chin. Only her face remained exposed, showing like an insignificant speck in a linen-covered sea of feathers. She wondered about Liudmila and Aida, marveling at how willingly they accepted their slavery, and how they turned it into a game.

Her thoughts kept turning back to General Konstantine and what he would do with her. The stories the girls told her danced through her mind. She imagined being called to him at night to join a threesome. Or maybe even an orgy with both girls and him. Did the General really have that kind of stamina? The images in her mind fast-forwarded to another scene in which she saw herself being held down by these two brats as ‘master’ took her. Her thoughts then raced to a different scene, one in which she was alone with him and he was flogging her bottom for some minor infraction.

She noticed her right hand straying too close to her delta; a finger idly wrapped itself around her dainty curls. No, she reprimanded herself, jerking her hand away, “I am not intrigued.” Still, her thoughts wandered, this time to her legs wrapped around his pelvis, pulling him against her. She wasn't bound in any way, and it was just him and her, making love as equals. Her left hand casually strayed across her right breast. She pulled that away too and forced both arms to remain by her side, punishing them for straying from the “Anna” party line.

Of course, she would have to refuse him. But she wondered how harshly he would whip her for that defiance. Then again, could she defy him indefinitely? She had already had a taste of what that cost. Or should she just accept him, knowing she wouldn't be able to hold out forever? These girls accepted him. And they seemed happy.

Her hands had the urge to roam her body, again; she redoubled her resolve to keep them by her side. Still, her erect nipples tingled as they caressed the linens with each breath she took, her chest slowly rising and falling.

Hushed giggles came from the other bedroom.

Anna fell asleep with her right hand idly resting on her bosom.

- 3 -

Anna awoke bathed in a feeling of warmth under her goose down. Only her nose felt the snap of cold air. The memories of what had transpired yesterday came flooding back as sleep left her mind. She forced herself out from the warmth of the comforter. The cold air assaulted her body sending goose bumps along her arms and thighs. She wrapped the comforter around her, then followed the sound of snores from the next room. She peeked in to find Liudmila and Aida sleeping arm in arm. They had woken Anna more than once. Now, she had an urge to wake them so they could tell her how to turn up the blasted heat.

Anna knew that it wasn't as simple as turning up the thermostat in this outdated country. This flat had kerosene heaters in the rooms. She had the same system in the small apartment she was renting, so she knew how to start them.

Once they were on, and steadily emitting heat, Anna turned her attention to lighting a fire in the kitchen stove. She found where they kept the coal and the kindling, and soon had that going too. She put her hands next to the fire to warm them when she realized she was chilled all over despite the comforter on her back. She set out to find something to put on, to hell with Uri's nakedness rule.

Her suitcase sat by the front door where she'd left it. It didn't have much in it, but it did have an item or two she could use. She slipped into her last pair of panties and an undershirt. She found her sweater and a pair of fuzzy slippers.

"Now, I feel better," she told herself. She went back to the kitchen and put on some water to boil. She hoped there was ground coffee. A little rummaging through the kitchen found tea and some sugar, but no coffee. "Those two will have hot water for their tea waiting for them when

they wake, not that they deserve it,” she thought.

As the water started to simmer, she left the kitchen to explore her new prison. She got as far as the living room window looking out over Bajcsy-Zsilinszky Street. There were very few people walking about and no cars. The sun had risen about a half hour ago; the wall of the building on the opposite side of the street was painted in the sun’s glow. Shadows in the shapes of long fingers, stretched across the street and up the walls on the other side. Elizabeth Park, on the opposite corner, glowed pink in the morning sun.

Anna continued surveying the flat. She found a dossier on the credenza in the first room from the outside, the living room. It looked just like the one General Konstantine had received from Moscow about her. Her heart raced as she opened it to the front page. It was all in Russian, with their damned Cyrillic letters. But she thought back to her Russian 101 and painfully read the words *Psychic Experiments* on the title.

Disappointment overcame her when she saw it wasn't “her” dossier, but then again, she'd seen him lock that away in his desk. It wasn't what she was looking for, but it was still her duty to collect whatever information she could.

Knowing she wouldn't have time to read the entire document — it was at least twenty typed pages. She opened it in the middle. Most of the Russian words were technical and beyond her ability. Words were crossed out in pen and corrections were made throughout. Annotations by different hands filled the margins.

“... at best, this program achieved mixed results. Although various individual travelers have blundered into American facilities during random forays, only on two such occasions was usable information retrieved. The very randomness of this type of travel and the limited returns on effort spent, call the usefulness of the program into question.

“Additionally, the potential danger of blundering into non-terrestrial regions and leaving so-

called 'doors' open, as in the case described in appendix iv, cannot be discounted. The contingency of an unknown quantity using these 'doors' to gain access to our sphere must be included in future risk assessments ...”

“Are you a little cold?” asked Liudmila. She was standing in the doorway at the opposite end of the room.

“Gosh, you scared me. As a matter of fact, I am.” Anna slapped the folder closed. She’d have to study it later, if it was still there. But now, she was determined to be firm, privileges be damned. Besides, Liudmila was in her robe — warm and toasty.

“You have to understand, Uri has been known to barge in at any time, day or night. His instructions were clear, and he has charged me to enforce them. Do we understand each other?”

“I'm cold.”

“I see you've started the heat,” Liudmila said. “Thanks for doing that, by the way. It should be warm in a half hour. Why don't you go back to bed until then. I'll find you a book if you want. You shouldn't be reading Master's reports.”

Anna took a quick glance down to the folder, knowing she’d have to put it out of her mind for the moment. “I don't feel like going back to bed. And I don't feel like undressing. I’ll do that when I hear him coming. He’ll never know.”

“But I will know!” Liudmila said as she walked towards her. “Give me that pullover!”

“No!”

“Then I’ll take it from you.”

“What’s going on here?” Aida said yawning. She stood in the doorway wearing a flannel shirts two sizes too large. It must be one of her master’s. Her hair stood on end as if she were possessed by a static electricity demon.

“Rules are rules,” Liudmila said in a matter-of-fact manner. “Help me get her undressed.”

“I see,” Aida said, then yawned again. “I guess it's time for morning exercise.”

The two circled Anna.

“Don't touch me!” Anna growled, feeling surrounded. “I may undress for the General, but not for you.”

As Liudmila reached for the arm of her sweater, Anna grabbed her by the wrist. The Russian girl suppressed a cry as Anna twisted her around and forced her to her knees.

“Trained by the CIA in hand-to-hand combat,” Anna said. “Best not mess with me.” But as she was speaking, Aida grabbed her from behind and spun her around. Anna was forced to release Liudmila and found herself face to face with her younger companion.

The two deflected the others blows as they grabbed at each other. Anna took hold of Aida's arm with one hand and a fistful of her hair with the other. Just as she thought she had the girl subdued, Liudmila put her into an arm lock from behind. She didn't count on the girl getting up so quickly.

Before Anna could shake Liudmila off, Aida reversed the grip, and now held Anna by both wrists. Anna tried to kick their feet out from under them, but they were both too quick for her.

They forced Anna onto her knees between them.

“And Master sent us to train with the KGB for a year,” Liudmila said. “Don't mess with us, either.”

They tried to remove Anna's sweater, but Anna fought back and wouldn't let them take it. They wrestled her to the floor; even with them on top of her, they still couldn't remove it. Aida changed tactics and started pulling Anna's underpants down. In response, Anna kicked out and got her somewhere soft. That ended that effort on Aida's part.

After a hurried conversation that mixed Russian and French, Liudmila took the cotton belt from her robe and bound Anna's wrists behind her back while Aida held her down. Then, the

two of them pulled Anna back to her feet, still kicking out at them.

“Shit,” Aida said when she realized that they couldn’t get the sweater off her now.

“Put her over the couch,” Liudmila directed.

The two dragged Anna to a couch against the wall and put her over its arm. Her upper body hung over the edge, precariously balanced with her nose inches from the floor. Liudmila sent Aida to get something from Master’s “toy” chest, then stooped in front of Anna and grabbed a handful of her hair behind her neck. She pulled Anna’s head back to look at her eye-to-eye.

Neither one said anything as they contemplated each other.

Liudmila then leaned forward and kissed Anna on the lips.

Anna wasn’t expecting a kiss. She tried to turn away, but couldn’t with Liudmila’s firm grip on her hair. She tried to bite, but couldn’t get at Liudmila’s lips. Liudmila didn’t break off the kiss until Aida returned.

Aida brought a riding crop along with a bundle of rope and a rubber replica of a man’s phallus.

Oh, God, Anna thought, these two are going to do to me what General Konstantine hadn’t.

Aida sat on the back of Anna's legs and bound her ankles so she couldn’t kick out. Then she got up and stood beside her with a riding crop in hand. Then came the moment Anna feared. Without a warning, Aida laid a stinging smack across Anna's bottom. Liudmila kept a firm grip on Anna’s hair all the while, making sure their eyes remained locked, savoring every moment of Anna’s anguish.

Liudmila smiled.

“Bitch,” Anna said.

Liudmila laughed.

Anna received one stroke of the crop after another. Aida delivered at least ten firm blows

across her bottom, more than Uri had given her, and these were far more severe. Then, as suddenly as she started, Aida stopped. She tossed Liudmila the dildo. “Your turn, my love,” she said.

Liudmila held it in front of Anna to show her the instrument in all its naked glory. Thick, long, slightly giggly and flexible as rubber is wont to be.

Anna gulped. “I bet ‘master’ didn’t give you permission to use his things.”

“He’ll never know,” Liudmila winked.

“But, I’ll know,” Anna retorted.

“Open your mouth,” Liudmila ordered.

Anna clenched her jaw shut.

Liudmila pulled Anna’s hair back, exposing her throat. At the same moment, Aida smacked her bottom again with the riding crop, harder than anything she delivered up to then.

Anna opened her mouth as she cried out; it was just for a moment, but that moment was all Liudmila needed to force the dildo between her lips.

Proud of herself, Liudmila reached over and gave Aida a kiss. When she turned her attention back to Anna, Liudmila saw that their captive had freed her hands. They should never have relied on the robe’s belt alone to subdue her. By the time Liudmila saw their mistake, Anna had the foot-long dildo out of her mouth and was holding it in her right hand. Before Liudmila could react, Anna slapped her across the face with it. It was a sharp, solid, slap from which Liudmila tasted blood.

