

The Story of O

By Pauline Réage

I
The Lovers of Roissy

Her lover one day takes O for a walk in a section of the city where they never go - the Montsouris Park. After they have taken a stroll in the park, and have sat together side by side on the edge of a lawn, they notice, at one corner of the park, at an intersection where there are never any taxis, a car which, because of its meter, resembles a taxi.

"Get in," he says.

She gets in. It is autumn, and coming up to dusk. She is dressed as she always is: high heels, a suit with a pleated skirt, a silk blouse, and no hat. But long gloves which come up over the sleeves of her jacket, and in her leather handbag she has her identification papers, her compact, and her lipstick.

The taxi moves off slowly, the man still not having said a word to the driver. But he pulls down the shades of the windows on both sides of the car, and the shade on the back window. She has taken off her gloves, thinking he wants to kiss her or that he wants her to caress him. But instead he says:

"Your bag's in your way; let me have it."

She gives it to him. He puts it out of her reach and adds:

"You also have on too many clothes. Unfasten your stockings and roll them down to above your knees. Here are some garters."

By now the taxi has picked up speed, and she has some trouble managing it; she's also afraid the driver may turn around. Finally, though, the stockings are rolled down, and she's embarrassed to feel her legs naked and free beneath her silk slip. Besides, the loose garter-belt suspenders are slipping back and forth.

"Unfasten your garter belt," he says, "and take off your panties."

That's easy enough, all she has to do is slip her hands behind her back and raise herself slightly. He takes the garter belt and panties from her, opens her bag and puts them in, then says:

"You shouldn't sit on your slip and skirt. Pull them up behind you and sit directly on the seat."

The seat is made of some sort of imitation leather, which is slippery and cold: it's quite an extraordinary sensation to feel it sticking to your thighs. Then he says:

"Now put your gloves back on."

The taxi is still moving along at a good clip, and she doesn't dare ask why René just sits there without moving or saying another word, nor can she guess what all this means to him - having her there motionless, silent, so stripped and exposed, so thoroughly gloved, in a black car going God knows where. He hasn't told her what to do or what not to do, but she's afraid either to cross her legs or press them together. She sits with gloved hands braced on either side of her seat.

"Here we are," he says suddenly. Here we are: the taxi stops on a lovely avenue, beneath a tree - they are plane trees - in front of some sort of small private home which can be seen nestled between the courtyard and the garden, the type of small private dwelling one finds along the Faubourg Saint-Germain. The street lamps are some distance away, and it is still fairly dark inside the car. Outside it is raining.

"Don't move," René says. "Sit perfectly still."

His hand reaches for the collar of her blouse, unties the bow, then unbuttons the blouse. She leans forward slightly, thinking he wants to fondle her breasts. No. He is merely groping for the shoulder straps of her brassiere, which he snips with a small penknife. Then he takes it off. Now, beneath her blouse, which he has buttoned back up, her breasts are naked and free, as is the rest of her body, from waist to knee.

"Listen," he says. "Now you're ready. This is where I leave you. You're to get out and go ring the doorbell. Follow whoever opens the door for you, and do whatever you're told. If you hesitate about going in, they'll come and take you in. If you don't obey immediately, they'll force you to. Your bag? No, you have no further need for your bag. You're merely the girl I'm furnishing. Yes, of course I'll be there. Now run along."

Another version of the same beginning was simpler and more direct: the young woman, dressed in the same way, was driven by her lover and an unknown friend. The stranger was driving, the lover was seated next to the young woman, and it was the unknown friend who explained to the young woman that her lover had been entrusted with the task of getting her ready, that he was going to tie her hands behind her back, unfasten her stockings and roll them down, remove her garter belt, her panties, and her brassiere, and blindfold her. That she would then be turned over to the château, where in due course she would be instructed as to what she should do. And, in fact, as soon as she had been thus undressed and bound, they helped her to alight from the car after a trip that lasted half an hour, guided her up a few steps and, with her blindfold still on, through one or two doors. Then, when her blindfold was removed, she found herself standing alone in a dark room, where they left her for half an hour, or an hour, or two hours, I can't be sure, but it seemed forever. Then, when at last the door was opened and the light turned on, you could see that she had been waiting in a very conventional, comfortable, yet distinctive room: there was a thick rug on the floor, but not a stick of furniture, and all four walls were lined with closets. The door had been opened by two women, two young and beautiful women dressed in the garb of pretty eighteenth-century chambermaids: full skirts made out of some light material, which were long enough to conceal their feet; tight bodices, laced or hooked in front, which sharply accentuated the bust line; lace frills around the neck; half-length sleeves. They were wearing eye shadow and lipstick. Both wore a close-fitting collar and had tight bracelets on their wrists.

I know it was at this point that they freed O's hands, which were still tied behind her back, and told her to get undressed, they were going to bathe her and make her up. They proceeded to strip her till she

hadn't a stitch of clothing left, then put her clothes away neatly in one of the closets. She was not allowed to bathe herself, and they did her hair as at the hairdresser's, making her sit in one of those large chairs which tilts back when they wash your hair and straightens back up after the hair has been set and you're ready for the dryer. That always takes at least an hour. Actually it took more than an hour, but she was seated on this chair, naked, and they kept her from either crossing her legs or bringing them together. And since the wall in front of her was covered from floor to ceiling with a large mirror, which was unbroken by any shelving, she could see herself, thus open, each time her gaze strayed to the mirror.

When she was properly made up and prepared - her eyelids pencilled lightly; her lips bright red; the tip and halo of her breasts highlighted with pink; the edges of her nether lips rouged; her armpits and pubis generously perfumed, and perfume also applied to the furrow between her thighs, the furrow beneath her breasts, and to the hollows of her hands - she was led into a room where a three-sided mirror, and another mirror behind, enabled her to examine herself closely. She was told to sit down on the ottoman, which was set between the mirror, and wait. The ottoman was covered with black fur, which pricked her slightly; the rug was black, the walls red. She was wearing red mules. Set in one of the walls of the small bedroom was a large window, which looked out onto a lovely, dark park. The rain had stopped, the trees were swaying in the wind, the moon raced high among the clouds.

I have no idea how long she remained in the red bedroom, or whether she was really alone, and she surmised, or whether someone was watching her through a peephole camouflaged in the wall. All I know is that when the two women returned, one was carrying a dressmaker's tape measure and the other a basket. With them came a man dressed in a long purple robe, full at the shoulders. When he walked the robe flared open, from the waist down. One could see that beneath his robe he had on some sort of tights, which covered his legs and thighs but left the sex exposed. It was the sex that O saw first, when he took his first step, then the whip, made of leather thongs, which he had stuck in his belt. Then she saw that the man was masked by a black hood - which concealed even his eyes behind a network of black gauze - and, finally, that he was also wearing fine black kid gloves.

Using the familiar *tu* form of address, he told her not to move and ordered the women to hurry. The woman with the tape then took the measurements of O's neck and wrists. Though on the small side, her measurements were in no way out of the ordinary, and it was easy enough to find the right-sized collar and bracelets, in the basket the other woman was carrying. Both collar and bracelets were made of several layers of leather (each layer being fairly thin, so that the total was no more than the thickness of a finger). They had clasps, which functioned automatically like a padlock when it closes, and they could be opened only by means of a small key. Imbedded in the layers of leather, directly opposite the lock, was a snugly fitting metal ring, which hallowed one to get a grip on the bracelet, if one wanted to attach it, for both collar and bracelets fit the arms and neck so snugly - although not so tight as to be the least painful - that it was impossible to slip any bond inside.

