

## Chains Of Temptation

J.M. Rolls, 1999

“The art of pleasing consists in being pleased.”

William Hazlitt

### PART ONE - Instigation

Steed, Emma Peel would stridently insist later, brought the whole thing on himself. Quite evidently, it was entirely his own fault for originally allowing such strong temptation to be put in her way. Some might say that the vehemency of her protestations of innocence were enough to prove, beyond any doubt, that she was as guilty as sin itself.

It started on a hot Saturday night in mid-August, a night on which even once the sun had set, London continued to swelter. Windows were left open in a desperate attempt to entice the slightest cooling breeze, the crime rate rose sharply, and the tabloid newspapers were full of photographs of attractive, scantily clad young women taking illicit dips in the capital's ornamental pools and fountains. Even the pigeons in Trafalgar Square drooped in the heat. Those few places with rudimentary air-conditioning found themselves suddenly over-populated. How John Steed could have worn a suit and tie out to dinner that hot, stifling evening, Emma would never know. He hadn't seemed to have suffered unduly in the restaurant, but when they had adjourned back to his Westminster Mews apartment, he had, admittedly, shed that suit and tie - and everything else that he had been wearing - with considerable alacrity.

Despite the sultry heat, they had made love on top of the previously undisturbed covers of Steed's wide, comfortable bed. A thoroughly satisfying, if rather sweaty encounter that had left both of them drowsy and relaxed enough to drift off into a light sleep. Emma though, who was far more bothered by the heat than her companion, had woken less than an hour later restless and thirsty. It seemed like an unkindness to rouse Steed, who was lying unmoving on his back with one arm outflung, his head turned towards the open window, apparently sleeping soundly, so Emma slipped quietly off the bed and headed for the apartment's kitchen. She was not consciously aware of her nakedness as she prowled through the living room, only that what little breeze there was coming off the river was blessedly cool on her skin.

Alcohol, even chilled from the refrigerator, seemed far too cloying to contemplate on such a night, so she settled for chilled water with a handful of ice thrown into the glass for good measure. Thirst temporarily quenched, she headed back to the master bedroom. On a Saturday night there seemed no good reason to return to her own, empty, apartment, especially at such a late hour. Far better to stay at Westminster Mews and enjoy a leisurely Sunday morning with her good-natured, charming friend and intermittent, capricious lover. One of the things Emma really appreciated about her easy, amiable relationship with Steed was the flexibility it gave her to come and go as she chose, knowing that neither her presence or her absence would cause any friction between them.

She walked into the bedroom and halted, looking at the recumbent figure on the bed. The curtains were open, and though there was no light on in the room, she could see him perfectly well in the combination of bright moonlight and artificial streetlight coming through the window. He hadn't moved at all, and from his slow, steady breathing she knew he was still soundly asleep. Emma contemplated him, eyes roving slowly down the long, honed length of his body. True, he was considerably older than she was, but his age was irrelevant. John Steed was an unquestionably attractive man, whether he had passed forty or not. It wasn't just Emma who thought so. Women, she had noticed a long, long time ago, tended to look at Steed and keep looking. Speculatively. Whether it was his tall, broad-shouldered figure, his strong, handsome features, or perhaps the spark of slow-burning devilment in his eyes, Emma wasn't sure, but women liked him. She liked him.

There was a walnut bureau to her left, the twin of the one in the living room. It sat in the periphery of her vision, ordinary and inconspicuous. Steed used it as a repository for his watch and his loose change, his wallet, and everything else he carried around with him in the pockets of his impeccable suits. Something was gleaming, cool and metallic, among the odds and ends on the polished wooden surface. Almost puppet-like, Emma's head turned. Moonlight glinted on circlets of utilitarian steel. One single, solitary word formed meaningfully in Emma's mind. Handcuffs.

John Steed was an ex-Military Intelligence officer who had left the British Army to become a security agent. He worked for a small, elite sub-division of the Secret Intelligence Service, a sub-division often erroneously linked to MI5. He looked and behaved like a sophisticated, affluent man-about-town, and was often mistaken for exactly that, but beneath his elegance and his urbane charm, Steed was as hard and intractable as the steel gleaming before her. They had been out to dinner that evening to celebrate the successful conclusion of a slightly bizarre assignment involving, of all things, a recreation of the Regency Hellfire Club. An assignment that Emma, for one, would remember for a long, long time for certain slightly... unusual... reasons. Reasons that included the late John Cartney's ideas about appropriate female party apparel.

Handcuffs. There was nothing more odd about Steed owning a set of handcuffs than there was about a carpenter owning a hammer. A tool of his trade, no more, no less. Temptingly cool steel. Fascinated without really knowing why, Emma cautiously picked up the steel circlets, careful not to make any unnecessary noise that might disturb the sleeping man. So cold, on a hot August night. So inflexible, unbreakable. Tempered, functional. Like Steed himself.

Her eyes flitted across the room again. Asleep on his back. Vulnerable. Unknowing. One arm outflung. Emma looked at that arm, looked at his wrist. Looked at the bedposts. The connection with the item in her hand was inevitable. Wicked. Wickedly tempting. Whether it was the lingering influence of the Hellfire Club, or a heat-induced madness, Emma didn't know. Or care. In fact, she didn't really think about it at all. She simply walked across the room, bare feet light and virtually silent on the polished wooden floor. Cartney had selected her as the Queen of Sin for his orgiastic revels at Hellfire Hall. Perhaps a little of his libertine influence had rubbed off on her.

Softly, insidiously, the steel went round Steed's wrist, the ratchet mechanism clicking smoothly. She was dreaming, surely? It was just too surreal. So gentle, her mischief, that the sleeping man didn't stir at all. Emma looked at the bedpost. There was a flaw in her plan. One hand would still be free. And Steed only needed one hand to defend himself. Hardly breathing, she took his captured hand, moved his arm. It bent obediently at

the elbow, muscles completely relaxed. Heavy, that inert arm. She passed the handcuffs around one of the bedstead's vertical rails, the connecting chain rattling against the metal. Impossibly, Steed still didn't wake. He wasn't feigning sleep, either, not from the rate of his breathing. So very easy. So very wicked. His other wrist was less accessible, but with gentle determination, she coerced it into the right position. Again, the sharp metallic clicks of a ratchet.

Without the key, without access to a lockpick, or to something that could be utilised for the same purpose, not even Steed could free himself from such a position. Emma stood still, looking down at her handiwork. The illicit thrill was wildly stimulating. It didn't suit her to wake him just yet. Moving gingerly, she eased herself back onto the bed, returning to the spot she had vacated earlier. Steed slept on, innocent and oblivious. He trusted her. There was no reason why he should have remained alert, even subconsciously. Emma edged closer to him, catching the musky scent of his skin as she did so. The dangerous, arousing scent of sex, a little diffused now, but still potent. He was sweating slightly as he slept, and when she laid a careful hand on him he was warm and damp. Soft skin over compact muscle and bone. Emma ran her palm over his stomach, feeling the faint prickle of short hairs from the narrow trail that ran from his chest to his groin, breaking at his navel to begin again, heading lower and spreading out.

Emma had always found him physically attractive, whether she had openly admitted it to herself at first or not. She would have been extraordinarily naive if she hadn't immediately recognised the spark of sexual magnetism that had existed between them from the very first time they had met. She still firmly believed that it had been inevitable that they would sleep together sooner or later, whether by accident or design. Attraction that strong, that compelling, simply couldn't be suppressed forever. When it had happened - as she had instinctively known it would - it had only proved that they were as attuned to each other physically as they were mentally. Emma liked Steed in a tolerant, amused sort of way, and her warm affection for him was quite genuine. She wasn't altogether convinced that she yet loved him - or that he loved her - but she was impulsively fond of him, and she unequivocally adored his enticingly strong body.

She turned her head, watching her hand as it stroked downwards towards the dark, wiry pubic hair and the slack male organ nestling sleepily there. Astonishing how unremarkable his penis looked in its flaccid state, not betraying the impressive dimensions of which it was capable. Emma's stomach muscles tautened reflexively. She became aware of a renewed moist warmth between her legs as her body remembered him. His presence in her flesh was so recent that she fancied, for a moment, that she could still feel him there, deep inside her. Steed's body fitted hers so well that they might have been solely designed for each other. Excited by her misbehaviour and by the proximity of his naked form, Emma let her hand continue to stray downwards until she reached his penis. Watching his face for signs of impending alertness, she stroked him gently.

He moved slightly, fitfully, but didn't wake. Emma was certain she detected the beginnings of a response elsewhere. Smiling to herself, she changed technique, gripping his penis gently, applying more obvious stimulation. It worked. The incipient response became a very definite stiffening. It never failed to fascinate her, the primal male reaction, the conspicuous transformation of his flesh. Bigger and harder in her hand, his shaft twitched slightly, as if asserting an independent life of its own. It was another temptation she couldn't resist. Again, she moved, twisting herself round. More intense now, the scent of male musk. Emma inhaled it, let it work its own magic on her flesh. Delicately, she flicked the tip of her tongue against the blunt head of his penis. No reaction. Rather more

purposefully, and certainly more lasciviously, she started to use long, firm strokes of her tongue against him, travelling the organ's entire length. When she reached the head again, she opened her mouth and drew him in.

Steed made a soft, incoherent noise, somewhere between a moan and a waking sigh. His hips moved slightly in automatic response to the stimulation. In her mind, Emma was already smirking. She started to suck him gently, knowing full well that in seconds he would be awake enough and aware enough to comprehend his situation. Another sound, rather more lucid than the first. He moved, presumably to reach for her. Metal rattled against metal.

Sharp, his voice, startled, angry, and suddenly very, very awake, "What the...?!"

Emma felt him flex, felt his muscles tense. No quiet rattle of chain this time. There was a loud clash of metal as he jerked hard against the restraints, trying, instinctively, to break loose. Emma thought it prudent to withdraw, before there was an unfortunate accident. She sat up, one hand on his thigh as he twisted violently, fighting against the handcuffs. There was no doubt that he was disorientated, confused, nor that for a moment his evident panic was genuine. His dark head snapped round, and she saw, just for a second, the wildness in his grey eyes. Fearing that he might, in his agitation, actually hurt himself, she said archly, "Relax. You're at my mercy, Steed."

Some of the wild panic dissipated, but the confusion didn't. Just as sharply as before, he demanded, "Mrs. Peel? What on earth...? Have you gone completely mad?"

"Relax," she told him again, smiling impishly, "There's really nothing to worry about."

Taut against the restraining handcuffs, he jerked his wrists pointedly, but he sounded a fraction calmer as he said tersely, "Nothing to worry about? Your opinion and mine obviously differ considerably on the point. What on earth is going on?"

"Nothing," Emma said easily, "Nothing at all. Excepting a little experimentation. Steed, don't look so worried. It really doesn't become you."

"Do forgive me," he said in a tone that was heavy with sarcasm, "but I can't say I've ever woken up handcuffed to my own bed before. I'm sure you'll allow a little bewilderment on my part."

She hadn't expected him to be quite as initially alarmed by the experience. True, the fear seemed to have ebbed - or to have been rigidly controlled - but he plainly wasn't finding anything about the situation remotely amusing. In hindsight, it was, perhaps, too foolish a prank to have played on him. As a security agent who faced danger and possible capture every day of his working life, Steed had very good reason to panic on waking to find himself thus restrained. For a moment Emma was actually slightly ashamed of herself. Only for a very brief moment. She said smoothly, "Trust me."