That’s when Anna sensed another presence in the room. She thought at first it would be her phantom voyeurs, the freaky old man with the eye patch and the woman in the little black dress, but when she looked up, she saw General Konstantine towering above her.

Aida shrieked when she saw him. She let the crop fly out of her hand in mid-swing.

Liudmila turned to look up at him and fell backwards onto the parquet.

“Um, welcome to your new home, sir,” Liudmila said as she scampered to her feet.

He had bags under his eyes as if he hadn't slept in days.

“I'd have expected better from the two of you,” he said. “And Andromeda, I thought you were more intelligent than to let them goad you. You must have done something to get them to do this to you.”

“She wouldn't undress,” Aida blurted out.

“Shouldn't you two be in position when I arrive home?” he asked.

Liudmila and Aida hurried to kneel in front of the General. They crossed their wrists behind their backs and looked straight ahead as if at attention.

Anna sat up and started to untie the rope around her ankles. “You've got to be kidding,” she grumbled. “This looks like a scene from The Story of O.”

“Let me help you with that,” General Konstantine said, ignoring her comment. He got down on onto one knee in front of Anna-on-the-couch and proceeded to remove the rope. “Take your place next to them,” he said. “I will show you how to position yourself. And, your sweater please,” he held out a hand for it. “You can have it back shortly.”

Anna took a deep breath as she stood. She turned away from him as she slowly pulled the sweater over her head. She'd already made her point to Liudmila and Aida; that she wouldn't submit to them. She took off her undershirt and underpants after the sweater, then turned to face him.

Instead of handing her clothes to him, she slowly walked over to where the girls knelt. Anna curled up her panties and placed it on Liudmila's head like a pill-box hat. As she suspected, Liudmila didn't dare make a move to displace it. She then placed her undershirt on top of Aida's head in the same manner. “You wanted them so much, here you go,” she said.

Anna threw her sweater at Uri, aiming at his face. “They ripped it,” she said, “and it was my only one.” She then took her place in line next to Aida and lowered herself to her knees before he got tired of her theatrics.

Anna saw something she wasn’t expecting as she looked straight ahead at him. If she was reading his face correctly, it was all he could do to not break out in laughter; although he forced a stern look, she could tell he was amused. This tidbit of information confirmed something Anna had suspected but was never sure of. She wasn’t even sure what that ephemeral bit of information was, or to what end she could use it. She did know that she needn’t fear for her life. Certainly he would punish her for any infraction — that she still feared — but she knew he would never really hurt her. Yes, there was an ember of humanity in him and that was something she had to learn to channel. Her release wouldn’t come by crude escape through an open window; rather it would come about by taking advantages of opportunities in any form they might take.

General Konstantine went over to Anna and stooped beside her. He gently positioned her body, showing her how to place her arms behind her back, the left crossed over the right at the wrists; he adjusted her posture, pushing her shoulder blades forward so her breasts would stand out; he took her thighs in his hand and positioned her legs apart so her sex would be visible; then he positioned her head, having her look up with eyes ahead and mouth slightly open. Yep, someone’s been reading “O” too much. She imagined a dog-eared copy of that erotic novel, which he must use as his protocol manual for slaves. She couldn’t help but smile at the absurdity of it.

“That’s very good,” he said as he stood. He kissed her on the forehead.

Despite her amusement, Anna felt a tinge of embarrassment at being lined up, mannequined, on her knees, and naked. Yet, she wasn’t sure if she was feeling indignant at the same time, or

even if her current emotion had a name. She watched as he turned his attention to the other two. He didn't mention anything about what was happening when he walked in; perhaps he'll punish them in his bedroom later; or maybe there would be no punishment, leaving it up to his slaves to work out their pecking order. Rather, he turned his attention to the mundane details of moving his household from one city to another: was the babushka who delivers the milk paid? Was the butcher's tab settled? How about the seamstress? Was anything important left behind? He made notes in a small book whenever the answer required his attention.

"I've been on the road all night," he said. "I would now like a bath and some breakfast."

Hearing that, Liudmila and Aida jumped up and ran off to do their master's bidding. Anna stood and started to go after them, not knowing what was expected of her.

"Andromeda, stay with me," he said. "You will give me a tour of my new home."

"But I've only been here since yesterday," she answered. "Perhaps you'd rather have someone prettier and younger to do that."

"No, I want you to."

"Okay," she said, looking around. "This is the living room, or front hall, or whatever you choose to use it for. The girls have already set up your writing table over there. There is some interesting reading on it already. And this sofa makes a really, really great spanking bench —"

"Andromeda," he interrupted, "you will be in charge over those two by spring. You are too intelligent and ambitious not to be."

"But, they are absolute monsters!" She started to cry. She knew she shouldn't be crying in front of him, but he did save her by walking in. But, tears were her only possible response now that the tension of the moment had dissipated. She realized she was shaking, too.

"I think you can handle them." He wiped her face dry with a kerchief from his pocket. "You may be at a low point now, but you won't stay there for long."

“How, by earning your precious privileges?” Anna said. But his advice was already causing alternatives to form in her mind. She made a promise to herself then: whatever escape she may plan in the future, she would make sure it waited until those two brats received her full dose of revenge.

“You don't have to wait for privileges, take charge now,” he said as he led the way to the next room. “I bet they'll mess up the simple task of drawing a bath. They're out of their routine in this new place, not thinking. They'll run out of hot water, and they'll forget to warm the towels. I like my towels warmed, you know.”

Anna turned to him, for some reason she wanted to kiss him on the cheek. But then again, that wouldn't be proper. After all, this was the man who kidnapped her and brought her into sexual slavery. She turned away from him, blushing, and ran to join the others in the bathroom.

The bath had been drawn and everything prepared. Liudmila went to get her Master and returned with him, arm in arm. Anna remained in the background, letting Aida and Liudmila tend to him. While General Konstantine was undressing, he looked Anna's way and winked at her. It was the only recognition he gave for organizing the other two's labor. As he stepped into the tub, Anna would now see what kind of a man was worth this much dotting over.

Back when she was being interrogated, she had conjured images of what his body might look like under his uniform; images that grew all the more vivid as he played with her in the most intimate of ways. Now, as she watched him stepping into the bath, she wasn't disappointed. Although on the slim side, his muscles rippled along his abdomen. His chest hairs were curly with the same smoky blond he had on his head. There was enough for a woman to run her fingers through, but not so much as to distract from the toned body underneath. His shoulders were broad and strong; and the cheeks of his bottom were round as if sculpted and

very transfixing as she gazed upon them. His thighs coiled like pythons of muscle under taut skin as he stepped into the water with his right leg, then his left. She imagined herself intertwined with those legs; then her own legs riding them, then she imagined wrapping her legs around his svelte torso. And his manhood: she knew she wasn't supposed to stare overtly, but even in its dormant state, she couldn't help but admire its length and girth as it existed there, lying between his legs, calling only to her; she couldn't ignore its tantalizing potential of what it might grow in to with just a little coaxing. He lowered himself into the tub slowly; letting the water envelop his soldier's body. As he sank in up to his neck, he looked Anna's way as the gentle heat soothed away pains only he knew.

Anna watched with mild amusement as his two slaves washed him. First one foot, then the other, then his back. She brought kettles of hot water regularly, keeping the bath warm. When she came back with a fresh pot, she found Aida in the tub cradled between Master's feet. "Push over," Anna told her, "or you'll get scalded." She fantasized about pouring hot water over the French brat's knees (oops).

She just added the hot water along the side of the tub.

Eventually, General Uri Konstantine became tired of the bath and declared himself clean. Liudmila and Aida dried him, one from the front and the other from behind. Anna watched as they gyrated their bodies against his, rubbing him dry with towels sandwiched between them and him.

"Shall I pleasure you, master?" Liudmila asked from behind as the towel fell to the floor. Her hands caressed him from his lower abdominals to his upper thigh.

"No, use me!" Aida said as she lowered herself to her knees, brushing his cock with her body on the way down.

"Which one, indeed?" he mused. "These decisions can be so difficult."

“I will.”

All three of them, Liudmila, Aida, and the General, turned to Anna, not believing what she had said.

Anna wasn't sure she had said it either. She knew that sooner or later she would be called upon, no, forced to pleasure him. Doing it now, she'd control the terms.

“I'm not asking you to —”, he started to say.

“I said, 'I will',” she repeated with resolve.

“You just watch this time, dear,” Liudmila said, sliding to her knees beside Aida. “Master is very particular as to how it's done.”

“Out of my way,” Anna said, parting both girls to either side of her. She looked General Konstantine in the eyes as she stood face to face with him. There was no fear, only determination on her side of the transaction. Anna wasn't sure where her bravado came from; surely it was a false bravado that would reveal itself in the most inopportune time. Nonetheless, she slid down his naked body, coming to rest on her knees, inches in front of him. Aida and Liudmila looked on from either side in disbelief.

Uri stroked her head for a moment as she looked upon his manhood, stiff, throbbing, red.

She took hold of him, circling the base of his cock with her fingers. She squeezed it, causing the already engorged organ to expand the length of its head yet again. She kissed its tip; felt its heat upon her lips; she gazed upon it, watched it throb, as if about to burst in her hand.

“Use only your mouth,” Liudmila whispered. “He doesn't like it when you use your hands. You get whipped for that. Keep your hands clasped behind your back so you won't be tempted.”

“Liudmila, be quiet,” General Konstantine said. “Those rules are only for the two of you.”

Alright, Anna thought, I've gone this far, I can handle that too. “I don't need special treatment,” she said. Then she returned her concentration to his organ. “Let me see if my new

master's" — what did Liudmila call it? — "wadpole is worthy of its acclaim." She took him in between her lips and released her hand hold on him. Then she crossed her wrists behind her back.

"See, I told you it is a real word," Liudmila whispered to Aida.

Anna tried to shut them out.

