

Cold Storage

Category: Text Stories

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SUB

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Part 1

The black saloon came to a halt by the security gatehouse. The tinted glass of the driver's window slid smoothly downwards. From the gatehouse a uniformed guard emerged and approached the driver. After a brief exchange of words he nodded to a colleague still in the gatehouse and the high black metal gates began to part.

The vehicle had two occupants in addition to the driver - a hulking figure whose grey suit did nothing to hide his powerful muscular frame. Seated in the rear was an older man whose elegant and immaculate dress spoke of discrete wealth. Next to him was a young woman, perhaps in her late twenties. The woman was exceptionally beautiful, her short cropped blonde hair framing a face of pert prettiness. Her slim body was complemented by a well cut blue business suit. She looked uncomfortable however, her shapely legs crossed away from her male companion and her hands frequently smoothing her short skirt down over her thighs as if willing the garment

to be a little less revealing.

The reason for the woman's discomfort was an all too common one. For much of the past year Miss Melanie Jones had been conducting a passionate affair with her employer. Of course she had known all along that Edward Steele was married and that he had no intention of changing his situation. However, the lack of prospects for the relationship was not the reason that she had recently broken it off. Rather it was Mr. Steele's sexual proclivities that had forced her hand. Although he was a more than adequate lover, Melanie had soon discovered that his tastes ran well beyond straightforward intercourse. For some reason that she couldn't imagine Edward seemed to enjoy binding her more than he enjoyed making love to her. What had started as 'harmless fun', with Edward tying her wrists with a scarf, had soon progressed to bizarre and frightening levels.

Perhaps what worried Melanie more than anything that she was subjected to, was her own reaction to this cruel treatment. She had quickly become aware that her climaxes were intensified when she was restrained and recently the mere thought of being tied up or gagged caused her to become aroused. She had finally decided that it had all gone too far when Edward had stripped her naked, hogtied her with brutal efficiency and then locked her in a metal trunk. Some of his staff had then carried the trunk out into the grounds of his palatial house (one of three) and left it there overnight. When the same staff released her late the next day Melanie was shivering, soiled and in agony from her bonds. She had told Edward soon after that she could take no more. Although she had fully expected Mr. Steele to angrily dismiss her there and then, he had actually seemed quite indifferent to her decision and had made no reference to her employment. So it was that for the past two weeks she had continued to work as his PA despite a chasm of cold reserve between them.

Melanie had not heard of the Human Response Laboratories before Mr. Steele had asked her to book a meeting with them. However, they seemed to be expecting her call and a date and time were readily agreed. She had been slightly surprised to be asked to accompany Edward to the meeting and the forty minute car journey had passed in a series of awkward silences punctuated only by Edward's desultory conversation with Max, his bodyguard and driver.

It was something of a relief to leave the car and walk with the two men towards the large doors of the main entrance to HRL. Inside the building they were greeted by another security guard manning a reception desk. The guard issued them with lapel badges and made a phone call to summon their host.

As the trio waited in the lobby, Melanie looked around at the stark facility. From the outside it had looked like any modern office complex, but inside it was so sparsely furnished, and so deserted, that it seemed more like some top-secret military base. From the reception hall a featureless corridor extended into the distance. It was from here that in a due course a man wearing a white coat approached them.

“Mr. Steele, how nice to meet you again” he greeted them.

The two men shook hands and then Steele introduced Melanie to the scientist.

“Dr. Perry, this is my assistant Miss Melanie Jones.”

Perry offered Melanie a weak handshake and a rather unctuous smile. She was surprised to find that Edward had met the man as she had never heard his name, or that of his organization, mentioned before she had arranged this visit. As was his habit, Steele didn't introduce Max to their host. The bodyguard seemed to not care, and he ambled behind the group as Perry lead them along the main corridor.

Melanie surveyed Dr. Perry and judged him to be in his early fifties, much like her erstwhile lover. But whereas Edward had kept himself in good shape (and enjoyed the good fortune to have kept a full head of hair), Perry was round-shouldered and thick-waisted. With his thin greying hair combed across his bald pate he looked every inch middle-aged.

They stopped at an unmarked door and Perry swiped a plastic card through a reader to the right of the frame.

“Knowing of your area of interest I've set up a little demonstration for you.” said Perry.

Once inside the door, Melanie realized that they were in some kind of large laboratory, brightly lit and with walls lined with work benches and storage cabinets.

However, it was what stood in the middle of the floor that caused Melanie's breath to catch in her chest. Standing bolt upright, and securely bound to a metal post, was a naked woman. As Perry motioned the visitors to gather around the startling exhibit, Melanie felt her face begin to flush and beads of sweat form around her neck and under her arms. She was also acutely aware of a rising warmth in her loins as she forced herself to look at the unfortunate girl. The girl was around Melanie's own age and build but was a brunette; her wavy chestnut hair gathered into a simple bun on the top of her head.. Wide leather straps at her ankles, knees, waist and neck held her secure and her arms were fixed behind her. Her mouth was filled by a painfully large ball-gag and saliva trickled from one corner of her lips.