Steed shot her the kind of look that suggested that he thought she had gone totally insane, and that he would never trust her again. With anything. Again, he shook his wrists, "Enough is enough. I don't like playing unexpected games. Give me the key."

Emma raised her eyebrows at him, "That wasn't quite what I had in mind."

Impatiently, "Key. Now."

She smirked. "Key? Where would I find the key, Steed?"

A flat, unfriendly look, "Not funny, Mrs. Peel. Not remotely funny. Come along now, hand it over."

Emma ran a hand along his thigh. "Patience."

He looked as if he was mentally counting to ten. When he spoke again, he had switched tactics. In place of the terse annoyance, there was smooth charm, as if he had decided it was potentially a more successful approach, "Mrs. Peel, much as I'm more than willing to put myself completely at your mercy, I'm actually rather uncomfortable. And, shall we say, somewhat restricted in my ability to provide whatever it is you might want from me."

She shook her head, "I don't think you are, Steed. Not for what I want."

Quite abruptly, his body went limp, the tension seeming to flow out of him. He closed his eyes for a moment, then said, "All right, you can have my stamp collection. My toy soldiers too, if you so desire. Now, would you like to give me the key to my handcuffs?"

Emma smiled in pure mischief and said quietly, "I don't think so. Not just yet."

Steed tilted his dark head at her, "Think of how potentially embarrassing this could be if the opposition broke into my apartment right now. I'd never live it down. The KGB would laugh themselves silly. Think of poor old Brodny's reaction."

Judging that he was by now slightly more receptive to gentle coercion, Emma let her hand wander back to his groin. Unsurprisingly, the hardness had ebbed a little, but she flattered herself that she could revive it. Stroking him, she said, "I promise you, Steed, that if the KGB break in and take incriminating photographs, I will make it my mission in life to secure and destroy the negatives on your behalf."

"How very reassuring," he said dryly. A shrewd look, and a resigned, "You're really not intending to let me go, are you?"

"No," Emma said placidly, "Not just yet. It would just be a waste of all the trouble I went to, wouldn't it?"

To his eternal credit, given his original reaction, Steed simply shot her a sideways look and then said, "I'm sure Cartney didn't intend you to take the Queen of Sin persona quite so literally, Mrs. Peel."

Inwardly, Emma relaxed. For a few minutes she had been concerned that she had made a serious error of judgement, that Steed simply wouldn't give in and play along with her. He seemed to have recovered from his shock and panic. If anything, his attitude was now more curious than irked. Not yet lascivious, but definitely intrigued. Neatly, she picked up her cue, "You weren't exactly indifferent to the idea, as I remember. What was it you said afterwards? 'I like the collar, but the snake doesn't do anything for you'?"

“It was merely an observation,” Steed said, flexing his shoulders, “not an enticement to misbehaviour.”

She wondered if he had the strength to break the welded steel links that joined the two cuffs. No, of course he didn't. Steed was strong, but he wasn't superhuman. He was certainly testing himself against the metal, exploring the possibilities of brute force. The muscles in his shoulders were bulging impressively, and she could see how deeply the cuffs were biting into his skin as he exerted tremendous force against the chain. He made no impression at all on the steel. How could he? If he couldn't pick the locks, then he was successfully captive until she released him. It was a stimulating thought.

Emma breathed warmly against his thigh, let the hand stroking his stiffening maleness descend to cradle the temptingly plump sac nestling between his legs. Soft, the skin, sharply contrasting the hard stones within. Fascinating. She watched his eyes, saw the quickly hidden flare of arousal. Again, she said, “Face it, you're completely at my mercy.”

“That,” he said, suddenly sounding faintly husky, “is what concerns me.”

He moved so quickly that Emma had no chance to evade him. His hands were chained, but the rest of him wasn't. A twist of the long, agile body, an impossibly fast roll onto one hip, and suddenly he had her pinioned, face-down, one knee pressed sharply into the small of her back. Emma resisted, tried to break free, knowing he couldn't possibly keep her pinned when he was so awkwardly twisted, his weight in the wrong place. It was a mistake. It gave him the ideal opportunity to scissor his legs around her waist, locking his feet together to make the hold even harder to break.

“Fifteen all,” Steed said mildly.

Whether it was from so much time spent riding she didn't know, but he had very strong thighs. Emma felt rather as if she were suddenly trapped in a vise. Breathing was not very easy. Steed couldn't break his restraints, and Emma seriously doubted she could break hers. Not by force, anyway. Which only left low cunning. She relaxed, hoping he would, too. He didn't. Steed was far too wily to fall for such an obvious ploy. In an odd, perverse sort of way, it was wildly erotic. She could feel his male strength, could feel his penis arrogantly hard against her back. All was fair in love and war, as Steed himself was fond of saying. Emma grasped his leg, drove her thumb mercilessly into his calf muscle, half an inch from the white, hairless scar that marred the skin. There was a surprised yelp of pain, sharply cut off, and an instinctive, momentarily relaxation of the pressure that held her fast. Before he could react, Emma struggled fiercely and rolled free, positioning herself well out of range.

“Thirty-fifteen,” she said, panting slightly.

Steed glowered at her. “That was a dirty trick, Mrs. Peel.”

“One I learnt from you, I believe.” She tossed her hair back, gazed at him haughtily, “Oh, well, if you're not going to play nicely...”

His eyes narrowed suspiciously, “And what, exactly, is that supposed to mean?”

“You’ll find out,” Emma told him, and got up from the bed, turning her back on him and leaving the room.

It wouldn’t be easy. If he decided to resist in earnest, it would be impossible. The thought, though, was very, very exciting. In the elegant, old-fashioned bathroom with its Victorian fixtures and black and white floor tiles, Emma extracted the cord from the dressing gown hanging on the back of the door. Short on inspiration for a second substitute rope, she tried the living room. Steed had started to undress there, earlier that night, casting his clothes carelessly onto the divan. He would certainly object to his tie being appropriated for such a purpose, but Emma felt that she was already so far down the road to damnation that it probably didn’t matter very much. Thus equipped, she went back to the bedroom.

The moon was still very bright, illuminating the room perfectly. Steed wasn’t renowned for being slow on the uptake. He shook his head slowly as he saw what she was holding, “You haven’t got a hope, Mrs. Peel.”

She smiled; a very meaningful sort of smile, “We’ll see.”

“Over my dead body.”

Emma casually dropped the makeshift bonds onto the end of the bed, as if she was honestly discarding the idea. There were, as the old saying said, more ways of killing a cat than drowning it in cream. Deliberately sensual, she knelt beside him, arching her body to the very best possible effect. She didn’t need to look at Steed to know that he was transfixed. In some ways he was laughably easy to manipulate. She lowered herself onto him, making sure he could feel her hardened nipples rubbing against him as she slid down his body. With considerable premeditation, she pressed her groin against his leg, letting him feel her moist heat. In a very low, seductive tone, she breathed, “Relax...”

He didn’t. His body was wire tense, but it was a very different sort of tension. His penis twitched, craving her attention. Once again, Emma lowered her mouth to it. Hot, rigid flesh, taut and needy, reared up at her. Exciting to have so much power over him. Exciting to be able to possess that reckless, pulsing hardness. Swiftly, perhaps needing it almost as much as he did, Emma closed her mouth around him. With no preamble, she started to suck, flicking her tongue over and round the smooth head, finding and tasting the first clear secretions, salty, viscous. With one hand she grasped the thick root of the shaft, while the other returned to his balls, fondling and squeezing gently, rolling the stones in the pouch, doing everything she could to stimulate him. Steed moaned, a low, animal noise, raw and aroused, pulled the handcuffs tight. His hips strained up at her. Emma took as much of him as she could without gagging, licking and sucking, her eyes closed. She was hardly aware of it, but her own hips were moving in time as she rubbed herself against his leg.

Everything seemed to have become far more imperative. Steed’s body was so very eager, his need so very sharp. Emma responded keenly to that need, wanting to satisfy it; desperate to satisfy it. He was moaning, quiet but intense, pulling against the restraints, his head back, exposing his vulnerable throat. Instinct, more than anything else, told her that he was close to the edge. Very close indeed. She felt his balls tighten, felt the mounting pressure. He was only seconds away. Emma didn’t ease back. She wanted him to reach that peak, wanted him to finish. A hoarse, guttural shout, and the explosion took him in long, heaving surges. Practised, Emma didn’t try to pull away. His semen, warm and

thick, spilled into her mouth in several powerful spurts. Whether from instinct or love didn't matter; Emma swallowed it anyway.

He was moaning softly, his body slowly starting to lose its tension. Normally, Emma would have remained with him in the gentle aftermath, tenderly easing him back to a stable plateau, but not this time. This time she had a very definite agenda. Quickly, but as stealthily as she could, Emma grabbed the improvised bonds, knowing that it was her best opportunity to secure him. A swift pass around one ankle, a quick knot and a neat lasso of the bedpost. One leg bound almost before he had a chance to begin to think about what she was doing. She got the dressing gown cord onto his other ankle before he started to resist. There was a brief and intense struggle. Emma sat on his shin, using her weight to hold him, just managed to get the cord round the other bedpost and tied off before he arched violently enough to unseat her. For Steed, though, it was too late.

Legs splayed apart, hands secured above his head, he was thoroughly caught. He glared at her balefully. Emma relaxed back against the foot of the bed, watching him with hooded eyes, simultaneously amused and aroused. Licking her lips provocatively, she said, "Game, set and match to me, I think."

His tone was so gentle it was hair-raising. "You cannot begin to imagine the extent of the retribution I'm going to exact for this, Mrs. Peel."

"Assuming, of course," Emma said mildly, "that I don't decide to keep you like that forever. I have to say, the idea has a certain appeal."

"Would you like," he asked with deceptive charm, "to put a collar and lead on me, as well?"

"Tempting." Emma let her eyes roam over him slowly. "You really are a very fine figure of a man. Steed."

"Thank you. Perhaps, now you've had your entertainment, you would like to release me? My shoulders are getting stiff."

"You really should be more patient." Emma told him, and stretched her legs out. Idly, she rubbed a foot against his hip. "Seeing you like that gives me all sorts of interesting ideas."

Steed gazed at her with immense courtesy, "I'm so very happy for you. Please remember that you will be paying for each of them in full."

"I'll bear that in mind, I promise. Now, however..." she let her words trail off and simply smiled.

Starting at his feet, Emma began to explore. She knew his body very well, but there was something markedly different about exploring him when he was powerless to prevent it. By the time she reached his muscular thighs, Emma was feeling quite intoxicated. There was a throbbing ache between her legs that urgently needed to be assuaged. Her explorations seemed to have had something of an effect on Steed's anatomy. He wasn't eighteen, with the impulsive desperation of youth, and he wasn't fully erect, but despite the evening's calls on his energy, he was definitely reacting to her deliberate caresses. An

idea formed in Emma's mind, and she knelt up, easing one knee over him before sitting back on her haunches. Something in Steed's grey eyes flared.