This man had kidnapped her, whipped her, made her fall for him, abandoned her to his two hellcats, then subdued her all over again. But now, she was in charge; in charge, even though she was on her knees before him, with her hands crossed dutifully behind her back. She dictated the speed; she dictated the intensity; she chose how close to his precipice he would dance; yes, she was in charge. At least, that is, until he orgasmed.

Anna expected that to happen rather quickly. After all, he had been teased to the brink by his two slaves as they gyrated their twenty and twenty-two year-old bodies against his. But Anna soon realized her problem wouldn't be holding him back from erupting too quickly, rather it would be his staying power the girls had warned her about. When he showed no sign of coming, she began to wonder how difficult this task she had taken on really was.

She'd learned psychological tricks of her own, tricks to hurry matters like this along; she started to gyrate her body; she slowly took him all the way in to the back of her throat then out again; when out, she circled his head with her tongue; when all the way in, she moaned as if she had an erogenous zone in the back of her throat; she changed pace often; now bobbing up and down furiously; now going slowly and deliberately; she took her breasts in her hands, caressing them, pulling her nipples; kneading them between her fingers; she touched herself between her kneeling legs; now exploring her clit with a finger; now sliding that finger deep inside her. When she moaned this time, it was because she discovered that there really was an erogenous zone located somewhere between her pussy and the back of her throat.

“Aida,” Liudmila said in a hushed murmur, as she watched intently from behind. “I learned a new English word. Fellatio.”

“Fellatio?” Aida replied, staring at Anna from the right.

“Yes, it’s a good word, don’t you think?”

“It turns me on to hear you say it.”

“Fellatio.”

Anna could kill them. She knew they were trying to break her rhythm, but he was so close to exploding that nothing could stop him, or her.

There was no mistaking the signs — he had now taken over with a fury, thrusting into her, holding her head firmly with both hands, no longer content with letting her control the pace. So much for that illusion of being in charge. She took hold of him by his hips to mitigate his deepest thrusts, for she feared he would push himself all the way down into her throat.

Anna wondered what to do when his moment finally arrived. She hadn’t really planned that part out. All of a sudden, she wasn’t ready to accept him when he came; wasn’t yet prepared to give away that last crumb of intimacy.

“You must catch it all,” Liudmila whispered, sensing Anna’s hesitancy. She knelt inches away, watching Anna intently.

“You’ve got to be kidding,” Anna thought. Yet, the moment was upon her and she had to decide what to do.

The idea came to her even as she felt his member tighten. She quickly took hold of his organ with her right hand and moved her head to the left. She aimed at Liudmila as he shot his release.

“Hey!” Liudmila screamed as Anna’s aim hit its mark. “Now you’ve done it,” Liudmila said, wiping her face with a towel. “You’ll get twenty lashes for that.”

“Liudmila, you deserved it,” Uri Konstantine said, as he held out his hand for Anna to take.

Anna let him help her up. "I was right about your spunk when I first met you."

"Master, you're not going to let her get away with this!" Liudmila protested. "You'd give me twenty lashes if I did the same thing." She stood to face him. "Rules are rules, you keep telling us. You'd think nothing of whipping either of us whenever the smallest drop spills!"

"Yeah, you whipped me for less than this!" Aida added. "And I was just as new."

"My robe," he said, trying to end the discussion.

But the two didn't want the discussion to end. They crossed their arms and turned away from their Master in open defiance.

Anna helped him into his robe when the others wouldn't. She watched the three of them in their standoff, amused but wondering what kind of strange dynamic was working between them. All of a sudden she understood just as he started to explain.

"They're trying to trick me into punishing them," he told Anna. "Shall I take their bait?"

"It's not mine to say, sir," Anna answered.

"Nonetheless, order must be maintained," he said. "Although your performance was exceptional, it wasn't something I asked of you. You took this task upon yourself. When you did, you also took on the responsibility and the consequences for your playful finale. You will receive twenty lashes for that transgression. Do you accept your punishment?"

"Will it be any harder than when you were interrogating me?" she asked. Anna had controlled the terms of this, their first encounter; perhaps she could control the terms of her punishment, too. "Because, if it is —"

"It will be no more than you can take," he said. "No harsher than before."

That whipping during the interrogation had scared her. Scared her, that is, until she realized the pain was mostly psychological. When she realized his whip wasn't tearing her flesh apart, she found she could easily handle it and the fear left her. And now, as she stood before him, she

wasn't afraid of him, either.

Uri Konstantine led her by the hand into the largest bedroom, his bedroom, and instructed her to kneel and lean over the bed. Anna did as she was told and waited patiently while he brought forth his whip.

It seemed like she had to wait forever, but when the whip cracked and she felt the sting on her bottom, her fortitude evaporated. Even though the pain was “mostly psychological” it still hurt, and she still cried out, and she still nearly jumped off the bed. But as the signals from the pain receptors in her bottom reached her brain, she saw her two phantoms again.

They sat on the bed, on either side of her, her bearded old man in the blue robe and the woman in the little black dress. They started to fade a moment later, but appeared again whole when the next crack of the whip landed on her bottom.

She looked to the man, then to the woman. They just sat there, watching her. The whip continued to fall on her bottom rhythmically, not letting them fade away. She knew then that she could only see them in this heightened state of awareness brought on by an extreme assault on her senses.

She reached out for them, surprised when she could touch them; his blue robe was rough but threadbare, and very real; her dress was silk, and equally as real. She could see its label from where she lay, Chanel.

Another crack of the whip. Another jolt of pain. Another few seconds of clarity.

The man took hold of Anna's hand. They were rough and weathered, like his face. Yet, there was sympathy in his touch. The phantom woman, taking her cue from him, took Anna's other hand.

“Do you see them?” Anna asked the other in the room.

“There are a few red spots, but no broken skin,” Liudmila answered.

No, they don't see them, Anna concluded.

“Who are you people?” she asked.

“Just a master and his two slaves,” Uri answered.

“Three slaves now,” Liudmila corrected.

“Is that right, Andromeda?” Uri asked. “Three?”

“Of course,” she said, “three.” Yet her mind was elsewhere. She just wanted to talk to her two visitors on the bed; but every time she spoke, one of her terrestrials answered.

Terrestrials, non-terrestrials, she'd put them all in terms of that report. Did these two interlopers step into our universe through some sort of “door”?

Then the whipping stopped.

“Twenty,” Uri Konstantine declared.

The two on the bed faded. She felt them let go of her hands. She saw their indentations on the mattress flatten.

“More,” Anna cried. “Whip me more!”

“No need to be a hero,” Uri said. “You've had enough.” But to surprise her, he threw one more whip stroke across her back. This one stung Anna harder than the rest.

She looked for the two strangers while the pain still throbbed on her back; they were nowhere to be found. They had left through their invisible door in the universe.

- 4 -

That night, General Konstantine did not call Anna to his bed. She had assumed all along he was going to — after all, she was his sex slave now and he must be eager to taste the fruits of his new conquest. It puzzled her that he didn't, but she guessed that he was giving her time to acclimate to her new life.

“What a farce,” she thought. “He kidnapped me and is now trying to be nice to me; grrr, he's

doing the exact opposite.” As she lay in bed, she heard the rhythmic sound of flesh being slapped and the moans and cries of the other two slaves receiving their master's attention. She tried not to imagine what instrument he was using on them: his belt, a paddle, or perhaps a flogger designed for just that purpose. As the night progressed, those moans evolved to gasps of pleasure, and the cries became cries of orgasm; first from one girl, then the other.

Anna tried to fall asleep, disappointed, confused, let down; she wondered why she was so frustrated, she ought to be relieved. It was her renegade body playing tricks on her again. She told herself she should hate him, or at the very least, not to long for him like a school girl would a first crush.

Or, maybe he called Liudmila and Aida to his bed to placate them; even a palace this small has its palace politics. “Yes, that must be it,” she thought. “He’ll summon me tomorrow night.” With her mind at ease, but her body still wanting, she drifted off to a fitful sleep.

Before leaving the following morning, General Konstantine gave his slaves their orders for the day. Anna’s job was to wax and polish the parquet floors of the entire flat. “Seven rooms?” she thought, as he plunked a polishing rag into her right hand and a can of wax into her left.

“But,” she started to protest. She was too stunned to say anything more. She watched as he gave Liudmila and Aida their daily assignments. Either he didn't see her disappointment or he ignored it totally. When he finished dictating his orders to the other two, he just flew out the door. Anna thought he’d placed her in a position of privilege; Anna thought she would be above menial labor; that she’d be directing the others; supervising their work. He’d implied as much yesterday, bolstering her spirits with his words; it turned out she was, indeed, the scullery slave, the lowest of them all.

Anna stood in the living room, too stunned to move. Liudmila said nothing and just went off

to do her own tasks. Aida shrugged and said, “The floors don’t look like they need polishing, if you ask me.”

Anna fumed. Anna paced the room. Anna kicked the door. Then, she got onto her hands and knees and started her task.

“He’s testing me,” she grumbled.

The work was hard and dull. Naked, on her knees, stretching her arms and back, she soon started to feel every muscle in her body. By mid-afternoon she’d just finished the first room. And the next room lay beyond a set of double doors. Her body ached, she was exhausted, yet she felt a duty to continue, even if she was unable to finish all the rooms by the time he returned in the evening.

At six o'clock, when Uri Konstantine returned, his three slaves ran to greet him at the door. Anna didn’t have to be told to kneel this time, or how to hold her posture, or be reminded to keep her mouth slightly open, symbolically ready to accept him. “Look, Uri”, she thought, “you posed me this way. Now go ahead and do something with me. After all, you took me to be your sex slave, not your house maid.”

He patted each of them on the head as he entered the house, then bade them to rise to their feet.

The General did not hide his disappointment when he inspected Anna's progress, barely a room and a half done. He asked her to stand at attention for him, then to hold out her hands, palm side up. With a rattan cane, he slapped her across her two palms. She jerked her hand away as she felt the sting.

“Again,” he said.

She reluctantly held them out for him, this time trembling. When he raised his cane, Anna

reflexively jerked her hands back.

He made Aida and Liudmila hold her arms out as he delivered another nine smacks.

“I’m not a child,” Anna said, when it was over.