So they fastened the collar and bracelets to her neck and wrists, and the man told her to get up. He took her place on the fur ottoman, called her over till she was touching his knees, slipped his gloved hand between her thighs and over her breasts, and explained to her that she would be presented that same evening, after she had dined alone.

She did in fact dine by herself, still naked, in a sort of little cabin where an invisible hand passed the dishes to her through a small window in the door. Finally, when the dinner was over, the two women came for her. In the bedroom, they fastened the two bracelet rings together behind her back. They

attached a long red cape to the ring of her collar and draped it over her shoulders. It covered her completely, but opened when she walked, since, with her hands behind her back, she had no way of keeping it closed. One woman preceded her, opening the doors, and the other followed, closing them behind her. They crossed a vestibule, two drawing rooms, and went into the library, where four men were having coffee. They were wearing the same long robes as the first, but no masks. And yet O did not have time to see their faces or ascertain whether her lover was among them (he was), for one of the men shone a light in her eyes and blinded her. Everyone remained stock still, the two women flanking her and the men in front, studying her. Then the light went out; the women left. But O was blindfolded again. Then they made her walk forward - she stumbled slightly as she went - until she felt that she was standing in front of the fire around which the four men were seated: she could feel the heat, and in the silence she could hear the quiet crackling of the burning logs. She was facing the fire. Two hands lifted her cape, two others - after having checked to see that her bracelets were attached - descended the length of her back and buttocks. The hands were not gloved, and one of them penetrated her in both places at once, so abruptly that she cried out. Someone laughed. Someone else said:

"Turn her around, so we can see the breasts and the belly."

They turned her around, and the heat of the fire was against her back. A hand seized one of her breasts, a mouth fastened on the tip of the other. But suddenly she lost her balance and fell backward (supported by whose arms?), while they opened her legs and gently spread her lips. Hair grazed the insides of her thighs. She heard them saying that they would have to make her kneel down. This they did. She was extremely uncomfortable in this position, especially because they forbade her to bring her knees together and because her arms pinioned behind her forced her to lean forward. Then they let her rock back a bit, as nuns are wont to do.

"You've never tied her up?"

"No, never."

"And never whipped her?"

"No, never whipped her either. But as a matter of fact..."

It was her lover speaking.

"As a matter of fact," the other voice went on, "if you do tie her up from time to time, or whip her just a little, and she begins to like it, that's no good either. You have to get past the pleasure stage, until you reach the stage of tears."

Then they made O get up and were on the verge of untying her, probably in order to attach her to some pole or wall, when someone protested that he wanted to take her first, right there on the spot. So they made her kneel down again, this time with her bust on an ottoman, her hands still tied behind her, with her hips higher than her torso. Then one of the men, holding her with both his hands on her hips,

plunged into her belly. He yielded to a second. The third wanted to force his way into the narrower passage and, driving hard, made her scream. When he let her go, sobbing and befouled by tears beneath her blindfold, she slipped to the floor, only to feel someone's knees against her face, and she realized that her mouth was not to be spared. Finally they let her go, a captive clothed in tawdry finery, lying on her back in front of the fire. She could hear glasses being filled and the sound of the men drinking, and the scraping of chair. They put some more wood on the fire. All of a sudden they removed her blindfold. The large room, the walls of which were lined with bookcases, was dimly lit by a single wall lamp and by the light of the fire, which was beginning to burn more brightly. Two of the men were standing and smoking. Another was seated, a riding crop on his knees, and the one leaning over her fondling her breast was her lover. All four of them had taken her, and she had not been able to distinguish him from the others.

They explained to her that this was how it would always be, as long as she was in the château, that she would see the faces of those who violated or tormented her, but never at night, and she would never know which ones had been responsible for the worst. The same would be true when she was whipped, except that they wanted her to see herself being whipped, and so this once she would not be blindfolded. They, on the other hand, would don their masks, and she would no longer be able to tell them apart.

Her lover had helped her to her feet, still wrapped in her red cape, made her sit down on the arm of an easy chair near the fire, so that she could hear what they had to tell her and see what they wanted to show her. Her hands were still behind her back. They showed her the riding crop, which was long, black, and delicate, made of thin bamboo encased in leather, the kind one sees in the windows of better riding equipment shops; the leather whip, which the first man she had seen had been carrying in his belt, was long and consisted of six lashes knotted at the end. There was a third whip of fairly thin cords, each with several knots at the end: the cords were quite stiff, as though they had been soaked in water, which in fact they had, as O discovered, for they caressed her belly with them and nudged open her thighs, so that she could feel how stiff and damp the cords were against the tender, inner skin. Then there were the keys and steel chains on the console table. Along one entire wall of the library, halfway between floor and ceiling, ran a gallery which was supported by two columns. A hook was imbedded in one of them, just high enough for a man standing on tiptoe, with his arms stretched above his head, to reach. They told O, supporting her shoulders, and the other in the furrow of her loins, which burned so she could hardly bear it, they told her that her hands would be untied, but merely so that they could be fastened anew, a short while later, to the pole, using these same bracelets and one of the steel chains. They said that, with the exception of her hands, which would be held just above her head, she would thus be able to move and see the blows coming: that in principle she would be whipped only on the thighs and buttocks, in other words between her waist and knees, in the same region which had been prepared in the car that had brought her here, when she had been made to sit naked on the seat; but that in all likelihood one of the four men present would want to mark her thighs with the riding crop, which makes lovely long deep welts which last a long time. She would not have to endure all this at once; there would be ample time for her to scream, to struggle, and to cry. They would grant her some respite, but as soon as she had caught her breath they would start in again, judging the results not from her screams or tears but from the size and color of the welts they had raised. They remarked to her that this method of judging the effectiveness of the whip - besides being equitable - also made it pointless for the victims to exaggerate their suffering in an effort to arouse pity, and thus enabled them to resort to the same measures beyond the château walls, outdoors in the park - as was often done - or in any ordinary apartment or hotel room, assuming a gag was used (such as the one they produced and showed her there on the spot), for the gag stifled all screams and eliminates all but the most violent moans, while allowing tears to flow without restraint.

There was no question of using it that night. On the contrary, they wanted to hear her scream; and the sooner the better. The pride she mustered to resist and remain silent did not long endure: they even heard her beg them to untie her, to stop for a second, just for a second. So frantically did she writhe, trying to escape the bite of the leashes, that she turned almost completely around, on the near side of the pole, for the chain which held her was long and although quite solid, was fairly slack. As a result, her belly and the front of her thighs were almost as marked as her backside. They made up their minds, after in fact having stopped for a moment, to begin again only after a rope had been attached first to her waist, then to the pole. Since they tied her tightly, to keep her waist snug to the pole, her torso was forced slightly to one side, and this in turn caused her buttocks to protrude in the opposite direction. >From then on the blows landed on their target, unless aimed deliberately elsewhere. Given the way her lover had handed her over, had delivered her into this situation, O might have assumed that to beg him for mercy would have been the surest method for making him redouble his cruelty, so great was his pleasure in extracting, or having the others extract, from her this unquestionable proof of his power. And indeed he was the first to point out that the leather whip, the first they had used on her, left almost no marks (in contrast to the whip made of water-soaked cords, which marked almost upon contact, and the riding crop, which raised immediate welts), and thus allowed them to prolong the agony and follow their fancies in starting and stopping. He asked them to use only the whip.