"My turn," Emma told him, and raised herself up again as she took hold of his penis. If it wasn't as rigid as it had been earlier, it was certainly firm enough for her purpose. Intent, now, on her own pleasure, she closed her eyes and started to rub the smooth head of the captive organ against her aching, hungry flesh. Steed moaned softly, but Emma didn't open her eyes. There was something fiercely erotic about using his warm, vital body as an inanimate object, about being able to do exactly as she pleased. His hips drove up at her, as if he was clumsily trying to drive himself home. Emma prevented it, holding his shaft gently enough, but keeping it enslaved to her wishes. It glided smoothly in her moisture, creating a warm, slick friction that she could direct where she chose. It was good - it was very, very good - but it wasn't enough. She wanted - needed - to feel him inside, to luxuriate in the sensation of absorbing him, of making him a part of her.

For a moment or two more, she toyed with him, then suddenly, unexpectedly, bore down on him. A wonderful, familiar stretching as her body accepted him, conformed to him, and then the sensation of being completely filled. Emma sat on his hips, consciously deeply impaled on him, and opened her eyes. Steed was gazing at her, looking simultaneously inquisitive and covetous. He was throbbing inside her. Emma could feel it very distinctly. She knew what he expected. He expected her to start moving, to start riding him as she always did when she sat above him. It was tempting, but it wasn't what she had in mind. Instead of withdrawing a little to start the smooth motions he expected, Emma bore down on him even harder, forcing him even deeper. It was almost pain, almost pleasure. A satisfying, arousing combination of both.

"Emma..." he said, his voice rough with renewed desire.

Emma stared into his eyes, as if she could read her own destiny there, but there was nothing but his raw, pent-up need for her. The need, she was certain, to possess her. However egalitarian he was, Steed was innately male, with a very male need to possess... It wasn't something she had considered very much in the past, but now, with him so completely slaved to her whims, she recognised it in him. He was there, there deep inside her, but at her instigation, by her design, and for her pleasure. She stayed where she was, sitting astride him, and suddenly wasn't it she who possessed him?

He tried to thrust up at her, but bound hand and foot as he was, with her weight bearing down on him, he didn't have the leverage or the free movement to exert himself the way he normally would have done. Emma stayed static, controlling him. The heat of him, the size of him... impressive, but thoroughly captive. Watching his eyes, Emma reached down, caressing her stomach gently, heading lower. It galvanised him into another futile attempt to thrust. He couldn't do it. For the first time, Emma was completely in control, not because he allowed it, but because he had no choice. She could feel his frustration. Wickedly, she tensed her internal muscles, tightening around him. It made him groan.

"Emma..." he said again, and this time there was a pleading note beneath the huskiness.

Feeling impossibly sensual, wildly lascivious, Emma let her fingers slip lower, instinctively finding the hard bud of her aroused clitoris. The effect on Steed was dramatic. He braced against the restraints, muscles bulging under his skin, trying to tear himself

loose. Emma watched him fighting the bonds that held him, knew he couldn't succeed in his desperate attempt to break free. His ferocity only excited her more. She felt reckless and uninhibited, freed, perhaps, by his captivity. Freed to do anything she chose. Had she ever before behaved quite so brazenly in his presence? No. Something had always held her back, had always forced her to observe a certain decorum, however heady and sensual their lovemaking had been.

She was Cartney's Queen Of Sin, siren of the Hellfire Club. She was a spirited, uninhibited young woman who had cast off the shackles of convention. Her fingers moved quickly, hotly, no longer hesitant. Steed was fighting tenaciously, but to no avail. Emma had won. One battle, at least, in a war she had been oblivious to. She flexed her thighs, allowing a slight rhythmic movement, enough to torment him, not enough to begin to satisfy him. The heat and the pressure had built to an almost unbearable level. Emma wanted it to last, but she was too hungry for the intense release that was so very near.

The climax tore at her, centred on her aching clitoris, but licking through her like flames fanned by the wind. Whether she knew it or not, she started to ride him, hard and frenzied as the violent orgasm peaked and - impossibly - held. Shockwaves, one after the other, making her throw her head back and cry out, her free hand behind her, fingers digging into the muscles of his thigh. On and on, long after it should have ended, shuddering and impossibly wonderful. On and on, until the peak crumbled dramatically and she toppled forward onto him, still moaning softly, her heart pounding, internal muscles still twitching with stray spasms.

Slowly, very, very slowly, awareness came trickling back. The first sensation was of heat. Steed's body, taut and hot, sweat beading on his skin, matting the hairs on his chest. Sanity approached her cautiously, tentatively, and with it, it brought guilt and a touch of shame. Steed was still breathing quickly, and she could feel the ripples of tension catching at his muscles. For a moment she didn't dare look at him. How could she? Suddenly, she felt distanced from him, from the whole ludicrous situation. She didn't feel empowered, she felt disorientated. Where were the arms that always curled clumsily around her? Where was his tranquil, stunned tenderness? Where was the moment when she could have asked him for the moon and he would cheerfully have given her the stars as well?

Embarrassed and disconcerted, Emma kept her face turned away from him. She didn't want to see whatever was reflecting in the grey eyes. A quick movement disengaged them swiftly, painlessly, and as she rolled free, she couldn't help but see the accusing hardness of his penis. A hasty atonement was required if she ever wanted to look him in the eye again. No more teasing. Not now. She reached for him, but the moment she touched him there was a warning growl, low in his throat. He thought she was going to torment him further. The knowledge was an icy shock to Emma. Suddenly the game didn't seem exciting. Suddenly it seemed tawdry and senseless, making a mockery of the hard, weathered body spread-eagled helplessly before her.

Pulling her hand back as if burned, Emma knew she had to look at him. Had to face him, had to face the consequences of what had seemed to be just a harmless, stimulating entertainment. She lifted her head, stared straight at him. It seemed to be the best way. Even in the moonlight, she immediately saw the immense self-control stamped on his handsome features. Wary grey eyes flicked over her, assessing her. A heartbeat of time, then Steed's voice saying softly, hypnotically, "The key is on the bureau."

Emma couldn't decipher his mood. Couldn't decide if he was offended and enraged or perfectly equable. It seemed, however, like a very good idea to obey the tacit order. Without delay. Who, she wondered, walking across the room, was controlling who? She took his keys back to the bed, stooped to free his right wrist. His gaze was steady, unblinking, and it didn't leave her. The flesh beneath the steel looked red and bruised. A prickle of mortification shivered delicately down Emma's spine. She felt exactly as she had felt when her father had caught her thirteen year-old self stealing cigarettes from the box in his study. Steed's silence unnerved her. Perhaps it was supposed to.

He didn't take the keys from her, simply held out his left arm. Wondering what revenge was about to befall her, Emma unlocked the other cuff. The handcuffs fell onto the rumpled counterpane with a metallic jingle. She drew back slightly, not sure whether to keep her distance or not. Slowly, Steed sat up. He ran a hand through his tousled dark hair, smoothing it back into a semblance of order. Perfectly controlled, every tiny movement. He leaned forwards, edged down the bed a little, began to pick at the knot securing the nearest ankle.

Hesitantly, Emma sat herself on the edge of the bed. After a moment, she risked reaching out to pat his shoulder. Trying for a breezy sort of banter, she said, "They say variety is the spice of life, Steed."

The mildness of his tone surprised her, "They do indeed."

Emma watched the muscles in his back and shoulders moving fluidly under his skin. So much more powerful than he looked, Steed. So much stronger, so much more durable. If he had decided to whip round and pin her to the bed, she couldn't have stopped him. But Steed had more finesse than that, and his revenge would be far more subtle. She just knew it.

"How would you like," he said easily, finally freeing one ankle and turning his attention to the other, "to go and get me a drink? I'm really extraordinarily thirsty. Must be the weather."

Emma didn't altogether trust him. In fact, she didn't trust him as far as she could physically throw him. Which wasn't very far at all. There wasn't very much she could do about the impending retribution, however. Better just to play along with him and accept whatever sly retaliation he meted out. Better to let him even the score as soon as possible. She gave him a bright, innocent smile, "Of course I'll get you a drink. What would you like, oh Lord and Master?"

"A mere sip of champagne would be most acceptable, my dear."

So damned elegant, even when he was doubtless plotting some heinous revenge for the indignities he had suffered. Emma stood up and pantomimed the faintest bow before slipping quickly from the bedroom.

Straining to hear the slightest noise behind her, she went in search of the bottle of Krug she knew was resting in the refrigerator. Emma thought she heard a footfall. Nervous as a jumpy cat, she glanced over her shoulder. No sign of him. She crossed the kitchen, stooped to open the refrigerator door. A hand descended from nowhere, snagged her wrist and bore it down, pinning it against the tiled top of the cupboard. Emma yelped, more in surprise than in pain, but it was too late. He'd seized her other hand as well, and he was

suddenly very close up behind her. Very, very close. More to test the grip than anything else, Emma made a vague attempt to struggle. Just as well struggle against the steel shackles she had used on him. He wasn't using enough force to hurt her, but he held her fast.

Steed never used his superior strength against her. Never. If she tussled playfully with him, he always kept that strength curbed, always allowed her a chance of victory. He'd never, ever held her so relentlessly before. Emma suspected that even if she'd struggled in earnest, she still wouldn't have been able to break free, especially since he was using one braced leg to prevent her from lashing backwards with a well-aimed heel. It didn't surprise her that he could hold her so easily. Hadn't she seen Steed successfully tackle and restrain men even bigger than he was? Technique, she knew, was more important than brute strength. And Steed had both.

Emma relaxed. There was no point in trying to resist. Retribution, it seemed, was to be swift.

He loosened the grip, as if he'd made his point, said softly, close to her ear, "There's one other little service you could do for me."

He was still hard. She could feel it. Smiling to herself, Emma said simply, "You didn't seem to be interested."

"I had other things on my mind. Now, however..."

Before she could turn, he was moving behind her. Swift, surprisingly graceful, flexing his knees to align himself. Emma made no attempt to stop him. If that was what he wanted, well, what possible interest could she have in stopping him? Perfectly positioned, Steed leaned into her, using his weight to drive himself slowly and remorselessly home. Emma stayed bent forwards, secretly luxuriating in the inevitable thrill of sensations the unhurried invasion induced. He started to move, slow, long thrusts that spoke of a rigid control.

So soft it was almost a whisper, "I never realised you had such a wicked streak, Mrs. Peel..."

Her body was warming to him automatically. Slightly tender from the night's erotic adventures, she was grateful for the fact that he seemed inclined towards a gentleness she probably didn't deserve. A cultured man of refined tastes, Steed was as discerning in his love-making as he was in everything else. Thoroughly elegant. It was one of any number of reasons that drew Emma back to his bed time and time again. Elegance, finesse, maturity and wild, hot-blooded passion. She couldn't easily imagine once again sharing such sweet intimacy with anyone else. Perhaps he really had bewitched her, completely captivated her. More than a few people had warned her about John Steed when she had first become acquainted with him. He had that kind of reputation as a dangerous and charismatic charmer.

Steed had increased the pace so subtly that she hadn't been aware of the change at first. Faster, shorter thrusts, perfectly timed, but not quite as harmonious. Elegant he might well be, but there was a raw edge to Steed, too. Emma stopped thinking about it, conditioned herself to simply accept it. She knew her own body, and however pleasant the sensations rolling through her, she doubted that she would reach the tumultuous peak. It

didn't matter. She stretched herself forwards, allowing him to go deeper, wanting to please him. Emma could hear him breathing quickly, each breath shallow and needy. He was burning, and his self-control was melting away like the morning frost as the sun climbed higher in the sky. Rougher, faster, altogether more demanding. Impossibly, his urgency began to call forth a renewed hunger in her own flesh. An unexpected gift, one that she had no intention of wasting, if it was being freely given.