That night was a repeat of the last. Anna slept alone listening to the sounds of wild abandon from beyond her door.

The following morning General Konstantine ordered her to continue her task of polishing the floors, and this time to be more efficient about it.

“Yes, sir,” she grumbled reluctantly.

“Let me see how you do it,” he said.

Anna trembled as she got onto her hands and knees and started polishing a small circle. His booted legs were in her peripheral vision; she tried not to look at them. Then she felt his hand on her bottom. He stroked her gently in small circles. She wondered if he’d take her as she knelt on all fours, exposed for him. A tingle of elicited excitement coursed through her body.

“You need some motivation.” He reached between her butt cheeks and put a finger on her anus.

She shuddered. She stopped polishing for a moment, but continued when her composure returned.

He held something in his hand. She couldn’t see what it was, but it was solid and smooth. He slipped that something into her. It must be a ball, she thought. It was round, too large to be comfortable, but small enough to go inside her. She felt the string it was attached to; felt it tickle her pussy and thighs. She knew it was there so he could remove the ball later. She had gasped when he inserted the ball, and gasped again when he tugged on the string, teasing her with it.

“Am I to leave it in all day?” Anna asked.

“Yes, my dear,” he said.

“But, all day? It’ll be so frustrating!”

“I know,” he said. Then he bent down and kissed her on the back of her head. “Be strong.”

Anna cried when he left; cried for an hour as she worked; then the sexual frustration she dreaded took hold of her. She wanted desperately to touch herself; to give herself the release she needed. But, Liudmila and Aida were coming and going on their own day-to-day tasks and would see her. Besides, she wanted to make as much progress as she could, not wanting to have too many more days doing this.

She finished the room by midmorning. Then the hallway by noon. The job was just as slow and arduous as it was yesterday, but now she had the added complication of feeling the ball with every turn and twist she made. Each time, the ball rubbed against her inner walls, reminding her it was there, raising the level of frustration, but giving her no relief.

She joined Liudmila and Aida for a light lunch — she ate standing. The three of them spoke little during their meal. Then Anna went back to continue her chore.

Liudmila and Aida followed her to the room she was doing. Anna turned to see them blocking the doorway. A feeling of dread befell her. Was her plight with that ball up her bottom too attractive a target for them? Would they now follow through with their attack on her? Then Anna saw each of them holding a polishing rag similar to hers.

“We’ve completed our jobs for the day,” Liudmila said. “We can help you finish the floors.”

Anna wondered if it was a trick, but was feeling so dejected she could do nothing but take their offer at face value. She did look them up and down once — her sense of caution wasn’t completely anesthetized — but she quickly dismissed any potential misgivings she had about them or their offer. Anna just said, “Thanks,” and returned to all fours to continue the work.

The three of them finished the rest of the floors by the time their Master returned home that

night.

“Nicely done,” General Konstantine said to Anna.

“Thank you, sir,” she answered.

“Get onto your hands and knees for me,” he commanded. When she did, he said, “Hold your bottom up.” Reluctantly, she obeyed. He took hold of her around the waist with one hand and slowly pulled the ball out of her bottom with the other. She gasped; the feeling was disquieting but intriguing at the same time.

If he would have taken a little longer as he teased it out, or if he would have gently rubbed her pussy while he did, she’d surely have had a small orgasm. Anna wondered if he knew how malleable she was in his hands at that moment.

But he knew perfect well. And he took perverse pleasure in not calling her to his bed that night, either.

Over the next month General Konstantine assigned Anna one arduous task after another. He often teased her sexually, but never brought her release, nor did he ever summon her to his bed at night.

He added to her duties over that time; Anna was put in charge of the kitchen and the pantry inventory. Although not allowed outside, she had the authority to send one of the other two girls for groceries and the like. She was ordered to keep a log of when they left and when they returned.

Anna became more and more sexually frustrated as the days passed. It was worst when she heard the wild sounds of passion late at night; especially on days he placed that marble ball up her bottom — something he did at least twice a week.

Uri Konstantine caught her touching herself one night; by this time, it was late December, the week between Christmas and New Years. Anna had listened to the three of them all evening and couldn't sleep. As she stroked her own pussy; she forgot where she was, and cried the cries of ecstasy as she brought herself to orgasm time after time.

She saw him standing in the doorway. The embarrassment quickly faded when she realized she had bigger problems than her propriety. He tied her to the four corners of her bed, and told her to expect the same each night from then on if she couldn't keep quiet.

"Did you tell him not to touch me?" Anna asked Liudmila the following afternoon. It was almost five o'clock, and he'd be home in an hour. She didn't want to confide in Liudmila and Aida, but she had no one else to talk to.

"No," Liudmila said with a huff, as she stirred that night's bean soup. "It seems I don't have any pull with him. If I did, you'd be a part of the nightly activities." She took a sip from the ladle and added a half spoon of salt. "I don't know why he's not including you, but I'll tell you one thing, he's become totally insatiable since you've arrived in our family. We're more sore than ever."

"This frustration is driving me wild," Anna said. "And he's going to tie me to the bed at nights. I won't get any release."

"I don't know his reasons, but I can talk to him for you."

"No," Anna said, swallowing hard. "It's time I stand up for myself. When he summons the two of you tonight, I will go, instead. I know this will risk his wrath, and we all might get punished —"

"You're not going to go to him like that, are you?" Liudmila interrupted.

"Why not?"

“Look at yourself.”

Anna had been cleaning the ashes out of the ceramic furnace all afternoon. She was covered with soot. Her hair clung to her head with sweat.

“Aida,” Liudmila called. “Prepare a bath for Anna. Hurry, we’ve got to get her cleaned up before Master gets home.”

Anna tried not to show surprise or shock. She was finding it hard to continue hating the other girl. Even her usual suspicions of some hidden, ulterior motive were pushed to the back of her mind.

The bath itself was as exotic as it was erotic. Liudmila and Aida washed her in a warm bath foaming with scented bubbles. They used sea sponges on her that they didn’t even use on their Master. They wouldn’t let Anna do anything for herself, not even wash her between the legs. They gently sponged her there, although they refrained from playing with her pussy. Anna was at a point where she would have accepted release from even them had they pursued that line of sport. But, no, they were saving Anna for her Master.

“The more frustrated you are,” Liudmila said, as her sponge rubbed her up and down between her legs, “the more courage you’ll have to walk into his bedroom.”

Anna breathed a deep moan of pleasure at the touch, but Liudmila moved on to wash her feet.

After the bath, they towel-dried Anna, fashioned her hair, and painted her nails.

“We’ll put makeup on you after dinner,” Liudmila said. “Otherwise, he’ll suspect.”

When they heard him unlocking the door, they ran to greet their master in their usual fashion; he then removed the ball from Anna’s anus like always. If he noticed how clean Anna was after the fireplace, he didn’t say anything.

After dinner, Aida, the makeup artist, applied powder to Anna’s cheeks, rouge to her lips,

and eye liner to her eyes. Then she added a touch of color to her breasts. They graced her with a hint of perfume, then gave Anna a mirror.

“Wow,” she said. “This is me?”

Then they waited for Master to call his slaves to him for the night.

And waited.

Seven-thirty turned into eight, then eight-thirty.

The three girls just looked at each other as they waited together in Liudmila and Aida’s room. Finally, they sent Aida to him to make inquiries.

“Aren’t you going to call for us?” Aida asked from the hall outside his room.

“No, not tonight,” he said. “You may have the night off.”

Back in the room, the three of them fumed at the news.

“He knows,” Anna growled. “Somehow he knows. He’s playing with us. Just like he’s been playing with me since I got here.” She stood up and said, “I’m going to barge in on him. Wish me luck.”

Anna slowly opened the heavy wooden door to the General's bedroom. “Sir?” she inquired from an opening no wider than a handbreadth. “General?”

He didn’t answer. She saw him through that crack, sitting on his bed, reading.

Anna took a deep breath and opened the door. “May I come in?” She took tentative steps inside without waiting for the answer that never came. On one level, she knew he was playing with her, but that didn’t stop her heart from drumming in her chest and her knees from turning into melted candle wax.

“Close the door,” he said, betraying no emotion.

Anna wondered if he meant with her inside or out. But she’d come this far and wasn’t about

to run away. She closed the door behind her and walked slowly over to his bed.

He did not look up from his book.

Anna stood two paces from him. Then waited. She cleared her throat.

He continued to read.

Anna continued to wait, determined to not let him frighten her to death. Then she had a thought; she knelt in front of him, legs apart, wrists crossed behind her back, breasts out, head raised, mouth slightly open — just like he'd taught her.

He looked up from over the top of his book.

“Is there something you want?” he asked. She sensed a hint of mischief in his voice he couldn't hide.

“Why did you bring me here?” she asked.

“It's complicated,” he answered.

“I thought it was to be your sex slave.”

He closed his book and put it aside. He looked at her with a raised eyebrow in a way that told her she may be assuming too much.

“I thought you were going to, well,” Anna stammered, “play with me, like you do with your other slaves. And, and, do what you do to them, and stuff like that.”

“I said, you would amuse me,” he reminded her. “And that, my dear Andromeda, you have done exceedingly well.”

“But, but, General,” she stammered. What could she say? “Don't you find me attractive?”

“Indeed I do. I find you very attractive.”

“Then, take me. Use me. I'm yours.”

“I hope you know what you are asking for,” he said, sitting up straight. “Because you are about to get it.” He raised his blanket and motioned with his eyes for her to climb into bed next

to him.

She crawled between the sheets and over him to sit on his other side. Just as she sat down she felt like the lamb who kept knocking at the lion's den until she was finally let in.

“Relax,” he laughed, when he saw how tense she'd gotten.

“Relax? I'm relaxed,” she said. “Why do you think I'm not relaxed. I'm very relaxed.”

“Andromeda —” he started to say, but she turned to him and kissed him. Kissed him, with her hands around his neck. He took a deep breath when she finally broke away.

“Andromeda!” he said again.

“What are you going to do to me?” she asked. “I mean, the sounds I hear late at night; the stories the girls tell. I mean, back when you interrogated me, I knew in my heart you wouldn't hurt me. But, I mean, I can learn to enjoy that kind of stuff, you know, if you start slow —”

“Andromeda! Anna! Be quiet!”