Melanie tried to stop herself from trembling and concentrate on what Dr. Perry was telling them.

"...this is bondage at it's most basic. It's pleasing enough to look at but the limitations are obvious. Our volunteer is not really fully immobilized and we can only keep her here for a couple of hours before things begin to get messy. If we want a more severe and long-term restraint then clearly something else is needed."

It was at this point that Melanie noticed that brunette was not the only exhibit that Dr. Perry had laid on for them. Some four feet behind and further into the lab was another woman - or at least Melanie assumed that it was a woman. Bound to an identical post was a human figure entirely encased in dark rubber. As the group moved towards her Dr. Perry was explaining the features of this new captive.

"...this young lady is restrained by a tight-fitting rubber body suit, a hood and a heavy leather corset. She's fitted with rectal and urinary catheters and has both breathing and feeding tubes..."

Melanie thought her legs might give way under her as she studied the complex of tubes that emerged from the woman's head and lower abdomen and ran to fittings in the metal plate beneath her feet. It was all horribly reminiscent of one of Edward's little 'experiments' whereby he had bound her from head to toe in plastic film and thick packing tape leaving only a tiny nose tube for her to breathe through. Edward had left her like that for hours and released her only when she was on the point of wetting herself. The poor girl in Dr. Perry's lab didn't even have that as an

end-point to her suffering, as the scientist took delight in pointing out.

“...this means that she can be maintained in this state for many hours. The only limitation is temperature control.”

‘Temperature control!’ that was a polite way of putting it, thought Melanie bitterly. She remembered vividly the awful suffocating heat that had built up in her after only a short period of her tape bondage. More than once she had almost fainted within her terrible cocoon. What this poor woman must be enduring inside her rubber prison did not bear thinking about.

“The body is unable to dissipate energy in the normal way and soon begins to overheat. In this case we have a flow of cooled air from the ceiling ducts to try to minimize the problem...but even with this we could not extend containment for more than a few days.” continued Perry.

A few days! Melanie swallowed hard and tried to fight down the rising excitement inside her. The thought of such severe and prolonged bondage was at the same time both terrifying and exhilarating. Her knees felt shaky beneath her and she was horribly aware of the gathering dampness between her legs. Was this why Edward had brought her to this strange place? To rekindle her desires in this direction? If so it was certainly working! Melanie admitted to herself that, if Edward suggested it right now, she would probably agree to go back to his house and submit herself to his whims once again. For the moment, however, her priority was to try and act normally and to take in what Dr. Perry was telling them.

Perry now lead the group to his next demonstration, beyond the rubber clad maiden. At first sight this seemed to consist of nothing but a featureless white obelisk, about 8 feet high and a meter square. However, at the touch of button on a console to the side of the structure, its white panels slid upwards to reveal a glass tank filled with a clear liquid. Floating, suspended in the fluid was another naked young woman. The girl, who might have been in her late teens or early twenties, was anchored to the bottom of the tank by short chains which ran from cuffs around her ankles to lugs on the floor of the tank. Her arms appeared to be pinioned behind her back, but otherwise she was unrestrained. A bundle of two or three plastic tubes emerged between her legs and then looped behind her to exit from the tank’s open top into a

panel on the ceiling. The girl's pale, frightened eyes watched Melanie from behind a full face mask. Another thick tube (or perhaps a bundle of smaller tubes - Melanie couldn't be sure) connected her face mask to the outside world and presumably kept her supplied with air.

"This is a different approach..." began Dr. Perry.

"Here we are using liquid immersion to solve our heat dissipation problems. This is just plain tap water, but we have experimented with a number of other liquids. By varying the temperature of the water we can keep the subject comfortable..."

"Or uncomfortable!" Edward interjected with a smirk.

"more or less indefinitely." concluded Perry.

Edward Steele, who had remained nonchalant thus far, now tapped a finger on the glass tank enthusiastically.

"So this would allow long-term restraint?"

"Not as long term as we'd like..." said Perry, shaking his head.

"Although water solves the overheating issue, it creates other problems. Long term immersion causes the skin to swell up and then slough off - that was why we tried other liquids. But we were unable to find anything that didn't cause deterioration. This method would be good for maybe...three weeks."

Edward fell silent and shook his head pensively. Max had shown no reaction to any of the exhibits and was now looking around the room with bored indifference, as if a seeing naked women in bondage was an everyday event.

"Our final experiment in this series..." said Perry "...involves using a gel formulation."