He was gripping her hips now, holding her firm as he drove into her with increasing violence. Fast, impulsive thrusts, designed, it seemed, to satisfy him as quickly as possible. Emma's orgasm came from nowhere. Quick and needy, a sharp crest that didn't linger, snatched spontaneously. She shuddered, feeling the diminishing aftershocks, and despite herself, she suddenly longed for him to finish. Her wish was very quickly granted. A blissful grunt, a low, throaty moan; short, hard, staccato thrusts, and then the unique sensation of his climax, of the liquid fire abruptly surging into her, through her. A final jerk of his hips, taut and spasmodic, and then his weight on her back as his body relaxed.

For just a moment or two, Emma waited, then she eased away from him slightly, feeling him slip free. She turned, put her arms around him, cradled his dark head into her shoulder, stroking his damp hair gently. When she judged he was in a fit state to understand her, she said softly, "Sweet revenge, Steed?"

Apparently rather reluctantly, he raised his head a fraction. Grey eyes glinted at her in the moonlight. Still husky, he said charmingly, "My dear Mrs. Peel... You didn't think that was my revenge, surely?"

It had been a faint hope. Emma hunched a shoulder slightly, "I didn't think so, somehow... I don't suppose it would help if I promised to be on my best behaviour from now on?"

"No," Steed said placidly, "I don't think it would."

"Ah, well. It was worth a try. When do you intend taking your revenge?"

"That, my dear, would be telling." A pause, then a shrewd look, "Are you all right?"

Emma realised she had swayed slightly. Suddenly she was very, very tired. She didn't want to know how late it was. Tired, and tender in several intimate places. There was always a penalty to be paid for such reckless passion. Sensing the gentleness of his mood, she didn't bother to banter, just said, "Just rather weary, that's all."

"The youth of today," Steed said, shaking his head, "no stamina."

But he picked her up and carried her back to the bedroom anyway. Steed was, after all, a gentleman.

-oOo-

Emma woke a little before nine on the Sunday morning. Steed was lying next to her, already awake, and she was remarkably surprised to find herself free and unmolested. Then again, Steed had probably considered it far too predictable to emulate her idea. He was staring at the ceiling, apparently lost in thought, hands behind his head. Both his wrists, she saw immediately, were visibly bruised from his battle against the unyielding

steel of the cuffs. She didn't move, didn't betray her wakefulness. Her attitude towards the night's misbehaviour had changed again. It had been... entertaining. Stimulating. Steed's attitude had eased her own. Hadn't she fallen asleep curled affectionately against him? Hadn't he carried her from the kitchen with wry amusement and gentle tolerance? He evidently bore her no malice. She just hoped that his shirtsleeves were long enough to hide the bruises.

Steed would have his revenge. Emma didn't doubt it for a single moment. Subtle, appropriate revenge, if she knew him half as well as she thought she did. He might wait a day, a week, a month, but he would pay her back for the liberties she had taken. With interest. The thought was not as intimidating as it should have been. It was undoubtedly dangerous, but Emma trusted him.

Moving at last, she nuzzled against his chest, inhaling the distinctive scent of him. Gentle. Affectionate. She had a sneaking suspicion that she did love him, however imprudent it might be. Steed turned his head, his eyes looking even lighter in the morning sunlight. Perhaps he was already hatching some diabolical scheme. Perhaps he was simply enjoying the quiet restfulness of a Sunday morning. Emma smiled at him, a fond, genuine smile that was spontaneous.

Steed said mildly, "Good morning, Mrs. Peel."

She didn't trust him. Not as far as she could throw him. But she did like him.

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To be continued in...

"Chains Of Temptation"  
Part Two - Retaliation

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CHAINS OF TEMPTATION - JMR

Chains Of Temptation

J.M. Rolls, 1999

“The art of pleasing consists in being pleased.”  
William Hazlitt

## PART TWO - Retaliation

“Edward Jackson,” Emma Peel said with strained patience, “is an anthropologist, as well you know. A very eminent anthropologist who hasn’t given a lecture here in England for over six years. If you ever bothered to listen to me, you’d know that I’ve been talking about attending his seminar in Cambridge for weeks now.”

“My dear Mrs. Peel,” Steed said, in the infuriating tone that tried to suggest that she was maligning him, “I’m well aware of your interest in Professor Jackson and whatever fascinating insights he has to offer on the tribes of Borneo -”

“New Guinea.” Emma corrected snidely.

Steed ignored her interruption, “- I was merely giving you the chance to spend a couple of days in Paris. Of course, if Cambridge is more to your taste...”

Irritated, Emma glared across the restaurant table at him. He looked back, expression bland. There were times - quite a few times, actually - when Emma found the temptation to strangle him with his Old School Tie nigh on impossible to resist. There was something singularly irritating about his complacent equability. The most annoying thing about the whole situation was the fact that she would thoroughly have enjoyed a day or two in Paris. Why fate had to conspire to hand Steed an assignment acting as a courier at exactly the same time as she had planned to be in Cambridge, Emma didn’t know. It just wasn’t fair.

He reached out to pick up the half-empty bottle of wine, and she was certain he deliberately let his shirt cuff ride up so that she could see the faded bruises encircling his wrist. She wouldn’t have put it past him to deliberately darken them with Indian ink, just to lengthen the time for which she was supposed to feel guilty. Sharply, she said, “You can go to Paris on your own, Steed. I’m going to Jackson’s lecture.”

“Fair enough,” Steed said mildly, “Don’t say you weren’t given the chance.”

Emma glowered.

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“Boyfriend?” Pinkerton asked, refilling her glass again. He was none too subtle, and obviously optimistic. Since Jackson’s lecture that afternoon, he had been pursuing her doggedly.

“Something like that,” Emma said dryly, wondering what Steed would think of the colloquial description.

The young man's sandy eyebrows drew down into a frown, "Inevitable, I suppose, that such a beautiful woman would already be taken. Ah, well. So tell me, Emma, what does he do, this boyfriend of yours? Barrister? Businessman?"

Emma thought about it for a moment, then said blandly, "Secret agent."

Pinkerton laughed uproariously. When his mirth subsided, he said, "Of course. Obviously. I really should have guessed. James Bond, eh? Double-oh whatever."

She smiled, playing along with him. Funny how sometimes the truth could be a better artifice than a lie. There was nothing overtly objectionable about Miles Pinkerton, but he was beginning to grate on her nerves. Young, brash, obviously very full of himself. Not unlike a younger version of someone else she knew, but nowhere near as disarmingly urbane. She wondered, for a moment, whether Steed was currently having dinner with some pretty girl in a chic Parisian restaurant. Probably.

"What did you think," Emma said, trying to steer the conversation into a more interesting area, "of Professor Jackson's theories on the introduction of modern technology into primitive areas?"

Pinkerton shrugged his shoulders blithely, "I've heard it all before, when I was a student in America. Reactionary, if you ask me. The old boy has a bee in his bonnet about it. Strange fellow altogether, Jackson."

"Oh?" It was a more interesting avenue to follow than some.

"He has some... curious... hobbies. Amateur photography, that sort of thing." Pinkerton wriggled his eyebrows meaningfully. "Never seen so many slides and photographs of nubile young tribeswomen. And tribesmen, come to that. Have you ever been to one of his parties? No, of course, you wouldn't have. You should, you know... Very enlightening."

"Really?" Emma said, slightly curious and rather sceptical.

"Oh, yes." Again, a meaningful look. "Actually, the Dean's having a bit of a do for him tomorrow night. Promises to be the most entertaining affair in Cambridge so far this year. I say, how would you like to come along with me?"

-oOo-

"Who is to say," Edward Jackson declaimed, "whether the sexual proclivities of one society are any more or less perverse than those of another? Are some tribal rites of passage perversions, by our standards? Who can possibly have the right to judge?"

Emma wasn't sure whether the murmur that went through his listeners was one of polite agreement or uncomfortable embarrassment. One young girl, obviously an undergraduate, had flushed such a dark crimson that she looked almost literally like a beetroot. Emma, older and wiser, suspected that Jackson not only enjoyed playing to an audience, but was doing everything he possibly could to outrage that audience. Little wonder that he hadn't remained in favour at Oxford, and had departed in high dudgeon to pursue his interests elsewhere. She sipped her wine and stayed on the edge of the little group, listening and absorbing, quietly forming her own opinions.

Later, when she was standing alone near the decimated buffet, she was surprised when Jackson approached her. He was tall and stocky, and he walked with an odd, shambling gait that might have been as affected as the round lensed spectacles perched halfway down his blunt, fleshy nose, or the badly tied Old Etonian tie around his neck. His eyes, though, were dark, intelligent and penetrating, and his tone, when he addressed her, was matter-of-fact and undramatic. He said, "Emma Peel, is it? Emma Knight, as was. Harrington's student."

"You're very well informed, Professor," Emma said coolly, but she shook his proffered hand gravely.

"You think I'm very rude, don't you?" Jackson asked, sounding slightly amused. "Well, perhaps I am. Call it one of the privileges of academia. I believe your particular interest is in the indigenous peoples of the Amazon basin?"

"It was," Emma confirmed, "but I'm afraid that nowadays anthropology is merely an interesting hobby of mine."

"What a waste to the field. I've just come back from Brazil myself. Fascinating place. Fascinating region. Who knows how many undiscovered tribes there may yet still be living in the rainforest?"

Emma listened to him politely at first, but then with growing interest. Whatever his foibles, it seemed that his reputation as a brilliant anthropologist was richly deserved. She couldn't say she altogether liked him, but she was beginning to respect him for the depth of his knowledge. He was incisive, too, and she began to genuinely enjoy their conversation.

"Sex," he said abruptly without any sign of dramatic effect, "is an important, and much neglected, field in anthropology. Don't you agree? It is the one thing that defines us all, and yet the prudish mores of outdated convention restrict its scientific study."

It was, she decided, a unique angle. If, indeed, it was an angle. Which she sensed it was. His gaze kept sliding down to her breasts. It was rather unnerving. Refusing to be intimidated, she said archly, "I might agree with you."

"I thought," he said, "that you might. In our own history, we can find parallels with the phallus worship of many primitive tribes today. The Celts were head-hunters, Mrs. Peel, but they worshipped the male genitalia, too. What better proof than the Maypole that you can find on every village green in the spring?"

-oOo-

Nothing, nothing at all, would have induced Emma Peel to accompany Jackson back to the house he rented. Except the attempt that was made on his life in the college's quadrangle as he departed. A man, tall and slim, and very blond, jumped from the concealing shadows, a knife in his hand, and if Emma hadn't reacted instinctively, it was quite possible that Professor Edward Jackson would have been a dead man. The would-be assassin, roughly deterred, had managed to make good his escape, leaving Emma to do the only thing she could do under the circumstances. Escort Jackson back to his house.

Unwillingly, she had agreed to stay for a drink. A single, solitary drink. It seemed churlish not to agree, when he was so patently shocked by what had happened. After refusing point blank to telephone the police, Jackson had excused himself briefly, telling her to look around as much as she liked until he returned. As an anthropologist, albeit an amateur one, it wasn't an opportunity that Emma could quite bear to pass up. The house wasn't large, and every ground floor room she wandered into seemed to contain the scattered debris of what was undoubtedly a fine collection of artefacts and specimens. Everything from ceremonial Masai spears to fearful-looking shrunken heads. Jackson, it seemed, was something of a human magpie.