“Okay, okay, okay. I'll be quiet. You're right. I'll be quiet.”

“Lie down!” he snapped.

The order he gave Anna solidified in her thoughts. That moment, she very much needed his direction, and that's what he gave her. She willingly obeyed and slid down to lie in the center of the bed. He pulled the blanket away, exposing her body to him. He knelt beside her. She looked him up and down, in his sleeveless tee shirt and boxer shorts.

She touched him on the thigh. She had the urge to reach into his shorts and feel his manhood. She didn't know why, just like she didn't know why she kissed him a moment ago. She suppressed that urge, at least for the moment, to see what he had in store for her.

He then bent over her to kiss her.

She wondered if she should turn away; reject that kiss; struggle against him. But that would be a pretend struggle. No, she decided, nervous as she was, there would be no pretenses. She

met his lips. He took hold of his sex in his cupped hand as their mouths touched, she felt bridges collapse, atomic bombs explode, earthquakes, tornados, and a speeding train careening through her body. His hand on her sex only added a whirlwind to the mix. As she ground herself against him, electricity raced up and down her body; more than electricity, it was lightning in a tropical storm as she orgasmed at his mere touch.

He stroked her face after she came. He circled her lips with his finger tip. She kissed it. She took it in. She sucked that finger like it was his cock. He slid another finger from his other hand into her pussy. She took it in, fucking it like it was his cock.

Why did she know all along it would be like this? Why did she know it would feel this good? Why did he deny her for so long?

He kissed her nipple; drew it into his mouth; pulled on it in with lips. His fingers, now away from her mouth, took hold of her other nipple; caressing it, kneading it. Meanwhile, he continued to play with her clit, feverishly bringing her to climax: fireworks, sunspots, meteor impacts. She orgasmed again.

Anna reached into his shorts and took hold of his cock: hot, rigid, confined, yearning to burst free.

“Not yet,” he whispered, gently pushing her hand away.

“But, master, I should be the one bringing you pleasure.”

“Andromeda,” he said, “you already are bringing me more pleasure than you can imagine.”

He continued to play with her clit, now with an even greater urgency as she rose to another climax. He watched her come again. And she watched him watching her. Train wrecks, airplane crashes, solar flares.

She'd come five, six, seven times, maybe more. Anna then realized he hasn't taken his pleasure yet. When would he? She was beginning to be sated. If he was going to take her now

he might go on for hours. She realized she was in trouble.

As if reading her mind, he positioned himself on top of her and entered her.

As she felt him inside her, comets collide with asteroid belts. He pushed deep inside her, thrusting so deep she felt him all the way in, pressing against that one special, lovely spot all the way in the back. She pulled him into her as she grabbed him by his hips. Pulled him in as deep as she could, gyrating herself against his loins as her legs wrapped around him. Supernovae exploded, galaxies collided, all coming from within her as she came from this deep-body orgasm the likes of which she had never experienced before.

And yet, he was just beginning. She lost track of time. Lost count of orgasms. Ran out of metaphors. She became weak and malleable as he held her, positioning her in the ways he wanted her. Now on all fours; now on her back with her legs up; now riding on top of him.

Anna didn't know what time it was when he pulled out and ordered her to make him come. "What was I doing up 'til now?" she wondered. It could have been midnight, it could have been four in the morning. She didn't know. She was exhausted emotionally, sated sexually, and sore in her pussy. The night had been a blur, her orgasms a blur. He allowed her to take him in her mouth. She was at it for an hour, maybe two, bobbing up and down on him, changing her rhythm periodically. Her jaws became as sore as her pussy. She didn't even know he was close to coming until he grabbed two fists of her hair and in a move that surprised her.

When it was over, Anna wasn't sure what to do. Her focus up until then was their wildfire sex. He put an arm around her and had her lay beside him. He kissed her on the forehead. This calmed her and a bliss overtook her. She felt as if the bed was floating in a peaceful tropical sea. She quickly drifted off to a serene sleep in his arms.

Anna still slept when Liudmila brought her master his tea in the morning.

“Shhhh,” Uri Konstantine whispered, putting a finger to his lips. “Let her sleep.”

Liudmila placed the tray on his lap as he pulled himself to a sitting position, trying not to disturb Anna.

“Did she meet your expectations?” Liudmila whispered as she sat on his other side.

“Yes, she did,” he told her. “I’ve never seen so much built up tension released in anyone like I saw in her last night. I don’t suppose I can ever make her repeat it, not on this scale.”

“So you don’t mind she visited you?”

“Mind? I was waiting for her. I was beginning to wonder if she’d ever would. But when I returned home last night, I knew this was going to be the night. I saw through the three of you so easily.”

“You were waiting for her to visit?” Liudmila pouted.

“Yes,” he said. “Although she had shown the willingness to serve, I still had to be sure. It wasn’t enough that she surrendered to me during her interrogation, nor watching her display of bravado on that first day. Going down on me may have just been a reaction to that nasty welcome you gave her. I wanted to see her giving herself to me on her own accord.”

“Master, you are so, so, so impossible!”

“Keep your voice down. I enjoy watching her sleep.”

“You don’t enjoy watching me sleep. You always poke me awake.”

“That’s because you, my dear, sleep with your mouth open and snore.”

Aida barged into Anna’s room just as Anna was settling down for the night. “He’s asking for you,” she said with hands on her hips.

Anna thought she was secure in the knowledge that Uri would call upon one of his other slaves, now she was caught off guard.

“But we did it last night,” Anna said putting aside the book she'd just opened, a romance novel in English Uri had found for her.

If Anna had known or even suspected, she'd have had time to put herself in the right mood. Oh, and she could get used to the bubble baths, too. As it was, all she could do was to quickly examine herself in the mirror. “Passable,” she said. Then she made her way past Aida, whose feet were still planted in the middle of the room.

“Was supposed to be my turn,” Aida whispered.

“Isn't my doing,” Anna whispered back.

Anna went to his bedroom, like she did last night. She'd wished she'd have put on some makeup and brushed her hair. She supposed he wouldn't have minded if she took some time to prepare herself. Too late now, she thought as she came up to his door.

Like last night, she didn't knock. If he wanted me to knock, he would have told me. She opened the door a crack and tentatively said, “Hello? I'm here.” When he didn't answer, just like he didn't answer last night, she walked in and shut the door quietly behind her.

“I'm surprised you called me again,” Anna giggled. She didn't know why she became nervous around him. She shouldn't be; he was like a dog that senses fear. “Aida was expecting to be called —” She stopped in the middle of her sentence when saw the coil of rope in his hands.

“Come in, my dear,” he said. “Don't stand there frozen in the middle of the carpet.” He beckoned to her with the hand holding the rope.

“You're going to tie me up,” Anna stated.

He shot her a sarcastic look; a look he reserved for whenever she stated the overly obvious.

“Lie down,” he ordered.

“Lie down?” she snapped. Eyes transfixed on the rope.

“Yes, lie down. On the bed. You know, like you so eagerly did last night. I didn’t have to coax you then.”

“You didn’t have rope then,” Anna said as she took several slow steps over to him. She sat on the edge of the bed, then swung her feet up — all the while never taking her eyes off him.

And his rope.

She tried to be at ease, or at least to seem to be at ease. She slid to the middle of the bed and laid down.

He sat next to her.

“Is this how you like to see me?” Anna asked reaching for the bedposts with her arms and legs. “All tied up and helpless?”

“Relax, my dear,” he said.

“Uri, um, Master, tonight I am relaxed.” She rolled over on her side towards him.

“No, you’re not,” he told her. “Your all tensed up inside.” He stroked her hair then kissed her on the side of the head.

“I like it when you do that,” Anna said.

“Then I’ll kiss you there more often,” he told her as he placed another kiss on top of the other. He watched her take a long, slow breathe in, then let it out. “Does the thought of being tied up intrigue you?”

“Maybe,” Anna said, “No. Yes. I don’t know.”

He rolled her onto her back and took her closest hand into his. He started to wrap the rope around her wrist, one gentle turn at a time.

“No,” Anna said. Then changed her answer again, “yes.”

“Andromeda, my sweet,” he said in a chastising voice.

“Maybe.”

“Shhh,” he said gently, as he tied off one end.

She watched as he pulled the other end around the bedpost and tie that off, too. He tested the rope with a tug. It was secure. He straddled her chest and tied her other wrist in the same manner.

Anna realized it would be impossible for her to break free. She pulled on the ropes, testing them anyway.

He turned around on her and tied off one leg to the post on the footboard, then the other. She laughed and jerked her leg free when he tickled her between the toes.

“Ouch,” he cried.

She’d accidentally kicked him. “Sorry,” she said.

“You are ticklish?” he asked after securing that last foot.

“No,” Anna said, realizing she had just exposed a weakness to him. A weakness that was among her most highly guarded secrets. “No, I’m not at all ticklish. Not in the least. Not one bit.”

“I believe you,” he said, climbing off her, still rubbing his nose.

“Does it hurt?” she asked. “I really am sorry.”

“It was completely my fault,” he said, sitting next to her. “You just caught me off guard.” He idly rubbed his finger tips along her side, up along her rib cage to her underarm and beyond.

“Oh, God no! Uri, don’t tickle me!” Anna said with an urgency. “Please don’t.”

“But if you’re not ticklish ...”

“I’m not, so don’t!”

As one finger from each hand circled the tender flesh of her underarms, Anna screamed in hysterical laughter. She pulled against her bonds with a force that would have sent anything but this overbuilt oak bed crashing in on itself.

“Uri, stop!” Anna begged. She pulled on the ropes tying her to the posts.

He took no heed of her pleas and continued gently exploring the soft regions of her skin.

Anna suspected sooner or later he would test her in beyond her capabilities, and she suspected she’d be powerless to stop him. But why did it have to be tickling, she lamented. She’d do anything to exchange these teasing little touches for the crisp, well-defined sting of his whip.

Anna was in hysterical tears by the time he moved to her feet. He sat on her legs to keep her from hurting herself as she lashed against the ropes. First it was all gentle touches between each toe; then he drew a discrete line along her arches with his fingertip; down to her heel, then up again, back to her toes.