Meanwhile, the man who liked women only for what they had in common with men, seduced by the available behind which was straining at the bonds knotted just below the waist, a behind made all the more enticing by its efforts to dodge the blows, called for an intermission in order to take advantage of it. He spread the two parts, which burned beneath his hands, and penetrated - not without some difficulty - remarking as he did that the passage would have to be rendered more easily accessible. They all agreed that this could, and would, be done.

When they untied the young woman, she staggered and almost fainted, draped in her red cape. Before returning her to the cell she was to occupy, they sat her down in an armchair near the fire and outlined for her the rules and regulations she was to follow during her stay in the château and later in her daily life after she had left it (which did not mean regaining her freedom, however). Then they rang. The two young women who had first received her came in, bearing the clothes she was to wear during her stay and tokens by which those who had been hosts at the château before her arrival and those who would be after she had left, might recognize her. Her outfit was similar to theirs: a long dress with a full skirt, worn over a sturdy whalebone bodice gathered tightly at the waist, and over a stiffly starched linen petticoat. The low-cut neck scarcely concealed the breasts which, raised by the constricting bodice, were only lightly veiled by the network of lace. The petticoat was white, as was the lace, and the dress and bodice were a sea-green satin. When O was dressed and resettled in her chair beside the fire, her pallor accentuated by the color of the dress, the two young women, who had not uttered a word, prepared to leave. One of the four friends seized one of them as she passed, made a sign for the other to wait, and brought the girl he had stopped back toward O. He turned her around and, holding her by the waist with one hand, lifted her skirt with the other, in order to demonstrate to O, he said, the practical advantages of the costume and show how well designed it was. He added that all one needed to keep the skirts raised was a simple belt, which made everything that lay beneath readily available. In fact, they often had the girls go about in the château or the park either like this, or with their skirts tucked up in front, waist high. They had the young woman show O how she would have to keep her skirt: rolled up several turns (like a lock of hair rolled in a curler) and secured tightly by a belt, either directly in front, to expose the belly, or in the middle of the back, to leave the buttocks free. In either case, skirt and petticoat fell diagonally away in large, cascading folds of intermingled material. Like O, the young woman's backside bore fresh welt from the riding crop. She left the room.

Here is the speech they then delivered to O:

"You are here to serve your masters. During the day, you will perform whatever domestic duties are assigned to you, such as sweeping, putting back the books, arranging flowers, or waiting on table. Nothing more difficult than that. But at the first word or sign from anyone you will drop whatever you are doing and ready yourself for what is really your one and only duty: to lend yourself. Your hands are not your own, nor are your breasts, nor, most especially, any of your bodily orifices, which we may explore or penetrate at will. You will remember at all times - or as constantly as possible - that you have lost all right to privacy or concealment, and as a reminder of this fact, in our presence you will never close your lips completely, or cross your legs, or press your knees together (you may recall you were forbidden to do this the minute you arrived). This will serve as a constant reminder, to you as well as to use, that your mouth, your belly, and your backside are open to us. You will never touch your breasts in our presence: the bodice raises them toward us, that they may be ours. During the day you will therefore be dressed, and if anyone should order you to lift your skirt, you will lift it; if anyone desires to use you in any manner whatsoever, he will use you, unmasked, but with this one reservation: the whip. The whip will be used only between dusk and dawn. But besides the whipping you receive from whoever may want to whip you, you will also be flogged in the evening, as punishment for any infractions of the rules committed during the day: for having been slow to oblige, for having raised your eyes and looked at the person addressing you or taking you - you must never look any of us in the face. If the costume we wear in the evening - the one I am now wearing - leaves our sex exposed, it is not for the sake of convenience, for it would be just as convenient the other way, but for the sake of insolence, so that your eyes will be directed there upon it and nowhere else, so that you may learn that there resides your master, for whom, above all else, your lips are intended. During the day, when we are dressed in normal attire and you are clothed as you are now, the same rules will apply, except that when requested you will open your clothes, and then close them again when we have finished with you. Another thing: at night you will have only your lips with which to honor us - and your wide-spread thighs - for your hands will be tied behind your back and you will be naked, as you were a short while ago. You will be blindfolded only to be maltreated and, now that you have seen how you are whipped, to be flogged. And yes, by the way: while it is perfectly all right for you to grow accustomed to being whipped - since you are going to be every day throughout your stay - this is less for our pleasure than for your enlightenment. How true this is may be shown by the fact that on those nights when no one desires you, you will wait until the valet whose job it is comes to your solitary cell and administers what you are due to receive but we are not in the mood to mete out. Actually, both this flogging and the chain - which when attached to the ring of your collar keeps you more or less closely confined to your bed several hours a day - are intended less to make you suffer, scream, or shed tears than to make you feel, *through* this suffering, that you are not free but fettered, and to teach you that you are totally dedicated to something outside yourself. When you leave here, you will be wearing on your third finger an iron ring, which will identify you. But then you will have learned to obey those who wear the same insignia, and when they see it they will know that beneath your skirt you are constantly naked, however comely or commonplace your clothes may be, and that this nakedness is for them. Should anyone find you in the least intractable, he will return you here. Now you will be shown to your cell."

While there were talking to O, the two women who had come to dress her had been standing on either side of the stake where she had been whipped, without touching it, as though it terrified them, or as though they had been forbidden to touch it (which was more likely); when the man had finished, they came over to O, who realized that she was supposed to get up and follow them. She therefore got up, gathering her skirts in her arms to keep from tripping, for she was not used to long dresses and did not feel steady on the mules with thick soles and very high heels which only a thick satin strip, of the same green as her dress, kept from slipping off her feet. As she bent down she turned her head. The women were waiting, the men were no longer looking at her. Her lover, seated on the floor leaning against the ottoman over which she had been thrown at the beginning of the evening, with his knees raised and his elbows on his knees, was toying with the leather whip. As she took her first step to join the women, her skirt grazed him. He raised his head and smiled, calling her by her name, and he too stood up. Softly he caressed her hair, smoothed her eyebrows with the tip of his finger, and softly kissed her on the lips. In a loud voice, he told her that he loved her. O, trembling, was terrified to notice that she answered "I love you," and that it was true. He pulled her against him and said: "Darling, sweetheart,"

kissed her on the neck and the curve of the cheek; she had let her head fall on his shoulder, which was covered by the purple robe. Very softly this time he repeated to her that he loved her, and very softly added: "You're going to kneel down, cress me, and kiss me," and he pushed her away, signaling to the women to move aside so he could lean back against the console. He was tall, but the table was not very high and his long legs, sheathed in the same purple as his robe, were bent. The open rope stiffened from beneath like drapes, and the top of the console table slightly raised his heavy sex and the light fleece above it. The three men approached. O knelt down on the rug, her green dress in a corolla around her. Her bodice squeezed her; her breasts whose nipples were visible, were at the level of her lover's knees. "A little more light," said one of the men. As they were adjusting the lamp so that the beam of light would fall directly on his sex and on his mistress's face, which was almost touching it, and on her hands which were caressing him from below, René suddenly ordered: "Say it again: 'I love you.'" O repeated "I love you," with such delight that her lips hardly dared brush the tip of his sex, which was still protected by its sheath of soft flesh. The three men, who were smoking, commented on her gestures, on the movement of her mouth closed and locked on the sex she had seized, as it worked its way up and down, on the way tears streamed down her ravaged face each time the swollen member struck the back of her throat and made her gag, depressing her tongue and causing her to feel nauseous. It was this same mouth which, half gagging on the hardened flesh which filled it, murmured again: "I love you." The two women had taken up positions to the right and left of René who had one arm around each of their shoulders. O could hear the comments made by those present, but through their words she strained to hear her lover's moans, caressing him carefully, slowly, and with infinite respect, the way she knew pleased him. O felt that her mouth was beautiful, since her lover condescended to thrust himself into it, since he deigned publicly to offer caresses to it, since, finally, he deigned to discharge in it. She received as a god is received, she heard him cry out, heard the others laugh, and when she had received it she fell, her face against the floor. The two women picked her up, and this time they led her away.