Too fascinated to wonder where her host had got to, Emma finally stumbled upon what seemed to be a makeshift library. Books and magazines lined every available shelf, and stood in teetering piles everywhere. A row of decorated human skulls sat on the windowsill regarding her malevolently. It was the skulls that made her open the internal door, perhaps to get away from their disconcerting gaze. Beyond the library, another room, a little smaller, containing a number of packing cases and ramshackle furniture covered with yet more of Jackson's collection.

The collection housed in the little room was... unique. Scientific or pornographic? Emma couldn't quite decide. Pictures and photographs, models and sculptures, strange, intimidating items carved from bone and ivory. Things that would have made the Marquis de Sade blush. It wasn't, she decided, healthy. Not remotely. But it was fascinating.

"Ah," Jackson's voice said from behind her, genuinely startling her, "I see you've found my private collection."

Time To Leave, a voice said in Emma's mind. Right Now.

She turned round. Jackson was standing before her looking unperturbed, as if he simply wasn't aware of the riding whip he was flexing absently as he gazed at her. The temptation to laugh derisively was only suppressed by a tincture of fear that was far from pleasant. Jackson smiled charmingly, but he was between Emma and the door, and she didn't like it one little bit.

"I think," she said with icy calm, "that I've changed my mind about that drink."

"Mrs. Peel," he said, sounding hurt, "surely you won't spurn my hospitality?"

If he didn't move, Emma decided, then she would have no compunction at all about going straight through him. He seemed to sense it.

"Oh, dear," he said, and switched out the light, plunging the room into total darkness.

If she had to club him unconscious with an eighteen-inch long carved ivory phallus to escape, Emma thought, then so be it.

Judging that he was still blocking the doorway, she charged at him. He was closer than she had anticipated, and she hit him with bone-jarring force. He was impossibly solid, and she rebounded off him. Emma would never have believed that he was so compact. He had looked so... fleshy. A hand grabbed her wrist, and again, she was surprised. She

wouldn't have credited him with the sinewy strength of that grip. She kicked out at him, but he was too quick for her, too wily.

It was like grappling a remarkably solid and powerful bear. Adrenaline surged through her. The primitive instinct of fight or flight. They crashed into the wall together, and the unexpected impact stunned her momentarily. Mounting horror made her continue to struggle despite her dizzy disorientation. He was strong. Very, very strong. Not only strong, but adroit, too. Had he done this sort of thing before? Real fear, so powerful that it seemed to turn her muscles to steel, possessed her. Miraculously, she managed to twist away from him, managed to stumble to her feet and start to run towards where she imagined the door to be.

Something lying in her path - a box? - caused her to trip, and she fell heavily, momentarily winded. He was on her in an instant, big and powerful. The scent of her own fear caught in her nostrils. He grabbed her wrist, and she felt rather than heard the snap of metal. Cold. Hard. Unyielding. Handcuffs.

Emma opened her mouth to scream - hardly a natural reaction for her - and then a very familiar voice said, "What did you tell me, Mrs. Peel? 'Relax. You're at my mercy'?"

Steed. Bastard.

Emma didn't know whether the shock or the relief was more powerful.

Steed was in France, not due back for at least another day. Steed was still in Paris. Only he manifestly wasn't.

If he hadn't already handcuffed one wrist, and been pinning the other to the floor, Emma would certainly have impulsively slapped him for the amount of genuine terror he had induced. Instead, she told him exactly what she thought of him. Graphically.

"Now, now," his voice said mildly in the darkness, "that sort of language is most unladylike. Quite unbecoming. And, as far as I'm aware, there's no doubt about the legitimacy of my parentage."

It was evidently a conspiracy. When Jackson had turned off the light, Steed must have switched places with him. Emma's heart was still racing, but the fear had turned to anger. Anger, and an unworthy frisson of excitement. Something else occurred to her. He had handcuffed one of her wrists, but not the other. Perhaps there was still a chance of escape.

Lithe as a cat, he rolled to his feet, pulling her up after him. The library beyond the little room was in darkness, too, and Emma could barely even make out his general shape in the blackness. There was another metallic snap, but not around her free wrist. He had handcuffed her to something. A quick tug revealed that she was secured not to something, but to someone. Whether she liked it or not, where Steed went, she went. At least for the moment. Like warder and prisoner, they were handcuffed together at the wrist.

"This isn't funny, Steed," she said sharply. "All that... it was beyond a joke."

She wouldn't, of course, admit to him that she had been honestly frightened, but she guessed he knew the truth well enough.

“My apologies,” he said, with patently feigned contrition. Then, “Jackson’s a fascinating fellow. Did you know that we were at school together?”

That, at least, answered some of her immediate questions. Of course... that Old Etonian tie. She should have spotted the clues.

“I always felt,” Steed continued, “that he was rather too fond of being caned. And rather too fond of our House Master. He certainly has amassed a very interesting collection over the years, however. Don’t you agree, Mrs. Peel? I do like this house he’s rented. So many of these Victorian houses have been so unsympathetically treated. Have you seen the garden? You really should.”

Emma couldn’t see where his words were leading. Frostily, she said, “Horticulture bores me at the best of times. Do you think we could have the light back on, now you’ve had your fun?”

“Unnecessary, my dear. We’re not staying.”

“What are you up to, Steed? I warn you, I’m not finding this amusing.”

“You’re not? Oh, dear. Well, perhaps a short spin in the countryside will improve your mood. Come along, Mrs. Peel.”

Someone - presumably Jackson - had switched off every light in the house. All Emma could see of Steed was a shadowy outline at her side as he drew her along with him. Just how detailed, she wondered, had the conspiracy been? Steed led her into the hall, out through the front door. The night was warm, but the moon was obscured by clouds. She still couldn’t see him very well, but she could just about discern his features.

“Well?” She asked him haughtily, “Where are we going?”

“Does it matter?” Steed inquired breezily, and started down the path towards the street. It didn’t seem to worry him that anyone passing might justifiably wonder why they were handcuffed together.

A little way down the street from Jackson’s rented house there was a small cul-de-sac. Steed’s vintage Bentley seemed to dominate it, looking completely outlandish and terribly conspicuous. Close to the car’s passenger door, Steed halted. Street lighting turned his features into a dramatic study of light and shade, and stripped the colour from his eyes, making them appear eerily achromatic.

“I told you that there would be a price to pay for your misbehaviour.” He said smoothly, surprisingly gently. His strange, light eyes glittered at her, amused and anticipatory. Softly, so very softly, “Will you pay the price, Mrs. Peel?”

A shiver ran up and down Emma’s spine. She was being expertly manipulated, and she knew it. Steed understood her very well indeed, and he knew she prided herself on her courage, on her determination to face things head on with as little fear as possible. Not only was he subtle, he was very clever. He knew which levers to use, and where to apply them. Cunning old fox. He’d put her into an untenable position. How could she possibly refuse to pay the debt? It went against every facet of her character. Artfully, he’d put her

into a situation where she had no choice but to voluntarily agree. Very, very clever. A worthy revenge. She was almost willing to applaud him.

If she refused, then Steed won immediately. If she refused, she betrayed her own character, her own integrity. Payback. Exquisite and refined. Well, she thought, never let it be said that she was afraid to meet a challenge. Emma looked straight into his eyes and said disdainfully, "Why not?"

From somewhere, he produced the key to the handcuffs and unlocked first his, then her wrist. He didn't need to employ cold, crude steel when he had her so successfully bound by her own sense of honour. A very slight, very gentle breeze stirred Emma's hair.

"We're going to a little party," Steed told her amiably, "I'm sure you'll find it amusing."

Two and two, Emma had discovered, didn't always add up to four where Steed was concerned. But this time she suspected that it did. She remembered Pinkerton's words and said quietly, "One of friend Jackson's, no doubt."

Steed, ever the gentleman, opened the passenger door for her.

-oOo-

One of the abiding stories about John Steed that Emma had heard over and over in various forms involved Lord Lovatt's daughter, Victoria. The story, perfectly true, although doubtless embroidered over the years, had it that many years before, the estimable Lord Lovatt, noticing that his only daughter was conspicuously absent from the annual Hunt Ball being held at Galvesdon Hall, had taken a midnight stroll through the formal gardens at the rear of the great house, possibly expecting to find her in an innocent clinch with Sir Paul Harper's son, one of her particular favourites. Victoria, seventeen and probably far more wayward than her father would accept, had certainly had something of a following amongst the county's eligible young men, and Lord Lovatt, by all accounts, had been more amused than anxious about her conduct until that night.

The tale went that Lord Lovatt had eventually located his daughter in the family summerhouse, but that her companion had not been Anthony Harper, and that her activities had not been remotely innocent. Steed himself, when Emma had teased him with the story, had neither confirmed or denied the accusation that he had fled trouserless from Lord Lovatt, who had given chase with the sole intention of horsewhipping him to within an inch of his young life. Mischievous friends asserted that Steed's escape had been nothing short of miraculous, given Lovatt's furious determination to flay him alive.

The story, if it had finished there, would have been entertaining, but not particularly remarkable. John Steed, by all accounts, had been a handsome and roguish young scoundrel, a charming rascal of some surprising notoriety, given his tender years, and such behaviour hardly seemed uncharacteristic of a young man with such a reputation. The true significance of the story lay elsewhere. Lord Lovatt, like many men of his rank and station, had returned to the army at the outbreak of war, and had spent most of his war years in London, directing Allied operations from a Whitehall office. Steed, too, had joined the British Army, but unlike Lovatt, he had been a field officer. Almost inevitably, he had been wounded in action, and had been sent home to England to convalesce. It seemed that either effrontery or stupidity had made him visit Galvesdon Hall one fine day,

but Victoria had joined the WAAF, and was safely posted in Scotland. Her mother, Margaret, however, had been at home.

The key, Emma often felt, to Steed's complex and contradictory nature, lay in that story. Having narrowly avoided a horsewhipping for misbehaving with Lovatt's daughter, no sane, sensible young man with any interest in remaining both alive and remotely respectable, would have had the impudence or courage to flagrantly commit the same transgression with Lovatt's wife. There had always been, it seemed, a streak of wickedness in Steed, a touch of devilment that lurked below the easy grace and charm of a natural gentleman. The passage of years had certainly given Steed a modicum of respectability, had mitigated his dubious reputation as age and maturity, and the weight of experience had smoothed his rougher edges, but Emma knew, better than most, that however suave and genteel Steed appeared to be, he was still the same man who had slept with both Lord Lovatt's wife and daughter. Once a scoundrel, always a scoundrel, even if he was also a gentleman.

If Steed was always - almost always - a perfect gentleman towards her, then wasn't it possible that he was just as capable of displaying the other, darker, side of his nature to her...?

It wasn't the night air that was making her shiver slightly as they drove further into the Cambridgeshire countryside. Nor was it exactly fear. Emma wasn't afraid of Steed. Never had been. It was anticipation. Expectation.