“Noooooooooooo! Uriiiiiiiiiiiii! Stooooooooop!” she cried between uncontrollable laughs.

He repeated the same excruciating procedure on the other foot.

“If this is all a secret plan to interrogate me, I’ll talk! I’ll tell you anything I know! Anything! Just stop!” she cried in dread.

“I think not,” he said calmly. “I’m rather enjoying myself at the moment.” He let a ticklish finger run up the back of her leg, then along her inner thighs.

“No, not there!” Anna bucked on the bed, almost throwing him off her. “This is against the Geneva convention!” Then, when he turned around to face her, she realized he was about to tickle her pussy. “I’ll do anything for you! Anything! Just stop!” she cried as his fingers circled closer and closer without actually touching her sex. But then again, he already could do anything to her. “Liudmila! Aida! Help!” she screamed.

“You don’t actually think they’ll come, do you?” he laughed, as he gently touched her clit with the tip of a finger. Even there, on her most erogenous zone, the touch registered as more tickling. She bucked and twisted under him; she would have thrown him off if she could.

But he was too heavy to throw, and she was tied down too securely. He continued this sweetest and most devious torture for what must have been hours. Anna lost track of the time; just like she'd lost track of time the previous night. She fell in a delirium of laughter. When her body wore out and he sensed she could fight him no more, his tickling turned into caresses, then into probing, and then into orgasm for her.

After she came a good many times, he entered her, as he did last night, taking his own pleasure. But this time, tied spread eagle she could do nothing but lie there and accept him. She couldn't even wrap her legs around his body.

When they were both spent she fell asleep in his arms, just like she had the night before.

General Uri Konstantine called Anna to his bed the following night too. And the night after that, and the night after that. From then on, he only called Anna. She was fast becoming overdosed on pleasure. And she was getting very sore, not only in her pussy and jaws, but in every muscle as he positioned her in ever more outrageous poses.

After that one time he didn't tickle her again, rather, he re-introduced her to his whips. Perhaps he'd reserved tickling for special occasions, or he was doling out this devious torture sparingly so she wouldn't acclimate herself. But, when he whipped her, Anna found she could almost climax, or at least work herself up to a very aroused state. He'd gently and rhythmically whip her bottom and back, and she'd savored every gentle sting as it resonated throughout her body.

On New Year's Eve, Anna received a countdown of 100 of these gentle lashes. He timed the last of them (three, two, one, Happy New Years!) to land at the stroke of midnight. Liudmila and Aida were invited this time, too. It was their little New Year's Eve party. The two girls held Anna down as he delivered the lashes. After that, they toasted 1957 with a shot of *palinka*, a

strong alcohol distilled from pears. Then, their party devolved into an orgy. Anna was able to sit a good part of it out and just watch Aida and Liudmila, starved for sex, get their own long overdue release. Anna sat against the headboard and watched the three take each other in ways she'd never imagined. She found she actually enjoyed watching them. Had she not been so severely overused in the past weeks, she would have given serious consideration to joining them of her own volition. Just this once, just because it was New Year's Eve, to dive in of her own volition.

Liudmila set up a Christmas tree on January 6th, Orthodox Christmas. Anna had forgotten all about the holiday, assuming Uri, her Soviet General of a master, didn't celebrate any religious holidays.

"Oh, he would kill me if we didn't set up a tree," Liudmila said, when Anna casually asked. "If it was up to me, I'd just have a quiet little Solstice celebration, but Master insists on a tree. He laughs at me and says Solstice is just superstition, but to him, Christmas is okay." Anna watched as she over reached to hang an ornament on the top branch. "Wait and see, he'll bring us presents tonight. But don't get your hopes up. They'll probably be sex toys and frilly baby dolls to wear."

Anna let Liudmila rant as she decorated the tree. A goose cooked under Aida's supervision. Although they never went hungry, meals had usually been simple affairs. There was still a food shortage after the Second World War and the revolution further disrupted logistics. Even General Uri Konstantine, with his all his clout, could only provide a simple fare for himself and his house. But tonight, it was goose. They'd be having it with stewed apples, red cabbage, and potatoes in parsley sizzled crisp in the goose fat. Plus lots and lots of delicate little pastries for dessert.

General Uri Konstantine called his girls to sit with him in the living room after they ate. A knock came at the door no sooner than they were assembled. Uri got up himself to answer it, while the three looked at each other puzzled. No one had ever knocked at the door before.

Two conscripts stood in the doorway, each with a sack stuffed full of wrapped presents brimming from the top. They gave their General a crisp salute. When they started to bring the sacks in, Uri just took the bags and dismissed the men. Anna could see them craning their necks to get a glimpse of the General's three "nieces" as he closed the door in front of them.

"Look what Father Christmas left for you."

"What's the matter, couldn't he get past the guards in the lobby?" Aida smirked.

"You don't deserve more than a lump of coal, but here, this is for you," her master said as he handed her a brightly wrapped box with ribbons and a bow. "And here's one for Liudmila. And this one is for you, my dear Andromeda."

Anna wondered if she should have gotten, or a least made, something for him. But then again, being captive, how could she possibly have? She thanked him and began unwrapping her box. From her peripheral vision she saw what Aida pulled out of hers. She gulped and dropped her box.

"This should be fun on cold winter nights!" Aida said, holding up a bright red two-headed phallus, extra long. "Oh look, Liudi, yours is the same."

Liudmila held her double-headed object for all to see. Hers was blue, but other than that, identical to Aida's. They started sparring in a mock sword-fight from either end of the sofa.

Anna picked up her box again, ready for the same surprise. But, then again, her box was much lighter, and nothing rolled around within it. With hesitation Anna tore the wrapping off, then slowly peeked inside.

"Clothes!" she cried. She flipped off the top of the box and pulled out a white linen blouse.

Then another in pink. In all, there were five crisp, new blouses, both short and long-sleeved. The next box was filled with underwear and socks. The undies were of the practical kind, and the socks would keep her toes warm. He did throw in a pair of silk nylons and a garter as the bottom items of that box. Anna didn't care: she was more excited about the prospects of ending her ordeal of perpetually frozen toes. She didn't care what the other girls were pulling out of their other boxes — yes, they got clothes, too; but theirs were more frilly than practical.

“Thanks, Uri, um, Master.”

“Go ahead, put something on,” he told her. “You've earned it.”

For a moment, a cloud of anger filled her mind. She thought back to when he'd told her she'd have to earn the privilege of wearing clothes. Apparently now she was trained to his satisfaction. Uri, I don't need your damned privileges, she thought to herself while still holding the white blouse against her chest. It was her favorite of them all. She calmed her internal doubts and reminded herself that she had accepted her role in this strange family. This was not the time to question why things worked the way they did.

She hugged him. Then gave him a kiss.

He wiped a tear from her cheek she didn't even know was there.

Anna put on a new silk camisole from the undergarments box, then the white blouse.

Another box contained an assortment of skirts. She put on a knee-length woolen one with a little poodle design sewn on the side. Warm socks and slippers followed.

She felt warm for the first time she could remember. She didn't even know she'd been chilly since she'd gotten used to running around naked. In fact, clothes felt strange now. Now that she had them on, they were an encumbrance, if anything.

Liudmila and Aida giggled. They must have gone through that same mixed feelings when clothes were returned to them a long time ago. Anna wondered if now she would be like them

and run around the apartment naked as often as not.

“Um, Anna, we’ve got something for you too,” Aida said. She held out Anna’s sweater, the one she tore when they tried to take it off Anna the day after she arrived.

“We sewed the tear,” Liudmila said. “See, you can hardly tell where it was ripped. Um, we would have given it to you sooner, but Master said not to. So, here, Merry Christmas.” They were making it very hard for Anna to hold that grudge against them, especially since she hadn’t devised an adequate revenge against them yet.

“Thanks,” Anna said, trying her best to seem indifferent. She took the sweater and put it on over her blouse.

Anna turned to sit back down, for there were still many boxes from Uri to open, but then she turned back to them and put her arms around both of them and gave them a hug. By the time she pulled away she was crying.

More boxes, more clothes. Anna knew Uri must have bought all these things on the black market. With everything to open and try on, she didn’t have time for the confluence of emotions to take hold and pull her in any direction. Which was good, because she didn’t know what to think; who to hate, who to love, and who among them all to love or hate the most.

The moment came when only two packages were left for Anna. When she opened the first of them, her face drained of color. She held in her hand her own double-length, double-ended dildo. Just like Aida’s and Liudmila’s, but hers was pink. She looked at him with crooked eyebrows as she thought through all the implications. These clothes, wonderful as they are, were only a reward for her first level of training. This two-headed toy was a harbinger of what was to come for her. He would undoubtedly take her to a new level now, challenging her all every step of the way. She wondered if she was up to it as she glanced at Aida and Liudmila, now chatting with each other.

And the last box? Anna wondered what was in that all-too-skinny, and all-too-long package. She opened it with suspicion. She found those suspicions to be valid when a riding crop fell from the wrapping onto her lap. She held it up, puzzled.

“Andromeda, you are in charge from here on,” General Konstantine told her.

“I’m what?”

“She’s what?”

“She’s what?”

“In charge of the house’s day to day operation,” he elaborated, “and over Liudmila and Aida. You have been for a while. Only now, it’s official.”

“Um,” Anna said, not knowing what to say.

“Hey, you can’t put her in charge!” Liudmila pouted.

“I expect you to use this crop as needed to maintain order,” Uri continued.

“I think it’s going to be an interesting year,” Anna said as she looked at the dildo in her right hand and riding crop in her left.

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Anna soon learned what her master's imagination had in store using three slave girls and three double-headed sex toys. She was infuriated at being used as no more than a posed prop; intrigued at the same time how he came up with his ideas; embarrassed to orgasm so forcefully in the company of the other girls; and fearful that this experience was just a step along the way to something worse. But it was something she had been expecting for a while. Something that a sex-crazed master with three female slaves at his disposal would love to watch.