The mules banged on the red tiles of the hallway, where doors succeeded doors, discreet and clean, with tiny locks, like the doors of the rooms in big hotels. O was working up the courage to ask whether each of these rooms was occupied, and by whom, when one of her companions, whose voice she had not yet heard said to her:

"You're in the red wing, and your valet's name is Pierre."

"What valet?" said O, struck by the gentleness of the voice. "And what's your name?"

"Andrée."

"Mine is Jeanne," said the second.

"The valet is the one who has the keys," the first one went on, "the one who will chain and unchain you, who will whip you when you are to be punished and when the others have no time for you."

"I was in the red wing last year," Jeanne said. "Pierre was there already. He often came in at night. The valets have the keys and the right to use any of us in the rooms of their section."

O was about to ask what kind of person this Pierre was, but she did not have time to. As they turned a corner of the hallway, they made her halt before a door similar in all respects to the others: on a bench between this and the following door she noticed a sort of thick-set, ruddy peasant, whose head was practically clean shaved, with small black eyes set deep in his skull and rolls of flesh on his neck. He was dressed like the valet in some operetta: a shirt whose lace frills peeked out from beneath his black vest, which itself was covered by a red jacket of the kind called a spencer. He had black breeches, white stockings, and patent-leather pumps. He too was carrying a leather-thonged whip in his belt. His hands were covered with red hair. He took a master key from his vest pocket, ushered the three women in, and said:

"I'm locking the door. Ring when you've finished."

The cell was quite small, and actually consisted of two rooms. With the hall door closed, they found themselves in an antechamber which opened into the cell proper; in this same wall, inside the room itself, was another door which opened into the bathroom. Opposite the doors there was the window. Against the left wall, between the doors and the window, stood the head of a large square bed, which was very low and covered with furs. There was no other furniture, no mirror. The walls were bright red, and the rug black. Andrée pointed out to O that the bed was less a bed than a matted platform covered with a black, longhaired imitation fur material. The pillow, hard and flat like the mattress, was of the same reversible material. The only object on any of the walls was a thick, gleaming steel ring which was set at about the same height above the bed as the hook in the stake had been above the floor of the library; from it descended a long steel chain directly onto the bed, its links forming a little pile, the other end being attached at arm's length to a pad-locked hook, like a drapery pulled back and held in place by a curtain loop.

"We have to give you your bath," Jeanne said. "I'll unfasten your dress."

The only peculiar features of the bathroom were the Turkish-type toilet, located in the corner nearest the door, and the fact that every inch of wall space was covered with mirrors. Jeanne and Andrée did not allow O to go in until she was naked. They put her dress away in the closet next to the washbasin, where her mules and red cape already were, and remained with her, so that when she had to squat down over the porcelain pedestal she found herself surrounded by a whole host of reflections, as exposed as in the library when unknown hands had taken her by force.

"Wait until it's Pierre," said Jeanne, "and you'll see."

"Why Pierre?"

"When he comes to chain you, he may make you squat."

O felt herself turn pale. "But why?" she said.

"Because you have to," Jeanne replied. "But you're lucky."

"Why lucky?"

"Was it your lover who brought you here?"

"Yes," O said.

"They'll be a lot harder with you."

"I don't understand...."

"You will very soon. I'm ringing for Pierre. We'll come and get you tomorrow morning."

Andrée smiled as she left and Jeanne, before following her, caressed the tips of O's breasts. O, completely taken aback, remained standing at the foot of the bed. With the exception of the collar and leather bracelets, which the water had stiffened when she had bathed and were tighter than before, O was naked.

"Behold the lovely lady," said the valet as he entered. And he seized both her hands. He slipped one of the bracelet hooks into the other, so that her wrists were tightly joined, then clipped both these hooks to the ring of the necklace. Thus her hands were joined as in an attitude of prayer, at the level of her neck. All that remained to be done was to chain her to the wall with the chain that was lying on the bed, and was attached to the ring above. He unfastened the hook by which the other end was attached and pulled on it in order to shorten it. O was forced to move to the head of the bed, where he made her lie down. The chain clicked in the ring, and was so tight that the young woman could do no more than move from one side of the bed to the other or stand up on either side of the headboard. Since the chain tended to shorten the collar, that is, pull it backward, and her hands tended to pull it forward, and equilibrium was established, with her joined hands lying on her left shoulder and her head bending in that direction as well. The valet pulled the black cover up over O, but not before he had lifted her legs for a moment and pushed them back toward her chest, to examine the cleft between her thighs. He did not touch her further, did not say a word, turned out the light, which was a bracket lamp on the wall between the two doors, and went out.

Lying on her left side, alone in the darkness and silence, hot beneath her two layers of fur, of necessity motionless, O tried to figure out why there was so much sweetness mingled with the terror in her, or why her terror seemed itself so sweet. She realized that one of the things that most distressed her was the fact that she had been deprived of the use of her hands; not that her hands could have defended her (and did she really want to defend herself?), but had they been free they would at least have made the gesture, have made an attempt to repel the hands which seized her, the flesh which pierced her, to protect her loins from the whip. O's hands had been taken away from her; her body beneath the fur was inaccessible to her. How strange it was not to be able to touch one's own knees, or the hollow of one's own belly. The lips between her legs, her burning lips were forbidden her, and perhaps they were burning because she knew they were open to the first comer: to the valet Pierre, if he cared to enter. She was surprised that the whipping she had received had left her so untroubled, so calm, whereas she thought that she would probably never know which of the four men had twice taken her from behind,

and whether it was the same man both times, and whether it had been her lover, quite distressed her. She turned over slightly on her stomach, recalling that her lover loved the furrow between her buttocks which, except for this evening (if it had been he), he had never penetrated. She hoped it had been he; would she ask him? Ah, never! Again she saw the hand which in the car had taken her garter belt and panties, and had stretched the garters so that she could roll her stockings down to above her knees. The memory was so vivid that she forgot her hands were bound and made the chain grate. And why, if she took the memory of the torture she had gone through so lightly, why did the very idea, the very word or sight of a whip make her heart beat wildly and her eyes close with terror? She did not stop to consider whether it was only terror; she was overwhelmed with panic: they would pull on her chain and haul her to her feet on the bed, and they would whip her, with her belly glued to the wall they would whip her, whip her, the word kept turning in her head. Pierre would whip her, Jeanne had said he would. You're lucky, Jeanne had repeated, they'll be a lot harder on you. What had she meant by that? She no longer felt anything but the collar, the bracelets, and the chain; her body was drifting away. She fell asleep.