There was more, she felt, to what was being played out than just playful retribution for the uninhibited entertainment Emma had enjoyed at Steed's expense. It was almost as if she had inadvertently provided some kind of catalyst, as if she had inadvertently taken a step towards a better understanding of exactly who and what her eccentric, enigmatic lover really was. As if she had unwittingly given him the opportunity to show her things about him that had only ever been hinted at.

And if Steed could reveal a little more of himself to her, then did she dare reveal more of herself to him in turn?

-oOo-

On a perfectly ordinary country road, Steed suddenly executed a smooth right turn that took the Bentley up a long gravel drive flanked by mature trees. Ahead of them, partially obscured by those trees, Emma could see the lights of a house. Steed glanced at her, features unreadable, "Sir Robert Marsh's house."

Robert Marsh...? Emma raised her eyebrows, "The financier?"

"None other."

At the top of the drive there was a melee of cars. Some expensive, some distinctive, some utterly ordinary and anonymous. A battered grey Vauxhall sat next to a gleaming Aston Martin. Steed tucked the Bentley into a gap between an MG and a smart little Mini Cooper. Switching off the engine, he said, "Are you still prepared to pay the price, Mrs. Peel?"

She sensed a hidden meaning in the question. Simple as it sounded, he was actually asking her something quite different. In his own rather singular way, she fancied, he was asking her whether she trusted him, and if she did, how much she trusted him. It was almost as if every game they had ever played with each other had distilled down to this one evening. What was happening... it had nothing to do with revenge, just as she had suspected. Steed had changed the game, and he'd raised the stakes.

Trust. Steed had trusted her when he had been restrained and at her mercy. Unwillingly, perhaps, but he had trusted her. He could have insisted that she released him, but he hadn't. It might have been against his nature, against his instincts, but he had played along. He had been every bit as curious then as Emma was now. Did she trust him? Of course she did, in most things. But did she trust him in this?

There was another question. A question that had to do with how she really felt about him. Emma could sense that there was an invisible line before her, one that she could step across or not, as she chose.

Inappropriate as it was, a sonorous voice from her childhood echoed through her mind, "...though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me..."

She met Steed's steady gaze and replied simply, "Yes."

-oOo-

Sir Robert Marsh's party put John Cartney's recreated Hellfire Club firmly in its place as the frivolity of a mere dilettante. From the moment Emma walked through the front door, she realised that she was in the presence of people who took their pleasure seriously. Very, very seriously. Lasciviousness permeated the air. There seemed to be a lot of alcohol being consumed, and although Emma couldn't immediately see anything untoward going on, she realised that it was. Couples, trios, even little groups kept appearing and disappearing, and it was painfully obvious exactly what they had been doing, or were about to do.

"If I were you," Steed told her cheerfully, his eyes following an extremely buxom - and completely naked - young woman who was walking across the hallway, "I'd stay in the living room near the buffet and practice your Kung Fu on anyone who tries to make any kind of improper suggestion. If you'll excuse me, I'll be back in a very few minutes."

Unhappy about being abandoned, there wasn't much that Emma could do but take his advice. Edward Jackson sidled up to her from nowhere. He was wearing a wincingly garish shirt and a pair of overly tight white shorts that made his legs look like matchsticks. Cheerfully, he said, "Got here at last, then? I do hope you were amused by our little charade earlier?"

"Vastly," Emma said dryly.

Jackson chuckled, "Dear John always has had a rather bizarre sense of humour."

"So I gather." Emma didn't want to talk to him, but the alternative was even more depressing. She said, "You went to school together, I hear?"

“Oh, yes. Old Etonians, one and all. John called me from Paris and told me to expect you at my lecture.”

“How very thoughtful of him.”

“You really don’t like me, do you?” Jackson asked, sounding amused. “Well, never mind. I dare say it doesn’t matter. I must say, I was surprised when John asked me to ask Robert to invite you both here. These sort of affairs are hardly John’s cup of tea.”

For which, Emma thought, much thanks. She had started to wonder. She was momentarily distracted by an elderly man dressed in black leather who walked past her, trailing a scantily clad and very young man on a delicate silver chain. Not the sort of sight one saw every day. Jackson evidently caught the direction of her gaze, because he said, “Lord Justice Harvey. He must have finished his stint at the Old Bailey early.”

“Fancy.” Emma said.

-oOo-

“Sir Robert’s private museum,” Steed said, opening the door and ushering her inside. “It’s really quite notorious in some circles.”

Emma could see why. It made Jackson’s collection in the little room beyond his library look rather forlorn. She raised her eyebrows and asked, “Is there a point to showing me this?”

“Not at all, only that one has to pass through it to reach the dungeon.” Steed told her blithely.

Somehow, Emma had a horrible suspicion that Steed wasn’t joking. Well, she had no intention of gratifying him with the obvious response. Instead, she simply favoured him with a long, cool look and stepped further into the room. Like a public execution, Sir Robert’s museum was fascinating, in a macabre sort of way. Emma could truthfully say she had never seen anything like it. She wondered if he had the largest collection of erotica in England. Some of the paintings on the walls rivalled anything from the Kama Sutra. Emma wasn’t sure if it was tawdry or inspired. Steed led her through the display cases and the bizarrely-clad mannequins. She wondered what he was thinking, wondered what he thought of Robert Marsh’s hobby. Steed had never struck her as the kind of man who was easily taken aback by anything, and he definitely wasn’t puritanical about such things, but even so...

At the far end of the room there was a very ordinary looking door. Ordinary save for the twin male statues flanking it. Not the sort of statues one found in most museums. On each side of the door, an enormous erect marble phallus pointed the way ahead. Emma tried hard to ignore a tiny, crawling twinge of apprehension as they walked towards that door. Perhaps he was simply employing psychological trickery on her? Perhaps the door opened to reveal nothing more sinister than a broom cupboard?

It didn’t. Steed opened the door and bowed mockingly, “After you, Mrs. Peel.”

As dungeons went, it wasn’t really a dungeon at all. It was rather more like a mirrored gymnasium. Of sorts. Emma didn’t dare try to imagine what purpose some of

the... equipment... in the room served. There was a very large bolt on the inside of the door, whether to stop playmates escaping, or to prevent untimely intrusions, Emma wasn't sure. Steed shot it home with a rather reflective expression on his face. He didn't look like a man who was about to announce that the whole affair was one huge joke. Then again, he didn't altogether look like a man who was preparing to play out his darkest and most exquisite fantasies, either.

Emma couldn't say she was unaffected by the sight of the handy collection of canes and whips mounted on one of the walls. Nor that she could quite ignore the menacing shackles hanging from the opposite wall. Sir Robert, it seemed, had invested a lot of time and trouble to create a room that catered perfectly for his foibles.

Steed was standing a few feet from her, hands on hips, feet braced apart. Emma recognised his stance. Braggadocio, arrogance. A touch of haughty contempt for the world in general. For all its insolence, that stance was unconsciously defensive. He always adopted it when he was facing overwhelming odds, when he knew that things weren't going his way, or when he had a shrewd idea that he was about to come out far worse in an impending fight. That stance told Emma all she needed to know about Steed's intentions. He was good at bluffing - wasn't it, after all, part of his stock in trade? - but like the opponent who suddenly realised he might not actually be as big and dangerous as he liked to appear, Emma realised that he was dissembling.

He was a man who frequently made grand gestures. Sudden flights to Rome, unexpected and extravagant gifts. Inexplicable impulses. She had set the precedent for this game herself, and Steed had taken it as a challenge. It was a matter of pride to surpass her actions, to go a step further, and that step had taken him into an arena that was completely alien to him. To them both. The grand gesture, always Steed's weakness. He had laid his plans meticulously, had schemed and plotted devotedly, but now, facing the denouement, the whole plan had become an empty charade.

Who was in control now? Emma thought. Steed, who had engineered the whole escapade, or Emma herself, empowered by his inability to finish what he had started?

The sudden ascendancy over him was exhilarating. Emma turned on one heel to face him head-on. Steadily, trying not to sound triumphant, she said, "Your move, Steed. What do we do now?"

Deeper and deeper psychology. Steed had handed the power to her the moment she had called his bluff, but wasn't she now goading him into delivering exactly the retribution he had failed to mete out? And did he realise it? Did she?

Caught in his own trap, Steed reacted predictably. A wolf at bay was always more dangerous than a wolf on the prowl. His grey eyes glinted at her, as dangerous as his smooth reply, "Now you pay your dues, Mrs. Peel."

The setting for the drama was irrelevant. Marsh's exotic punishment room was irrelevant. The whole scheme was irrelevant, banal. Only the clash of wills was important.

Suddenly excited by the developing tension, Emma shook her head, "No."

Not once, in all the time she had known him, had Steed attempted to force her to do anything. He had cajoled her into things and he had manipulated circumstances to ensure

her assistance or her co-operation, but he'd never attempted to overtly bend her to his will. Not only was it not his way, but Emma also guessed that he had understood the futility of even trying. Steed was artful and Steed was crafty, and his talent lay in Machiavellian stratagems, not in direct coercion. Manipulation, not duress, was Steed's forte. Her blatant defiance seemed to bewilder him. Steed was used to artfully getting his own way.

Emma could almost see him trying to decide how to react. Evidently, he hadn't considered that she might break the unwritten rules of the game to openly defy him. The excitement lay in the danger, and as long as Emma knew that Steed was bluffing, there was no danger. Her rebellion removed the cosy safety from the artificial situation, created a different dilemma. For whatever reason, wasn't she trying to force him into asserting himself?

There was nothing remotely effeminate about Steed, but he could convey an effete sort of fecklessness, an insouciance that bordered on apathy, an indolence that could be easily mistaken for lassitude. He didn't often overtly display the obstinate single-mindedness and the tough fortitude that had saved his life time and time again. Didn't often show his sharp claws. Steed's motto had always appeared to be *suaviter in modo, fortiter in re*. There were times when Emma found his easy, genial manner simply too amiable, too insouciant. Times when she wanted - needed - to force some perceptible reaction from him. It was very much like sharply prodding a sleeping tiger with a short stick, just to see what it would do. Exciting, in an insanely dangerous sort of way.

"I see," he said, after a few moments.

Go on, Steed, Emma thought, surprising herself, take your revenge.

But another voice in her mind, a cold, whiplash of a voice, said, No! This is not what you want... You are not the kind of woman who secretly pines to be dominated... by anyone.

...And suddenly she saw it. The endless dilemma between them. Two high dominance personalities that warred for superiority... only they were too civilised, too mannerly, too wrapped up in their strident protestations of nonchalance to fight that war. Uneasy equals, maybe, but equals nonetheless. The delicate balance between them relied on the continued non-assertion of so very much.

Reality struck her hard. Suddenly they weren't playing an exciting, surreal game of control and manipulation. Suddenly they were simply caught up in something inane and pointless, a vapid illusion backed by empty threats. Ridiculous. The room in which they stood was ridiculous, Marsh's party was ridiculous, his guests were ridiculous.

Playground games. Dare, double-dare, love, kiss or promise. Children's games.

Steed's eyes were grey. A sea-grey that could appear almost aquamarine in some lights, and like gunmetal in others. Eyes that were intelligent and perceptive as they studied her. He manipulated her because manipulation suited him better than force. Sometimes he succeeded, sometimes he didn't. If he ever barked a direct order at her, Emma always obeyed, because Steed only issued orders when the danger was so acute that there was no time for subtlety. She obeyed because she respected his experience, his perspicacity. She obeyed because Steed had managed to keep himself alive long enough to accrue the wisdom upon which his orders were based.