That something came a week later, when his fascination with the two-ended dildo's ran its course. He laid his three girls across his bed where he gave them all a solid caning. Once their bottoms were red, hot, and sore, he instructed Anna to lie in the middle of the bed. Liudmila

knelt on her right and Aida sat on her left. It was impossible for Anna to judge their frames of mind as they looked upon her from either side. Liudmila stoked Anna's hair, but even that gave Anna no clue as to what she was thinking.

General Uri Konstantine sat in a chair across from the bed. He first loosened his shirt collar, then removed the shirt and watched then in his undershirt. Anna looked up at him as he soaked in the scene in front of him. When he saw enough, all he had to do was click his fingers. Liudmila and Aida knew exactly was expected of them.

“No,” Anna moaned. She tried to get up, but the other two had her pinned down with each . “Uri, don't make me —” she started to say, but a kiss on her lips from Liudmila cut her sentence short. At first she tried to struggle. She tried to turn away. She tried to squirm out from under them. But at the same time she became super-aware of the soft lips on hers, and of the gentle hands caressing her shoulders. She continued to struggle, but like so many times with her Master, those struggles proved to be ineffectual.

She took in a deep breath when Liudmila finally broke the kiss.

“Master, please, I can't ...” Anna said, but already she felt feminine lips on her breasts, and a dainty tongue circling a nipple.

“Andromeda,” he said, “you have done everything I have asked of you so far. For now, all I am asking is for you to enjoy the pleasures being bestowed upon you. You can do that for me, can't you?”

Their kisses were soft, and their bodies were tender, so unlike the firm, hard-body of her male master. As the girls lay on either side of her and Anna felt their bodies against hers, the absence of a hard, hot, male member was all too disquieting. Instead, the absence came in the form of a strange lust-filled vacuum. Those absent spaces came with their own heat that was all-consuming and filled with an energy that both intrigued and frightened Anna.

Lips. Mouths. Teeth. Fingers. Neck. Shoulder. Breasts. Nipples. Stomach. Belly. Toes. Feet.
Shins. Knees. Thighs. Mons.

“Oh, God, no!” she cried.

Clit. Pussy. Mouth. Tongue. Fingers.

She didn't want to come, but she was coming, anyway. She looked up briefly, only to see the back of Liudmila's blonde head beyond her belly. Aida's head was beyond that, temporarily occluded by Liudmila as they went down on her together.

Anna grabbed two fistfuls of the bedsheets when she came. It was a fierce orgasm she had. Although she'd had orgasms of this intensity before, given by her master Uri, this time it was of a different nature. She turned her head to the side, wanting to shut them out. For she didn't want this kind of pleasure, didn't want this frontier of hers invaded, this boundary to be bowled over.

She saw him there, her master perched on the edge of his chair, fingers on his chin, watching intently. She had to turn to the other side, shutting him to out, as he voyeuristically watched her spasm in uncontrolled orgasm.

Anna wanted to cry once the feelings of rapture had ebbed. Cry, because of how good it felt, and at the same time how un-her the experience was. She also knew this would be a normal part of their nightly activity from here on. She supposed she should thank him for easing her in — he certainly could have made her do this on the night she arrived. From what Liudmila and Aida told her, he put them together and watched them “do it” as soon as he brought Aida home.

But General Uri Konstantine did not give Anna time for tears. He bade her to get up and for Aida to take her place. Then he said, “As you have received pleasure, I want you to now give it.”

“Master, I, I can't. I —” Anna started to say.

“Liudmila will show you how,” he said. He got up from his chair and guided Anna into position, to kneel on all fours in the triangle between Aida's legs and the foot of the bed.

Liudmila was beside her in an instant.

“You've never done this before, have you?” Liudmila asked.

“No,” Anna answered blankly. But she was lying. As a school girl, after hours in the art classroom, she and a freckled girl named Judy Flock showed themselves to each other. Judy taught Anna exactly where to touch her. She had been amused at Judy's moans of pleasure as she did. When Judy returned the favor, Anna learned what those cries of ecstasy were all about. As she came for her first time ever, she was scared of what her body was doing, but she was intrigued more. From then on, they met regularly after school. The danger of the custodian discovering them made their adventure all the more thrilling. Until Judy Flock, a year older than Anna, had discovered boys.

“Kiss her,” the General whispered, “gently. Like you like to be kissed,” as he caressed Aida's inner thigh. “Liudmila will show you how.” Anna followed Liudmila's lead and placed her lips tentatively where Liudmila had just kissed Aida. Doing it was easier with her master next to her. Maybe she could do this — do it for him.

Liudmila showed her where to kiss, how to suckle, the art of using her tongue. But when it was Anna's turn, she hesitated. As she knelt frozen in place, her master smacked her across the bottom with a riding crop. It was a firm, single slap that had the effect of breaking her out of her trance. She then did what had been asked of her.

Anna tried to shut the universe out as she performed as she had been ordered. She tried to ignore Liudmila guiding her — she found she really didn't need to be guided. Instead, she concentrated on the responses she elicited from Aida's body; the delicate texture of her folds; her sweet-salty secretions; the gentle quivers within her loins; and her sweet gasps and murmurs

that told Anna she was on the right track.

She brought Aida to orgasm. The girl made gentle, little cries while her whole body shook on the bed as she came. Her master commanded Anna not to stop, and to make Aida come at least one more time. Anna complied to this order too, for his voice was gentle yet firm, and he was standing right behind her, caressing her back and bottom all the while. That touch, his maleness on her, made the difference and somehow gave her the strength to obey his orders.

Then, while Anna knelt on all fours between Aida's legs, she felt him enter her. Now, like before, during her interrogation, she hadn't noticed how the longing within her loins had grown. She gasped in pleasure as he slid his cock deep into her with one smooth thrust. "Don't stop," she had to be told. From then on it became difficult for Anna to concentrate on her task as Uri brought her pleasure the likes of which she seldom felt. Her own ministrations over Aida's pussy became sloppy and haphazard, but Aida didn't seem to mind as she came a second time. Anna knew then that, like many times before, she had lost to him before she even knew they were playing.

Dear Mother and Father,

You should see me now. Who'd have believed that after coming this far, recruited into the CIA and all, I'd end up where I am. I'm a house mistress, running the affairs of the Soviet General in charge of the occupation of Budapest. You were so afraid of what would become of me when I told you that I was accepted into the CIA. You thought I'd get killed in a foreign land. I'm quite happy to tell you that that didn't happen, but I did have a harrowing time when I was first captured. Let's not mince words, I had been kidnapped.

Speaking of not mincing words, although it's true that I'm Master Uri's house mistress, I'm also his slave, his sex slave. And, yes, and that means exactly what it sounds like. I started out with no privileges and no status, my soul and body stripped bare. I even had to earn the privilege to wear clothes. I had to constantly show my worthiness and willingness

to my new master. Only when he put his trust in me, did he advance me above his two existing slave girls to be his house mistress.

Master owns two other slave girls, Liudmila Bustov, and Aida — who has forsaken her family name because of some trauma in her past. Although they're both a lot younger than I, they were both well established in his house for years. I'm surprised I got promoted over them. They're strikingly beautiful, and so much better in pleasing Master than I ever could. Sometimes I'm so jealous of how thin they are.

I'll tell you a secret, I liked being tied up; that helplessness it brought, and that sense of letting go because there's nothing I could do about it. You may think it strange of me to surrender so completely to him, but I realized early on that he never intended to harm me. (I never let on that I figured that out about him.) I'm not saying that made life easier. The experience of being whipped and caned was frightful enough by itself. It's just that when I realized he wouldn't hurt me, it all turned into a wild, erotic adventure.

Even though I'm his house mistress and have complete say over how his apartment is run, it doesn't mean I can just lay back and relax while I supervise the menial work. If anything goes wrong, even if one of the other slaves caused the problem — especially if one of the other slaves caused the problem. I'm the one who gets punished. And his punishments are as creative as they are severe.

But I have a riding crop, too. I use it to maintain discipline in my two underlings. If I don't watch over them constantly, I'm apt to find them hiding away in the pantry touching each other in the most naughty of ways. If I do catch them, I put them over a chair and give them each a severe thrashing. In times like that, I have to be harsh. If I'm gently on them, they would constantly goad me into giving them sensual little slaps all day long and nothing would get accomplished. I've learned to be strict, if I'm not, I'd end up getting a harsh

thrashing myself from Master when he comes home at the end of the day.

Please don't think me too strange, but Master Uri had me under his spell right from the beginning. I could have escaped, I suppose, but I always wanted to see the next thing he had in store for me; what his next inventive punishment would be; the way he handles me; the masculine, primal ways about him. All of those keep me constantly intrigued. Now instead of thinking of escape, I occasionally fear that one day he'll tire of me and cast me out.

I've got to go, Master's calling. I'll write again soon.

Love,

Andromeda, I mean, Anna

Anna wrote this letter, or letters like this, often in her mind, but she never put any of them to pen and paper, and certainly would never shock her mom and dad by sending something like this to them. Yet, she imagined how much they worried about their missing daughter, but they could never understand how she came to accept, even enjoy, being a sex slave.

- 6 -

The cold, dreary winter was replaced by a wet, dreary spring. Anna watched the change of the seasons from the third floor windows as the days passed. Her master did take her out on occasion, to elegant dinners, the circus, and to the opera where she met the opera star Sofia Varga. She and Uri chatted with her. When Uri tried to invite her over, Anna was brave enough to remind him he already had his hands full with what he's already got. To her surprise, he relented to her advice and there were no repercussions for her when they returned home.

These were but short respites from her indoor life. Anna spent most of her time wrapped up in self-contemplation, her thoughts tending towards ways of better to serve her master. On the practical side, she learned how to manage to affairs of the house more efficiently. And under Liudmila's tutelage she restarted her studies in Russian. Then later, she enlisted Aida and began

learning French.

The days got longer and longer as May turned into June. The sun came out more often in its battle against the perpetual dampness that permeated everything. On one particularly clear June day, Anna was looking out at the intersection below them. A bus belched out black and grey smoke as it rolled out into traffic. As it backfired, the sound was like the mortar shells exploding during the revolution.

“Damn, I'm out of bread, again,” Aida yelled from the kitchen in exasperation. It brought Anna out of her daydreams.

“Don't cry about it. Go out and get some,” Uri shouted from somewhere in the apartment. It was one of his rare days when he was working at home.