In the wee hours of the night, just before dawn when it is darkest and coldest, Pierre reappeared. He turned on the light in the bathroom, leaving the door open so that a square of light fell on the middle of the bed, on the spot where O's slender body was curled, making a small mound beneath the cover, which silently he pulled back. Since O was sleeping on her left side, her face to the window and her legs slightly drawn up, the view she offered him was that of her white flanks, which seemed even whiter against the black fur. He took the pillow from beneath her head and said politely:

"Would you please stand up," and when she was on her knees, a position she managed by pulling herself up with the chain, he gave her a hand, taking her by the elbows so that she could stand up straight with her face to the wall. The square of light on the bed, which was faint, since the bed was black, illuminated her body, but not his gestures. She guessed, but could not see, that he was undoing the chain to rehook it to another link, so that it would remain taut, and she could feel it growing tighter. Her feet, which were bare, were solidly planted on the bed. Nor was she able to see that he had in his belt not the leather whip but the black riding crop similar to the one they had hit her with while she was tied to the stake, but they had only used it twice on her and had not hit her hard. She felt Pierre's left hand on her waist, the Mattress gave a little as, to steady himself, he put his right foot on it. At the same time as she heard a whistling noise in the semi-darkness, O felt a terrible burning across her back, and she screamed. Pierre flogged her with all his might. He did not wait for her screams to subside, but struck her again four times, being careful each time to lash her above or below the preceding spot, so that the traces would be all the clearer. Even after he had stopped she went on screaming, and the tears streamed down into her open mouth.

"Please be good enough to turn around," he said, and since she, who was completely distracted, failed to obey, he took her by hips without letting go of his riding crop, the handle of which brushed against her waist. When she was facing him, he moved back slightly and lowered his crop on the front of her thighs as hard as he could. The whole thing had lasted five minutes. When he had left, after having turned out the light and closed the bathroom door, O was left moaning in the darkness, swaying back and forth along the wall at the end of her chain. She tried to stop moaning and to immobilize herself against the wall, whose gleaming percale was cool on her tortured flesh, as day slowly began to break. The tall window, toward which she was turned, for she was leaning on one hip, was facing the east. It extended from floor to ceiling and except for the drapes - of the same red material as that on the wall - which graced it on either side and split into stiff folds below the curtain loops which held it, had not curtains. O watched the slow birth of pale dawn, trailing its mist among the clusters of asters outside at the foot of her window, until finally a poplar tree appeared. The yellow leaves from time to time fell in swirls, although there was no wind. In front of the window, beyond the bed of purple asters, there was a lawn, at the end of which was a pathway. It was broad daylight by now, and O had not moved for a long time. A gardener appeared on the path, pushing a wheelbarrow. The iron wheel could be heard

squeaking over the gravel. If he had come over to rake the leaves that had fallen in among the asters, the window was so tall and the room so small and bright that he would have seen O chained and naked and the marks of the riding crop on her thighs. The cuts were swollen, and had formed narrow swellings much darker in color than the red of the walls. Where was her lover sleeping, the way he loved to sleep on quiet mornings? In what room, in what bed? Was he aware of the pain, the tortures to which he had delivered her? Was he the one who had decided what they would be? O recalled the prisoners she had seen in engravings and in history books, who also had been chained and whipped many years ago, centuries ago, and had died. She did not wish to die, but if torture was the price she had to pay to keep her lover's love, then she only hoped he was pleased that she had endured it. All soft and silent she waited, waited for them to bring her back to him.

None of the women had the keys to any locks, neither the locks to the doors nor the chains, the collars or bracelets, but every man carried a ring of three sets of keys, each of which, in the various categories, opened all the doors or all the padlocks, or all the collars. The valets had them too. But in the morning the valets who had been on the night shift were sleeping, and it was one of the masters or another valet who came to open the locks. The man who came into O's cell was dressed in a leather jacket and was wearing riding breeches and boots. She did not recognize him. First he unlocked the chain on the wall, and O was able to lie down on the bed. Before he unlocked her wrists, he ran his hands between her thighs, the way the first man with mask and gloves, whom she had seen in the small red drawing room, had done. It may have been the same one. His face was bony and fleshless, with that piercing look one associates with the portraits of the Huguenots, and his hair was gray. O met his gaze for what seemed to be an endless time and, suddenly freezing, she remembered it was forbidden to look at the masters above the belt. She closed her eyes, but it was too late, and she heard him laugh and say, as he finally freed her hands:

"There will be a punishment for that after dinner."

He said something to Jeanne and Andrée who had come in with him and were standing waiting on either side of the bed, after which he let. Andrée picked up the pillow, which was on the floor, and the blanket that Pierre had turned down toward the foot of the bed when he had come to whip O, while Jeanne wheeled, toward the head of the bed, a serving table which had been brought into the hallway and on which were coffee, milk, sugar, bread, croissants, and butter.

"Hurry up and eat," said Andrée. "It's nine o'clock. Afterward you can sleep till noon, and when you hear the bell it will be time to get ready for lunch. You'll bathe and fix your hair. I'll come to make you up and lace up your bodice."

"You won't be on duty till afternoon," Jeanne said. "In the library: you'll serve the coffee and liqueur and tend the fire."

"And what about you?" O said.

"We're only supposed to take care of you during the first twenty-four hours of your stay. After that you're on your own, and will have dealings only with the men. We won't be able to talk to you, and you won't be able to talk to us either.":

"Don't go," O said. "Stay a while longer and tell me..." But she did not have time to finish her sentence. The door opened; it was her lover, and he was not alone. It was her lover, dressed the way he used to when he had just gotten out of bed and lighted the first cigarette of the day; in striped pajamas and a blue dressing gown, the wool robe with the padded silk lapels which they had picked out together a year before. And his slippers were worn, she would have to buy him another pair. The two women disappeared with no other sound except the rustling of silk as they lifted their skirts (all the skirts were a trifle long and trailed on the ground) - on the carpet the mules could not be heard.

O, who was holding a cup of coffee in her left hand and a croissant in the other, was seated cross-legged, or rather half-cross-legged, on the edge of the bed, one of her legs dangling and the other tucked up under her. She did not move, but her cup suddenly began to shake in her hand, and she dropped the croissant.

"Pick it up," René said. They were his first words.

She put the cup down on the table, picked up the partly eaten croissant, and put it beside the cup. A fat croissant crumb still lay on the rug, beside her bare foot. This time René bent down and picked it up. Then he sat down near O, pulled her back down onto the bed and kissed her. She asked him if he loved her. He answered: "Yes, I love you!" then got to his feet and made her stand up too, softly running the cool palms of his hands, then his lips, over the welts.

Since he had come in with her lover, O did not know whether or not she could look at the man who had entered with him and who, for the moment, had his back to them and was smoking a cigarette near the door. What followed was not of a nature to reassure her.

"Come over here so we can see you," her lover said, and having guided her to the foot of the bed, he pointed out to his companion that he had been right, and he thanked him, adding that it would only be fair for him to take O first if he so desired.