"This is stupid." Emma said.

Steed watched her acutely. Urbanely, "Yes."

"Shall we beat a hasty retreat?"

"I prefer to make a strategic withdrawal, Mrs. Peel."

-oOo-

Halfway back to Cambridge, with the night half over and the countryside rolling around them, Steed suddenly pulled the big Bentley off the road and into the trees. Emma raised her eyebrows, but said nothing. Another game? No, probably not. Not when they had spent so long that night struggling with the repercussions of complex games of power and control. Deftly, he brought the big old car to a gentle halt. The engine died away to leave an eerie woodland silence. Steed didn't look at her, instead, he stood up and vaulted lightly over the driver's door, landing on the running board and stepping down in a single fluid movement that betrayed his surprising athleticism. Curious, Emma watched him walk around the Bentley's long bonnet and approach the passenger door.

There was something different about the way he was moving. A taut muscularity, maybe, a curbed grace and power that he often exhibited just before he jumped into a skirmish with some nefarious wrong-doer. Something about him had changed. The archness he had been showing all evening had vanished, replaced by something rather more cool-headed and forthright. Without saying a word, he opened the car door and held out his hand. It wasn't an invitation, it was a gentlemanly gesture, like walking on the outside of the pavement or holding her coat for her. Emma let him hand her out of the car, wondering where his actions were leading.

No-one could ever have described John Steed as diffident, but when he chose, he certainly had the reticence that stereotyped his class. Gentlemanly courtesy and decorous reserve. The last thing, the very last thing Emma expected him to do was lean in to kiss her. Nor, when he did, did she expect him to kiss her quite so thoroughly. Normally, when he initiated any kind of amorous contact, he did so playfully, teasingly, taking his time to become more heated. She was startled by the insistence of that kiss, the... impatience? ...of it. The harsh rasp of evening stubble against her cheek was oddly exciting. Deep in the pit of her stomach, Emma felt an acute physical reaction to his unexpected directness. Instinct made her respond keenly to the kiss, but almost before she could grant him that response, he was demanding it.

It was unnerving. Far from unpleasant, but certainly disconcerting. Steed was always so... refined. He could certainly be flatteringly ardent in his attentions, but he was never unrefined. Sometimes Emma had honestly wondered if he was capable of making love to her without employing the exquisite technique and attention to detail that she had come to expect. Slightly breathless, she literally broke the kiss, palms flat on his chest. It was too dark - she couldn't see the answer in his eyes. The arm around her waist was pinning her against him, and she could feel the unequivocal hardness pressing against her through the layers of clothing. Very real, very urgent.

He walked her backwards until she was leaning against the Bentley's cold metal coachwork, lowered his head to her neck. She expected the caress of lips, but she didn't

expect him to bite her. Hard enough to let her know about it, not hard enough to hurt. Something was doing somersaults in her stomach. Rather belatedly, she raised a hand to his head, threaded her fingers through his dark hair, exploring the back of his skull for a moment before tracing lower. It hadn't taken her long to discover how sensitive the back of his neck was. Part of her mind registered the hand that was caressing the curve between her waist and her hip, then forgot about it to concentrate on the hand that had reached her breast.

Emma closed her eyes for a moment, concentrating on the sensations feeding back to her brain, then opened them again, looking up at the night sky for a moment. The moon was breaking through the clouds at last. Steed was kissing her shoulder. Rather breathlessly, Emma managed to whisper, "Rather precipitate of you, Steed..."

His head came up, his eyes meeting hers for just a moment before he kissed her again, as demandingly and as fiercely as before. Finally, it crossed her mind to wonder again about his motivation. At last, it dawned on her that there was more to the situation than a sudden whim or a moment of impetuous desire. She wasn't resisting him, but it didn't matter. He was still dominating her, not by force, but by sheer, raw sensuality. Steed's way. Manipulation, not coercion. Steed's revenge. She couldn't resist him... was incapable of pushing him away. And he knew it. Emma had restrained him to dominate him. With the tables turned, he had no need to restrain her. Everything that she was made her vulnerable. As vulnerable to him as he had been to her. He pulled his head back, letting her see the feral look in his moonlit eyes.

Rather more hoarsely than she would have liked, Emma said, "Bravo. Touché."

The tiniest incline of his head acknowledged her. He kissed her throat, agile fingers unbuttoning her smart white blouse. Steed had never imposed himself on her. Until now. It was... different. Exciting. Wildly, illicitly exciting. Emma seized his shoulders, held them hard, glorying in their solid strength. She could feel him impatiently tugging at her clothing, and that, too, was exciting. His mouth returned to hers, and Emma was grateful. Eagerly, recklessly, she duelled with his tongue, her attention momentarily distracted from what his hands were doing. Too involved with the deep, hungry kiss, she barely realised that he'd succeeded in exposing her body, but she felt him fumbling between them, felt him unzip his trousers.

It was insane, but suddenly she felt like an inexperienced girl again. Felt the same mixture of excitement and trepidation she had felt on that night in Rome when young Simon Latham had... The thought was dashed away by the sudden hardness prodding against her. The sensation caused another shudder of anticipation, another clenching of her stomach muscles. Steed bit her lower lip. Emma didn't care. Her attention was all on the hard male organ nuzzling between her thighs, rubbing ardently against her, gliding in her moist heat. She didn't know it, but she made a soft, desperate keening noise.

Aligned now, Steed pushed forwards with his hips, a blunt, utilitarian thrust that drove him into her. Emma cried out, reached for him savagely, her hands grasping his muscular buttocks, as if she could pull him even deeper inside her. Nothing, nothing at all, could have prepared her for the hot, frenzied urgency of it. Time after satisfying time she had made love with Steed... and there, she realised, with the dwindlingly sane part of her mind, was the difference - Steed always made love with her; now he was making love to her, completely in command. Time after time she had made love with him, and she had

never known him to be quite so fierce, quite so autocratic. He didn't hurt her, but he didn't bother to hide the fact that he could have done so with ease.

It was one of the most wildly erotic encounters that Emma could remember. Steed's revenge, subtle and complete.

-oOo-

Emma shifted restlessly in the passenger seat. She was still hot and damp from the encounter in the trees, despite the breeze as they motored along. Parts of her were hotter and damper than others and the rattling vibrations of the vintage car as it bowled over the tarmac didn't improve matters one little bit. She glanced sideways at Steed again. The road was well-lit, and she could see him with ease. So damnably handsome, John Steed. Not for the first time, she admired his strong, patrician profile. The high cheekbones suggested the possibility of an Eastern European interloper somewhere way back in the de V. Steed family tree, but otherwise those features were typically English. Typically British, anyway. More Celt, maybe, than Anglo-Saxon. Irish blood, Emma had heard, on his grandmother's side. Allegedly.

Perhaps sensing her scrutiny, he glanced her way, drawled easily, "Feeling less faint now, Mrs. Peel?"

She couldn't find it in her heart to be needled by the comment. Placidly, she said, "Yes, thank you."

"Jolly good."

His solicitude as he'd helped her back into the car, Emma very well knew, had covered wicked amusement. Not to mention a rather ungentlemanly degree of smugness. She blamed her near-collapse on weak knee joints. What else could it have been?

Close to Cambridge itself now, Steed finally asked, "Where are you staying? At the University?"

"I was going to, but in the end I booked a room at the Marley Hotel. Rather more civilised, I felt. You?"

"Jackson's putting me up. Though I don't know if that's a blessing or a curse."

"Oh? Sounds fascinating. Do tell."

"Never you mind, Mrs. Peel." Another sideways glance, then, "Of course, I don't expect he'll leave Marsh's until the morning..."

"...and it's awfully late to go back to my hotel. The night porter would be scandalised."

Idly, Emma reached out to rest a hand on his thigh. Whenever he dropped the clutch to change gear, she felt the smooth movement of muscle under her palm. He didn't comment on the contact, didn't even glance at her hand. A few minutes passed uneventfully. Although she was hardly aware of it, Emma's hand started to stray. Down to his knee, back up the long length of his thigh. Across the smooth cavalry twill to the palpable

male bulge. Steed glanced at her quickly, but he said nothing. Emma smirked inwardly and lazily explored the interesting contours. There was, as yet, no definite indication of arousal, but she could still easily identify what lay beneath the soft material.

“We’re almost there,” Steed said blandly.

“Turn right,” Emma suggested.

“Mrs. Peel, far be it from me to criticise your navigational skills, but that will take us in completely the wrong direction.”

Emma raised an eyebrow, then said again, “Turn right.”

Steed turned right. Really, he was a very obliging fellow. When he wanted to be. Emma kept her eyes on the road ahead, but her nimble fingers were at work. Steed executed a smooth left turn to take them closer to the river. His zip willingly surrendered to her. She hadn’t had much of an opportunity to verify her dawning suspicion earlier, but she very quickly confirmed what she had suspected then. Beneath the cavalry twill there was nothing to impede her.

Amused, she said, “Au naturel. How very bohemian of you, Steed.”

He took a hand off the steering wheel to snap his fingers, “I knew there was something I’d forgotten.”

“Fraud,” Emma accused, and gently eased the pliant organ from his trousers. The Bentley veered slightly, almost skimming the kerb, then regained a true course. She said mildly, “Do concentrate, Steed. I’d hate to be a road accident statistic.”

Almost immediately, he started to harden. Steed was dependable like that. Generally. Of course, there had been an odd night or two when he’d finally been forced to demand clemency from her, but Emma hardly felt that she could hold that against him. Not when the pleas had followed such enthusiastic performances. Steed, like Emma herself, wholeheartedly believed in encores. Caressing him adroitly, she followed a new chain of thought. For some indefinable reason, she and Steed had proved to be eminently congruent both as friends and lovers. They liked each other, they respected each other, and they got along very well together. Sexually, they were very, very compatible. What had she thought earlier about there being an invisible line before her? The games they had been playing - hadn’t they proved that they genuinely trusted each other? Not just as working partners, but as lovers? Hadn’t those games been, in fact, just another step along the road to... what?

It had started as friendship. It had blossomed into partnership, and into non-committal, uncomplicated fun. They had slept together the first time because the strength of the attraction between them had been irresistible. Once it had happened for the first time, there had been no reason for it not to happen again. Steed had made it abundantly clear that he was attracted to her, that he was more than willing to share her bed whenever she wanted him to, and as for Emma herself... Well, what possible reason was there for not enjoying herself with a man who was virile, charming and intelligent? Not to mention more than passably handsome.

It was... had been... the perfect situation. Steed was a good friend and an attractive man. He had been a perfect choice for a lover. A man who was willing to be with her when she wanted him, and who didn't sulk or brood when she didn't. Something, though, was changing. Had already changed? Suddenly nothing seemed quite as superficial. Suddenly Emma wasn't at all sure that she wanted the freedom to turn him away, the freedom to flirt with, and perhaps sleep with other men. Who else, after all, could she have played such intimate, dangerous games with? Who else could she possibly have allowed herself to be so open, so uninhibited with?

Solidly, defiantly erect now, the organ in her hand. It never failed to please her, the effect she had on him. She flattered herself that it was more than a simple biological reaction to physical stimulation. It occurred to her that the Bentley was travelling at an artificially slow speed. Steed was not normally noted for his adherence to speed limits. In fact, it was entirely possible that he had the worst record for speeding amongst all the members of the British SIS. His Bentley, he claimed, had been built to race around the circuit at Brooklands, and did not handle well at slow speeds.