“I can't leave this custard; it will boil over before I get back.”

“You're so helpless sometimes. Send someone else,” he yelled back. “Send Anna.”

Anna didn't believe what she'd just heard from three rooms away. She ran out of the living room to find her master to be sure she'd heard him right. He was in his bedroom, sitting at his desk reading a report. Liudmila was on the bed in a lacy negligee, patiently waiting for him to come to her.

“You want me go out and get bread?” Anna asked.

“You heard me, yes,” he answered casually.

“You mean, go outside, by myself, alone?”

“You're not scared of spiders, are you?” he said, with impatience in his voice. “It can't be all that difficult. Take some cash, go down to the street, the shop is just around the corner. Oh, and I suggest you put on more than that baby doll you're wearing.”

He wants me to go outside, with money, and go around the corner, out of his field of vision from these windows, to be gone for some undetermined time, then come back on my own. Anna

rolled this alien concept through her head over and over again, trying to figure out the catch.

“Well, what are you standing here for?” he asked. “The sooner you get the bread, the sooner we can all eat.”

But what if I don't come back? Anna wanted to ask, yet dared not engage him in this line of conversation. She sensed his impatience already, so she decided to simply back out of the doorway. Once she was out of his sight, she collapsed against the hallway wall and started shaking. She somehow navigated her way to her room and dressed in proper street clothes. Even the act of dressing was more complicated than it should have been. Her mind turned to mush as she tried to decide what to put on for this short walk to the store. She even had trouble finding matching shoes.

Anna made it down the three sets of stairs to the building's lobby, her legs hardly able to support her. The two Soviet guards snapped to attention as she passed by. They did not question her, did not try to stop her, or do anything but look ahead as they stood at attention for her. Did this mean I could have just walked out any time? she wondered.

People strolled along both sidewalks. Some hurried, most took their time. A mass of about thirty waited at a bus stop. A truck pattered by. Then a car in the other direction. A cart pulled by a donkey ambled along.

Anna walked to the intersection where her street, now renamed People's Republic Road, met Bajcsy-Zsilinszky. Anna crossed the street. She knew she'd now return to his field of view if he was watching. She couldn't resist a glance up to the third floor window. Yes, he was there, standing in the window. Liudmila and Aida were beside him. But now they caught her looking. Not knowing what to do, she waved at him. Through the glass, she saw a slight nod from him.

She continued up the street to the small bakery. Soon his view of her became blocked by a bus pulling up to a stop. She could easily get on board with the other waiting passengers. She

would be far gone before he realized what she did. Unless this wasn't an impromptu task after all, and she was being tested. In that case, he would have someone following her.

Anna casually looked up and down the street. She hadn't forgotten all of her CIA training in these months. No men in trench-coats, she joked to herself. Unless she counted that guy in a raincoat way up the street reading a newspaper a little too stiffly.

Anyway, she had a task to do. All she had to do was walk into that little shop, buy some bread, and walk out. How hard could that be?

Anna heard the shutter of a camera go off. She jerked around to see where it came from. A pair of young lovers, he snapping a picture of her as they made their way down the street.

Anna walked into the small store and looked around. There was a meat case which was mostly empty, save for some lard, a slab of hard bacon, and a few links of sausage. Although there were cans on the shelves, mostly of tomatoes or tomato paste, they were arranged in a way to disguise how little there really was. It reminded her of an aging man with a comb over. But there was bread. Plenty of fresh bread, for this shop was primarily a bakery. Anna selected two loaves, although she was only asked to buy one. She resisted the temptation to pick up a bag of buns, fresh from the oven. When Anna paid, the clerk said something in Hungarian too fast for Anna to catch. She just smiled back the old woman and left. As she stepped out onto the sidewalk she bumped into the man hurrying down the street.

"Excuse me," he said, as Anna almost dropped the two loaves. He had his hands in the pockets of his raincoat, head down as if he were walking against a driving rain. As he passed by her she realized what he said, not "elnezés" or the informal "bocsi" in Hungarian, but "excuse me" in clear American English.

"Hey!" Anna called out to him, then "Hey, mister," when he didn't stop. She ran after him and shouted, "Wait!"

He finally stopped and turned to face her. Anna suddenly had a hard time focusing on his face. She felt she knew this man, but from where? It was almost like seeing that woman in the black party dress, and not being able to place her face. He reached out his hand to her as she ran towards him. Maybe it was Andy, her lover and mission handler. Still, some part of her brain refused to connect the disquietingly familiar face with any internal references she may have.

“Andy?” she asked, looking directly at him. “Is that you?”

Anna heard someone call “Don’t!” from behind her. She stopped and turned to find where that warning came from. She saw her, across the street, waving her arms frantically, the woman in the black dress. Just as in her previous visions, she wore the same arm-length gloves and matching high heels. This time, instead of just observing Anna, that woman was actively communicating with her, warning her.

“No!” the woman cried again.

But where was that one-eyed man she was always with? Anna saw him then, running across the street, dodging a truck and then a bus to get to that man who wouldn't come into focus.

The unfocussed man turned away from Anna and started to run when he, too, saw the one-eyed man. The one-eyed man shot sparks from his finger-tips. They hit the building wall just ahead of the unfocussed man causing him to stop and turn the other way. Those sparks might as well have been lightning bolts with the intensity and thunder clap they produced.

“This must be some kind of hallucination,” Anna said out loud, “or a strange waking dream.”

Hallucination or not, Anna ran into the street, away from the unfocussed man's path, for she no longer found him sympathetic and didn't trust him. And the more she thought about him, the more he looked like her former lover and mission handler. Anna watched as the two men clashed. The one-eyed man grabbed her “Andy” by the collar and started yelling at him. The

other man — perhaps it was her Andy or perhaps not — pulled himself free and started shouting back. He shoved the one-eyed man. When they exchanged blows, bright light shot out from the point of contact, as if the two were shooting incomprehensible amounts of energy at each other. Energy on a cosmic scale, brighter than any sun. Anna wondered why no one else, besides her and the woman in black, seemed concerned. Even a young mother with a baby carriage strolled by, not two feet away from this vortex of cosmic powers.

Anna made it across the street and was almost hit by a car. The driver, too, was unconcerned about the growing storm of light on the opposite sidewalk. He only cursed Anna as he hit the brakes. No sooner did Anna reach the other side and turn to see what was happening, then a stray static discharge, a lightning bolt, from the melee hit the light post she happened to be standing under. A shower of glass from the exploding light fixture rained upon her. The next stray bolt, only a moment later, hit Anna directly in the chest. It was as if the energy of the sun had channeled through her and come out the other side. Her soul felt like it had been fried, the way she had expected her body to have been. Although her body remained unmarked and unburned, her inner being felt like it had been knocked out of her, torn apart, pounded, ground, mashed, grilled, and electrocuted before being sucked back in. The last thing she remembered was dropping the two loaves of bread before the concrete sidewalk rose up and smacked her in the head.

- - -

“What happened?” Anna asked when she awoke with a pounding headache. She found herself in her own familiar room with her master, Uri, at her side and Liudmila and Aida behind him.

“We were hoping you could tell us,” he said. “From the window, it looked like you had an attack of hysteria. It seemed to come on for no reason at all. You were coming back with the

bread; you hesitated, looked all around, and then all of a sudden you ran across street. You almost got hit by car. We couldn't see you from the window from then on. By the time we got down to you, you were on the ground. As far as we could tell, the street light you were under decided to explode that very moment. Already panicked, you must have fainted from the surprise.”

“And you just found me there?” Anna asked, perplexed that they saw none of what happened.

“Yes, a woman in a black dress was cradling you when we arrived.”

“A woman? In black? You saw her? You really saw her? Did she say anything? Did you ever see this woman before?”

“Andromeda, slow down,” he said. “You need some rest. I'm calling a doctor to come and take a look at you. And no, the woman didn't say anything. She just ran away when she saw us coming.”

- - -

Anna rested in bed for two days. Her first excursion outside alone turned out to be a mess. At least no one was accusing her of trying to escape. In fact, they praised her for trying too hard to get back after her hysteria episode.

“You can try going out again later,” Uri consoled her, “when your nerves are calmer.”

In the meantime, she stayed in bed, pampered by everyone around her, even Uri. The doctor they called had given them strict orders to see that Anna stayed in bed and rested. They gave her everything they could find for her to read. Liudmila even accidentally gave her one of Uri's classified reports mixed into a stack of magazines.

“Psychic Experiments,” the report said. This was the very same report she saw on her first day in the apartment. This report, which had been so unceremoniously taken from her, was

being handed back on a tray along with a cup of chamomile tea.

Now Anna had time to read the report at her leisure. It was all about the Soviet Psychic Travel Program. It chronicled the efforts of the psychics who had attempted to gain access to American facilities with more or less success — usually less. The travels in the later stages of the program failed more often than not. Instead of reaching their American targets, they found their path diverted to a strange, alternate realm. A realm that some of the psychics described as a place of magic, filled with mythical creatures. The report documented how the experiment was abruptly cancelled when the “scientists” in charge gave dire warnings of gates to this other place being left open and made wider every time a traveler visited. This gate, they suggested, could be used by the powers that live beyond our reality to gain access to our universe and cause untold mischief.

Is that what Anna was seeing all along? Not only this latest incident, which she still couldn't fully interpret, but also those visitations by her two phantom visitors which always came when she could least afford to deal with them. Anna knew that she was a focal point, somehow, for some reason, of these visitations. But why? What had she done that was deserving of that kind of attention?

She couldn't be responsible for what had happened to her, to be kidnapped and brought into slavery by General Konstantine. Was it so wrong that she reacted to him the way she did? The way she found him intriguing? Even sexy? Her little sins of the flesh paled against the real war crimes that so many had committing during the revolution. She kept wondering, why these beings choose to visit her and not someone more worthy. She came up with no answer.

She knew this wasn't over. One day, she would see more than these mere snatches and glimpses. She would just have to keep alert and be ready the next time she became swept up in this — her personal anomaly.

Thank you for reading Andromeda. I hope you enjoyed this chapter and will continue onto the next.

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Be well, Joe

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