The unknown man, whom she still did not dare to look at, then asked her, after having run his hand over her breasts and down her buttocks, to spread her legs.

"Do as he says," said René, who was holding her up. He too was standing, and her back was against him. With his right hand he was caressing one breast, and his other was on her shoulder. The unknown man had sat down on the edge of the bed, he had seized and slowly parted, drawing the fleece, the lips which protected the entrance itself. René pushed her forward, as soon as he realized what was wanted from her, so that she would be more accessible, and his right arm slipped around her waist, giving him a better grip.

This caress, to which she never submitted without a struggle and which always filled her with shame, and from which she escaped as quickly as she could, so quickly in fact that she had scarcely had a chance to be touched, this caress which seemed a sacrilege to her, for she deemed it sacrilege for her lover to be on his knees, feeling that she should be on hers, she suddenly felt that she would not escape from it now, and she saw herself doomed. For she moaned when the alien lips, which were pressing

upon the mound of flesh whence the inner corolla emanates, suddenly inflamed her, left her to allow the hot tip of the tongue to inflame her even more; she moaned even more when the lips began again: she felt the hidden point harden and rise, that point caught in a long, sucking bite between teeth and lips, which did not let go, a long soothing bite which made her gasp for breath. She lost her footing and found herself again lying on the bed, with René's mouth on her mouth; his two hands were pinning her shoulders to the bed, while two other hands beneath her knees were raising and opening her legs. Her own hands, which were beneath her back (for when René had propelled her toward the unknown man he had bound her wrists together by clipping the wristbands together), were grazed by the sex of the man who was caressing himself in the furrow of her buttocks before rising to strike hard into the depths of her belly. At the first stroke she cried out, as though it had been the lash of a whip, then again at each new stroke, and her lover bit her mouth. The man tore himself abruptly away from her and fell back on the floor, as though struck by lightning, and he too gave a cry.

René freed O's hands, lifted her up, and lay her down beneath the blanket on the bed. The man got up, René escorted him to the door. In a flash, O saw herself released, reduced to nothing, accursed. She had moaned beneath the lips of the stranger as never her lover had made her moan, cried out under the impact of a stranger's member as never her lover had made her cry out. She felt debased and guilty. She could not blame him if he were to leave her. But no, the door was closing again, he was staying with her, he was coming back, lying down beside her beneath the cover, he was slipping into her moist, hot belly and, still holding her in this embrace, he said to her:

"I love you. When I'll also have given you to the valets, I'll come in one night and have you flogged till you bleed."

The sun had broken through the mist and flooded the room. But only the midday bell woke them up.

O was at a loss what to do.

Her lover was there, as close, as tenderly relaxed and surrendered as he was in the bed in that low-ceilinged room to which, almost every night since they had begun living together, he came to sleep with her. It was a big, mahogany, English-style four-poster bed, without the awning, and the posters at the head were taller than those at the foot. He always slept on her left, and whenever he awoke, even were it in the middle of the night, his hands inevitably reached down for her legs. This is why she never wore anything but a nightgown or, if she had on pajamas, never put on the bottoms. He did so now; she took that hand and kissed it, without ever daring to ask him for anything. But he spoke. Holding her by the collar, with two fingers slipped in between the neck and collar, he told her it was his intention that henceforth she should be shared by him and those of his choosing, and by those whom he did not know who were connected to the society of the château, shared as she had been the previous evening. That she was dependent on him, and on him alone, even though she might receive orders from persons other than himself, whether he was present or absent, for as a matter of principle he was participating in whatever might be demanded of or inflicted on her, and that it was he who possessed and enjoyed her through those into whose hands she had been given, by the simple fact that he had given her to them. She must greet them and submit to them with the same respect with which she greeted him, as though they were so many reflections of him. Thus he would possess her as a god possesses his creatures, whom he lays hold of in the guise of a monster or a bird, of an invisible spirit or a state of ecstasy. He did not wish to leave her. The more he surrendered her, the more he would hold her dear. The fact that he gave her was to him a proof, and ought to be one for her as well that she belonged to him: one can only give what belongs to you. He gave her only to reclaim her immediately, to reclaim her enriched in

his eyes, like some common object which had been used for some divine purpose and has thus been consecrated. For a long time he had wanted to prostitute her, and he was delighted to feel that the pleasure he was deriving was even greater than he had hoped, and that it bound him to her all the more, as it bound her to him, all the more so because, through it, she would be more humiliated and ravaged. Since she loved him, she could not help loving whatever derived from him. O listened and trembled with happiness, because he loved her, all acquiescent she trembled. He doubtless guessed it, for he went on:

"It's because it's easy for you to consent that I want from you what it will be impossible for you to consent to, even if you agree ahead of time, even if you say yes now and imagine yourself capable of submitting. You won't be able *not* to revolt. Your submission will be obtained in spite of you, not only for the inimitable pleasure that I and others will derive from it, but also that you will be made aware of what has been done to you."

O was on the verge of saying that she was his slave and that she bore her bonds cheerfully. He stopped her.

"Yesterday you were told that as long as you are in the château you are not to look a man in the face or speak to him. The same applies to me as well: with me you shall remain silent and obey. I love you. Now get up. From now on the only times that you will open your mouth here in the presence of a man will be to cry out or to caress."

So O got up. René remained lying on the bed. She bathed and arranged her hair. The contact of her bruised loins with the tepid water made her shiver, and she had to sponge herself without rubbing to keep from reviving the burning pain. She made up her mouth but not her eyes, powdered herself and, still naked but with lowered eyes, came back into the room.

René was looking at Jeanne, who had come in and was standing at the head of the bed, she too with her head bowed, unspeaking. He told her to dress O. Jeanne took the bodice of green satin, the white petticoat, the dress, the green mules and having hooked up O's bodice in front, began to lace it up tight in the back. The bodice was long and stiff, stoutly whaleboned as during the period when wasp waists were in style, with gussets to support the breasts. The more the bodice was tightened, the more the breasts were lifted, supported as they were by the gussets, and the nipples displayed more prominently. At the same time, the constriction of the waist caused her stomach to protrude and her backside to arch out sharply. The strange thing was that this armor was very comfortable and to a certain extent restful. It made you stand up very straight, but it made you realize - why, it was hard to tell unless it was by contrast - the freedom, or rather the unavailability, of that part of the body left unrestricted. The full skirt and the trapezoid-shaped neckline running from the base of the neck to the tips of the breasts and across the full length of the bosom seemed to the girl to be less a protective outfit than an instrument designed to provoke or present. When Jeanne had tied the laces in a double knot, O took her dress from the bed. It was a one-piece dress, with the petticoat attached to the skirt like a detachable lining, and the bodice, cross-laced in front and tied in the back, was thus able to follow more or less the delicate contours of her bosom, depending on how tightly the bodice was laced. Jeanne had laced it very tight, and through the open door O was able to see herself reflected in the mirror, slim and lost in the green satin which billowed at her hips, as a hoop skirt would have done. The two women were standing side by side. Jeanne reached out to smooth a wrinkle in the green dress, and her breasts stirred in the lace fringes of her bodice, breasts whose tips were long and the halos brown. Her dress was of yellow faille.

René, who had come over to the two women, said to O: "Watch." And to Jeanne: "Lift your dress." With both hands she raised the crackling silk and the crinoline which lined it, revealing as she did a golden belly, gleaming thighs and knees, and a tight black triangle. René put his hand on it and slowly explored, and with the other excited the nipple of one breast.