"Why," Emma asked, artfully rubbing her thumb against the ridge of his penis, "are we crawling along at this speed?"

"I thought it for the best," Steed told her. It didn't escape her notice that his voice was a shade higher than it's normal smooth baritone.

"Live dangerously," Emma said.

A sly glance, "I rather thought we were."

A few moments later, Emma realised the road they were cruising down was mildly familiar. A little way down on the left she could see Jackson's rented house. She pouted, "Steed, you're just no fun."

"I sincerely hope you'll very soon have cause to retract that statement, Mrs. Peel."

He slowed the big car, brought it to a smooth halt outside the Victorian house. Emma maintained her grasp on him until he pried it loose. It was entertaining watching him trying to establish a suitable level of decency. The zip and the cavalry twill both seemed to be straining against unfair pressure. Archly, she said, "That looks terribly uncomfortable."

"You have no idea." Steed said rather dourly.

She noticed that he didn't attempt his normal jaunty vault from the car. Together, they walked up to the front door. The house was still in darkness. Emma said, "I hope you're right about Jackson."

"Trust me, Mrs. Peel. I happen to know that he had a prospect or two lined up."

-oOo-

Emma tightened her fists on the crisp white sheets, the material balling damply in her hands. The wooden bed creaked gamely in tempo with their fierce movements, making her even more glad Jackson was absent. There was no doubt that anyone trying to get any sleep in the adjacent bedrooms would have been fighting a losing battle, given the

concerto of unrestrained moans and groans that underscored the rhythmic creaking. Nothing tempered the erotic ferocity of their enthusiastic coupling, and Emma, for one, certainly wasn't sorry for that. The game had evaporated, and all that was left was reality. The reality of wanting and being wanted with an intensity that went beyond friendship, beyond the recreational possibilities of light-hearted love-making. If it was obsession, then Emma was glad to be obsessed.

She arched her spine, rising up at Steed, bending her neck so she could kiss his throat, his collarbone, the centre of his chest. She kissed the nearest male nipple, rasping it with her teeth, but it couldn't have hardened any more, whatever she did. Boldly, impulsively, she pushed his shoulder. He rolled obediently, allowed her to take the top position, kept driving into her with commendable strength and energy. Emma rode him mercilessly, gripping his wrists and pinning them to the mattress, but she acquiesced instantly when he twisted to change positions again. How long, she wondered, could it possibly last? So fierce, so passionate. All-consuming.

Steed finished it. Finished it by exploding into her with such force that it pushed Emma over the edge, made her scratch and bite him, cling desperately to him, trying to become part of him, absorbed through his skin. She became liquid, became lava, became something else, something more than herself, more than the sum of both of them. It was power, it was dominance, and it belonged to them both.

Drugged by the aftermath, Emma stayed pressed hard up against him. She could feel his heart pounding, could feel the hair on his chest prickling against her breasts, could feel blessedly strong arms grasping her with a truth that was innocent in its power.

Insanity. Obsession. Reality. He was mumbling sweet, breathless endearments, telling her how sublime she was, how magnificent.

Into the panting, sated validation of it all, Emma spoke, her words spontaneous, tumbling from her before she could analyse them. She mumbled recklessly, "I love you..."

The tragedy of it, or the relief of it, was that Steed was too caught up in the moment to hear what she said. Or so it seemed.

-oOo-

"I can hear him," Emma hissed apprehensively, "He's walking around downstairs."

Steed raised his head for a moment, listened, then said nonchalantly, "So? He probably decided it was high time he came home."

His head descended again, back between her thighs. Emma squirmed in a mixture of pleasure and anxiety. She felt absurdly guilty. It was almost one o'clock in the afternoon. She should have left hours ago. Had intended to leave hours ago. She had even got as far as taking a shower in preparation, but then Steed had joined her under the stinging jets of water and... And her plans had gone awry.

Her legs were hooked over his shoulders and the soles of her feet were resting on his back. It was hardly the most... demure... position to be caught in by one's host. On the other hand, the dark head fitted so well between her thighs... Caught between lust and trepidation, Emma shifted uneasily. She almost wished that Steed wasn't quite so

competent at what he was doing. If he hadn't been calling forth such intense ripples of pleasure, she might have been able to push him away. He was doing diabolical things to her clitoris with his lips and tongue, and the clever finger that had craftily slipped inside her wasn't helping her to make the decision to fend him off. She would have argued to the death in support of the existence of the female G spot.

A door slammed downstairs. Emma flinched. Only a very deliberate flick of Steed's tongue stopped her pulling away and sitting up defiantly. It was beginning to concern her that he didn't seem to be in any great hurry to finish things. As a schoolboy, Steed had been a natural distance runner, not a sprinter. It showed. She suspected that there was a touch of sadism in Steed. Why else would he push her onwards, quick and hard, then draw back to start again, gentle and exploratory?

Emma was starting to fantasise about his penis. About its length and girth, filling her so thoroughly. She wondered whether he would grant her mercy if she pleaded for it. It wasn't in her nature to beg, but her body was aching hungrily, starting to demand what it knew he could bestow. Almost as if he sensed it, a second finger slyly joined the first. She could feel the presence inside her, but it wasn't enough. Not nearly enough. At least his fingers were thicker than her own. And longer.

Without warning, the fingers withdrew, leaving her bereft. The candlesticks on the dressing table started to look alluring. Emma blinked at her own audacity. It could only be Steed's influence. She never thought such things. Did she?

His tongue flicked across her clitoris, darted lower. Too intense. Not intense enough. Rather more firmly, he applied long, deft strokes that made her wriggle and sigh. She felt his tongue probing into her, and then lower, the distinct sensation of a fingertip grazing lightly against tightly puckered flesh. The thrill that shot up her spine was terribly illicit. So that, she thought hysterically, was the game he was playing. Well, it wouldn't be the first time, and she had no intention of prudishly stopping him. It was wickedly exciting, in a very lascivious sort of way. Whatever was going on in her head, her body followed its own inclinations, drawing on experience. The taut opening relaxed a little under the insidiously probing fingertip. He kissed her clitoris warmly.

Whether it was a betrayal or not, her body softened, the tight ring of muscle dilating. Slick from her own moisture, that nefarious digit slid into her, past the first knuckle. Emma had no control over the breathy sigh that escaped her. So different, that sensation. Far from unpleasant, but very unlike anything else she knew. His thumb slipped into her vagina, making her moan and shake, doubly impaled.

Obsession. Power. Sex. Him.

The orgasm started in the base of her spine, started as a hot, roiling tension that signalled its advent. The muscles in her legs locked solid, muscles starting to shake. Either side of her head, she gripped the pillow, her eyes tight shut. Almost, almost...

It hit her hard, tearing at her, making her buck her hips up at him, making her clamp her thighs, trapping his head. Accidentally or deliberately, she impaled herself deeper on the finger probing inside her, on the thumb buried elsewhere. Incredible sensations flooding through her. Emma forgot about Jackson walking around in the rooms below them, forgot about decorum or restraint. She cried out, loud and hoarse, feeling her internal muscles contracting spasmodically, and as the climax ravaged her, Steed broke

free. Suddenly on his knees, lifting her hips, he bucked into her. The hard, uncompromising penetration made her cry out again, and just as the orgasm should have been ebbing, it peaked again with his quick, urgent thrusts. Emma shuddered, convulsed and went abruptly limp. The next thrust made her cry out again, but in protest. Too intense. She couldn't bear it. Not yet.

Obsession. Power. Freedom.

Steed pulled out of her quickly, cleanly, and repositioned himself lower, the head of his penis nudging hotly where his finger had been. Comprehension bit through the fog of Emma's trembling satisfaction. They'd played wickedly stimulating games often enough, but they'd never gone so far down the road... She could have stopped him. She didn't want to stop him. He was everything. He was the fire in her blood, the life in her heart. The dark obsession possessing her. There was nothing, no part of her that wanted to be free of him, nothing that was inviolate, invulnerable. Seeming to realise she had no intention of protesting against the new invasion, Steed leaned in, using his weight to peg him home. It surprised her, distantly, but her relaxed, sated body took him easily, willingly.

He made a desperate, inarticulate noise, a sob of desire, his head slamming back on his shoulders, as if it was simply too intense for him to bear. Emma moaned throatily, but in acceptance and desire, not pain or rejection. He should have been too big, too deep. He wasn't. Her body simply conformed to him, accepted him. Impossibly, the tension started to mount again with every slow, measured thrust. When he increased the pace, her body went with him. It was... unique. It was obsession. It was too much for Steed.

Emma felt him break, felt him lose whatever control he had, spinning almost immediately into ejaculation. That, too, was more vehement than any she'd ever felt. Strange sensations, wonderful, uninhibited sensations. Illicit. Immoral. Wanton. Her body managed a last, desperate snatch of pleasure, a tiny, joyous ripple, and then Steed was toppling onto her, like a puppet with broken strings, his penis slipping easily free, her tender, delicate flesh contracting gently in his wake, closing behind him.

Gentle. Tender. Wondering. She hugged his shoulders, nuzzled against his hot, sweaty neck. She could feel him struggling for breath, like a man who had desperately sprinted a mile up the side of a mountain. His weight bearing down on her was welcome, reinforcing the sudden acute, all-consuming sense of devotion. Gently, she laced her fingers up into his hair. Could this really be, she wondered, how things were destined to be? Forever? Could he really be the man she would grow old with? Emma didn't know, but suddenly the idea didn't seem as frightening and outlandish as it had once been.

Softly, against his ear, she whispered, "...All of me, Steed. All of me."

Did he understand what she barely understood herself? That the games - all of the games - were finished? That the only thing left was reality?

"Lady," he said, sounding husky and shaken, "However did you bewitch me so thoroughly?"

She could have put a chain around his neck, and he wouldn't have objected. She could have handcuffed him, could have manacled him, and he wouldn't have struggled. He even seemed to have stopped struggling against the invisible ties that both of them had

started to recognise. Emma kissed his neck, but she said nothing. There was no point in saying any of the things that they already knew, deep in their hearts.

-oOo-

“My dear Mrs. Peel,” Jackson said cheerfully as he walked up to her after his early-evening lecture, “I missed you this afternoon.”

Emma controlled her blushes, said simply, “I’m terribly sorry. I’d fully intended to be at your lecture, but -”

His eyes laughed at her, not unkindly, “- something came up?”

He knew. Of course he did. Perhaps he even understood. Emma managed a neutral smile, “Close enough.”

Jackson tipped his head slightly to one side. “I’m going to London tomorrow. I told John he was welcome to stay on for as long as he liked. Cambridge is such a fascinating city. Just the place to take a short break, don’t you agree? I won’t be back until Monday, at least. I’d be honoured if you’d both have dinner with me tonight...?”

Suddenly, he didn’t seem anything like as obnoxious. Suddenly he seemed to be a man who at least had some understanding of the way things were, the way they very well might end up.

Emma nodded, even impulsively slipped an arm through his, “I’m sure we’d love to. Now, will you tell me some more about your time in New Guinea...?”

The stage was set for the next act. It merely awaited the players. Who knew how the drama was going to unfold?

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To be concluded in...

“Chains Of Temptation”  
Part Three - The Queen Of Sin

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