"Merely so you can see," he said to O.

O saw. She saw his ironic but attentive face, his eyes carefully watching Jeanne's half-open mouth and her neck, which was thrown back, tightly circled by the leather collar. What pleasure was she giving him, yes she, that this girl or any other could not?

"That hadn't occurred to you?" he added.

No, that had not occurred to her. She had collapsed against the wall, between the two doors, her arms hanging limp. There was no longer any need to tell her to keep quiet. How could she have spoken? Perhaps he was touched by her despair. He left Jeanne and took her in his arms, calling her his love and his life, saying over and over again that he loved her. The hand he was caressing her neck with was moist with the odor of Jeanne. And so? The despair that had overwhelmed her slowly ebbed: he loved her, ah he loved her. He was free to enjoy himself with Jeanne, or with others, he loved her. "I love you," he had whispered to her ear, "I love you," so softly it was scarcely audible. "I love you." He did not leave until he saw that her eyes were clear and her expression calm, contented.

Jeanne took O by the hand and let her out into the hallway. Their mules again made a resounding noise on the tile floor, and again they found a valet seated on a bench between the doors. He was dressed like Pierre, but it was not Pierre. This one was tall, dry, and had dark hair. He preceded them and showed them into an antechamber where, before a wrought-iron door that stood between two tall green drapes, two other valets were waiting, some white dogs with russet spots lying at their feet.

"That's the enclosure," Jeanne murmured. But the valet who was walking in front of them heard her and turned around. O was amazed to see Jeanne turn deathly pale and let go of her hand, let go of her dress which she was holding lightly with her other hand, and sink to her knees on the black tile floor - for the antechamber was tiled in black marble. The two valets near the gate burst out laughing. One of them came over to O and politely invited her to follow him, opened a door opposite the one she had just entered, and stood aside. She heard laughter and the sound of footsteps, then the door closed behind her. She never - no, never - learned what had happened, whether Jeanne had been punished for having spoken, and if so what the punishment had been, or whether she had simply yielded to a caprice on the part of the valet, or whether in throwing herself on her knees she had been obeying some rule or trying to move the valet to pity, and whether she had succeeded. During her initial stay in the château, which lasted two weeks, she only noted that, although the rule of silence was absolute, it was rare that they did not try and break it while they were alone with the valets, either being taken to or from some place in the château, or during meals, especially during the day. It was as though clothing gave them a feeling of assurance which nakedness and nocturnal chains, and the master's presence, destroyed. She also noticed that, whereas the slightest gestures which might have been construed as an advance toward one of the masters seemed quite naturally inconceivable, the same was not true for the valets. They never gave orders, although the courtesy of their requests was as implacable as an order. They had apparently been enjoined to punish to the letter infractions of the rules which occurred in their presence, and to punish them on the spot. Thus, on three occasions, O saw girls who were caught

talking thrown to the floor and whipped - once in the hallway leading to the red wing, and twice again in the factory they had just entered. So it was possible to be whipped in broad daylight, despite what they had told her the first evening, as though what happened with the valets did not count and was left to their discretion.

Daylight made their outfits look strange and menacing. Some valets wore black stockings and, in place of the red jacket and white ruffled shirt, a soft wide-sleeved shirt of red silk, gathered at the neck and with the sleeves also gathered at the wrists. It was one of these valets who, on the eight day at noon, his whip already in his hand, made a buxom blonde named Madeleine, who was seated not far from O, get up off her stool. Madeleine, whose bosom was all milk and roses, had smiled at him and spoken a few words so quickly that O had missed them. Before he had time to touch her she was on her knees, her hand, so white against the black silk, lightly stroking the still dormant sex, which she took out and brought to her half-opened mouth. That time she was not whipped. And since he was then the only monitor in the refectory, and since he closed his eyes as he accepted the caress, the other girls began talking. So it was possible to bribe the valets. But what was the use? If there was one rule to which O had trouble submitting, and indeed never really submitted to completely, it was the rule forbidding them to look men in the face - considering that the rule applied to the valets as well, O felt herself in constant danger, so compelling was her curiosity about faces, and she was in fact whipped by both the valets, not, in truth, each time they noticed her doing (for they took some liberties with instructions, and perhaps cared enough about the fascination they exercised not to deprive themselves, by too strict or efficacious an application of the rules, of the gazes which would leave their face or mouth only to return to their sex, their whips, and their hands, and then start in all over again), but only when in all probability they wanted to humiliate her. No matter how cruelly they treated her when they had made up their minds to do so, she none the less never had the courage, or the cowardice, to throw herself at their knees, and though she submitted to them at times she never tempted or urged them on. As for the rule of silence, it meant so little to her that, except in the case of her lover, she did not once break it, replying by signals whenever another girl would take advantage of their guards' momentary distraction to speak to her. This was generally during meals, which were taken in the room into which they had been ushered, when the tall valet accompanying them had turned around to Jeanne. The walls were black and the stone floor was black, the long table, of heavy glass, was black too, and each girl had a round stool covered with black leather on which to sit. They had to lift their skirts to sit down, and in so doing O rediscovered, the moment she felt the smooth, cold leather beneath her thighs, that first moment when her lover had made her take off her stockings and panties and sit in the same manner on the back seat of the car. Conversely, after she had left the château and, dressed like everyone else except for the fact that beneath her innocuous suit or dress she was naked, whenever she had to lift her petticoat and skirt to sit down beside her lover, or beside another, were it on the seat of a car or the bench of a cafe, it was the château she rediscovered, breasts proffered in the silk bodices, the hands and mouths to which nothing was denied, and the terrible silence. And yet nothing had been such a comfort to her as the silence, unless it was the chains. The chains and the silence, which should have bound her deep within herself, which should have smothered her, strangled her, on the contrary freed her from herself. What would have become of her if she had been granted the right to speak and the freedom of her hands, if she had been free to make a choice, when her lover prostituted her before his own eyes? True, she did not speak as she was being tortured, but can moans and cries be classed as words? Besides, they often stilled her by gagging. Beneath the gazes, beneath the hands, beneath the sexes that defiled her, the whips that rent her, she lost herself in a delirious absence from herself which restored her to love and perhaps, brought her to the edge of death. She was anyone, anyone at all, any one of the other girls, opened and forced like her, girls whom she saw being opened and forced, for she did see it, even when she was not obliged to have a hand in it.

Thus, less than twenty-four hours after her arrival, during her second day there, she was taken after the meal into the library, there to serve coffee and tend the fire. Jeanne, whom the black-haired valet had brought back, went with her, as did another girl named Monique. It was this same valet who took them there and remained in the room, stationed near the stake to which O had been attached. The library

was still empty. The French doors faced wet, and in the vast, almost cloudless sky the autumn sun slowly pursued its course, its rays lighting, on a chest of drawers, an enormous bouquet of sulphur colored chrysanthemums which smelled of earth and dead leaves.

"Did Pierre mark you last night?" the valet asked O.

She nodded that he had.

"Then you should show it," he said. Please roll up your dress."

He waited till she had rolled her robe up and behind, the way Jeanne had done the evening before, and till Jeanne had helped her fasten it there. Then he told her to light the fire. O's backside up to her waist, her thighs, her slender legs, was framed in the cascading folds of green silk and white linen. The five welts had turned black. The fire was ready on the hearth, all O had to do was ignite the straw beneath the kindling, which leaped into flame. Soon the branches of apple wood caught, then the oak logs, which burned with tall, crackling, almost colorless flames which were almost invisible in the daylight, but which smelled good. Another valet entered and placed a tray filled with coffee cups on the console, from which the lamp had been removed, then left the room. O went over near the console, while Monique and Jeanne remained standing on either side of the fireplace.

Just then two men came in, and the first valet in turn left the room. O thought she recognized one of the men from his voice, one of those who had forced her the previous evening, the one who had asked that her rear be made more easily accessible. As she poured the coffee into the small black and gold cups, which Monique handed around with the sugar, she stole a glance at them. So it was this thin, blond boy, a mere stripling, with an English air about him. He was speaking again; now she was certain. The other man was also fair, thick set with a heavy face. Both of them were seated in the big leather armchairs, their feet near the fire, quietly smoking and reading their papers, paying no more heed to the women than if they had not been there. Now and then the rustle of a paper was heard, or the sound of coals falling on the hearth. From time to time O put another log on the fire. She was seated on a cushion on the floor beside the wood basket, Monique and Jeanne, also on the floor, across from her. Their flowing skirts overlapped one another. Monique's skirt was a dark red. Suddenly, but only after an hour had elapsed, the blond boy called Jeanne, then Monique. He told them to bring the ottoman (it was the same ottoman on which O had been spread-eagled the night before). Monique did not wait for further instructions, she kneeled down, bent over, her breasts crushed against the first and holding both corners of the ottoman in her hands. When the young man had Jeanne lift the red skirt, she did not stir. Jeanne was then obliged to undo his clothing - and he gave her the order in the most churlish manner - and take between her hands that sword of flesh which had so cruelly pierced O at least once. It swelled and stiffened beneath the closed palm, and O saw these same hands, Jeanne's tiny hands, spreading Monique's thighs, into the hollow of which, slowly and in short spasms which made her moan, the lad plunged.

The other man, who was watching in silence, motioned to O to approach and, without taking his eyes off the spectacle, topped her forward over one arm of his chair - and her raised skirt gave him an unhindered view of her backside - and seized her womb with his hand.

It was in this position that René found her when, a minute later, he opened the door.

"Please don't let me disturb you," he said, and he sat down on the floor, on the same cushion where O had been sitting beside the fire before she had been called. He watched her closely, and smiled every time the hand which was holding her probed and returned, seizing both front and rear apertures at once and working deeper and deeper as they opened further, wrenching from her a moan which she could no longer restrain.

Monique had long since gotten back to her feet; Jeanne was fiddling with the fire in place of O. She brought René a glass of whisky, and he kissed her hand as she handed it to him, then drank it down without taking his eyes off O.

The man who was still holding her then said:

"Is she yours?"

"Yes," René replied.

"James is right," the other went on, "she's too narrow. She has to be widened."

"Not too much, mind you," said James.

"Whatever you say," René said, getting to his feet. "You're a better judge than I." And he rang.

For the next eight days, between dusk when her stint in the library came to an end and that hour of the night - which was generally eight or ten o'clock - when she was returned to her cell, in chains and naked beneath her red cape, O wore an ebonite shaft simulating an erect male member which was inserted behind and held in place by three small chains connected to a leather belt around her hips, in such a way that the internal movements of her muscles could not expel it. One little chain followed the furrow of her buttocks, the two others the fold on either side of the belly's triangle, in order not to prevent anyone from penetrating that side if need be.

When René had rung, it was to have the coffer brought in which contained, or one of whose compartments contained, an assortment of small chains and belts, and whose other held a variety of these shafts, ranging from the very thin to the very thick. They all had one feature in common, namely that they flared at the base, to make it impossible for them to slide up inside the body, an accident which might have produced the opposite effect from that desired, that is it might have allowed the ring of flesh to tighten up again, whereas the purpose of the shaft was to distend it. Thus quartered, and quartered each day a little more, for James, who made her kneel down, or rather lie prone, to watch while Jeanne or Monique, or whichever girl happened to be there, fastened the shaft that he had chosen, each day chose a thicker one. At the evening meal, which the girls took together in the same refectory, after their bath, naked and powdered O still wore it, and everyone could see that she was wearing it, because of the little chains and the belt. It was only removed, by the valet, when he came to chain her to the wall for the night if no one had asked for her, or, if someone had, when he locked her hands behind her if he had to take her to the library. Rare were the nights when someone did not

appear to make use of this passage thus rapidly rendered as easy as, though still narrower than, the other. After eight days there was no longer any need for an instrument, and O's lover told her that he was happy she was now doubly open and that he would make certain she remained so. At the same time, he warned her that he was leaving and that she would not see him during the last seven days that she was to spend in the château, before he came back to pick her up and take her back to Paris.

"But I love you," he added, "I do love you. Don't forget me."

Oh, how could she forget him! He was the hand that blindfolded her, the whip wielded by the valet Pierre, he was the chain above her head, the unknown man who came down on her, and all the voices which gave her orders were his voice. Was she growing weary? No. By dint of being defiled and desecrated, it seems that she must have grown used to outrages, by dint of being caressed, to caresses, if not to the whip by dint of being whipped. A terrible surfeit of pain and pleasure should have by slow degrees cast her upon benumbing banks, into a state bordering on sleep or somnambulism. On the contrary. The bodice which held her straight, the chains which kept her submissive, her refuge of silence - these may have been responsible in part - as was the constant spectacle of girls being handed over and used as she was and, even when they were not, the spectacle of the constantly available bodies. Also the spectacle and the awareness of her own body. Daily and, so to speak, ceremoniously soiled with saliva and sperm, she felt herself literally to be the repository of impurity, the sink mentioned in the Scriptures. And yet those parts of her body most constantly offended, having become less sensitive, at the same time seemed to her to have become more beautiful and, as it were, ennobled: her mouth closed upon anonymous members, the tips of her breasts constantly fondled by hands, and between her quartered thighs the twin, contiguous paths wantonly ploughed. That she should have been ennobled and gained in dignity through being prostituted was a source of surprise, and yet dignity was indeed from within, and her bearing bespoke calm, while on her face could be detected the serenity and imperceptible smile that one surmises rather than actually sees in the eyes of hermits.

When René had informed her that he was leaving, night had already fallen. O was naked in her cell, and was waiting for them to come and take her to the refectory. As for her lover, he was dressed as usual, in a suit he wore every day in town. When he took her a suit he wore every day in town. When he took her in his arms, the rough tweed of his clothes irritated the tips of her breasts. He kissed her, lay her down on the bed, lay down beside her and, tenderly and slowly and gently, took her, alternating between the two tracks open to him, before finally spilling himself into her mouth, which he then kissed again.

"Before I leave," he said, "I would like to have you whipped, and this time I'll ask your permission. Do you agree?"

She agreed to it.

"I love you," he repeated. "Ring for Pierre."

She rang. Pierre chained her hands above her head, to the chain of the bed. When she was thus bound, her lover kissed her again, standing beside her on the bed. Again he told her that he loved her, then he got down off the bed and nodded for Pierre. He watched her struggle, so fruitlessly; he listened to her moans swell and become cries. When her tears flowed, he sent Pierre away. She still found the strength

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