With this he walked over to a second obelisk which completed the row of four bondage demonstrations. Once again the casing was winched away to reveal an identical glass tank with a young women suspended within it. Melanie was immediately aware, however, that this tank did not contain water. Whatever was in

it was only semi-translucent and the effect was rather like looking at someone frozen in a block of ice. The same thought occurred to Edward Steele.

“Is it ice?” he asked.

“No.” replied Perry. “Although ice has many of the properties we were looking for. This is a synthetic silicone based gel which was our first attempt to develop a novel compound specifically for long-term human storage.”

“Does it work?” asked Steele bluntly.

“Almost.” replied Perry with a sardonic smile. “We got quite excited about this when we first developed it a few years ago. It conducts heat in the way we needed, and it doesn’t degrade the skin.”

Melanie felt a wave of nausea wash over her and she wiped sweat away from her brow. She desperately wanted to sit down, or at least to lean on something as she fought to comprehend how this could be happening. This company, or whatever it was, had apparently been working for years to develop ways of subjecting women to bondage for increasingly long periods of time. Who could be funding such research? And who could possibly want the results? For Melanie there was also the horrible realization that bondage - what she had thought of as a peculiar quirk of her ex-lover - might actually be a major industry with God-knows how many devotees.

“So what’s the problem?” asked Edward.

“It’s just not rigid enough...” replied Dr. Perry philosophically. “...the subject is able to move slightly and over time their struggles disrupt the gel and it becomes more like a syrup. However we felt we were near enough with this compound to justify further effort to perfect our techniques. Modestly, we feel that we’ve now done that and I’d like to show you the results.”

Dr. Perry lead the group back to the corridor and down it a considerable distance until they came to a pair of elevators. He pressed the call button between the two and instantly the doors of the left-hand shaft opened. When all four of them were in the car Perry pressed the button marked `B’ on the control panel. The doors shut and the elevator began its descent.

Melanie had been glad of the walk to the elevator as it allowed her to work some of the shakiness out of her legs. Once inside she gratefully leaned against the internal paneling, enjoying the cool of the metal surface against her face. She took several deep breaths and tried to compose herself. Obviously this place was some kind of perverts paradise and Edward had brought her here either to embarrass her or to try to seduce her again. All she had to do was stay calm, try not to show that it was getting to her, and they would soon be back in the limo and heading for the office. Melanie was still acutely aware of her own physical arousal. The gusset of her panties was now wet through and she was glad she had worn tights today. She blushed and cringed inside as she thought again about the journey home. Would the wetness between her legs soak through her undergarments and produce a tell-tale damp patch on the back of her skirt? Or, worse still, would her humiliation be marked for all to see on the back seat of the Lexus? As soon as they got back to the office, she told herself, she would resign and put an end to this once and for all.

The elevator took only seconds to reach the basement level. The doors opened, but when Edward moved to step out Dr. Perry called him back.

“Sorry, not quite there yet!”

With this he selected a key from a bunch dangling from his waist band and inserted it into a lock below the elevator’s control panel. He turned the key through ninety degrees and instantly the doors closed once again and the elevator began to descend once more. Dr. Perry turned to his passengers and smiled in response to their quizzical looks.

“Security I’m afraid folks. We are going to a sub-basement level that can’t be reached without the right authorization. It’s not shown on any plans of the building. If you don’t have this key you wouldn’t know it existed.”

For the second time the elevator stopped and the doors opened. This time Dr. Perry lead his guests out into a smallish room in which a number of technicians and scientific types were sat at computer consoles. Perry approached one of them.

“Jim, this is Mr. Steele and Miss Jones, who we discussed earlier.”

The technician stood up and nodded in recognition but did not extend his hand. He was clearly junior to Dr. Perry and seemed cowed by the older man's presence.

"Would you accompany us into the storage facility..." added Perry.

It was clearly a command, not a question and the younger man followed Dr. Perry to the far end of the room where a large metal door was set into the wall. Perry took another key from his bunch and inserted it into a keyhole to the left of the door. His assistant produced a key of his own and fitted it into a matching receptacle to the right. Perry counted to three and they turned their keys simultaneously. The metal door rumbled slowly open revealing a dark void beyond.

It was with considerable trepidation that Melanie followed the men into the inner chamber and was at once aware of an unnatural chill in the dry air. Dr. Perry hit a switch that activated some small, rather dim, lighting tubes on the left hand wall of the new room. As Melanie's eyes became accustomed to the low-level lighting she began to appreciate the size of the space they now stood in. It was a gallery of perhaps 15 meters width and at least 60 meters in length - it was difficult to tell in the gloom. The ceiling was high and almost featureless. To the left was a smooth wall broken only by the lamps and by a series of rectangular panels of no obvious purpose.

To the right hand flank of the gallery were a series of large objects of identical but mysterious design. Melanie looked at the nearest one uncomprehendingly. It was a huge block of dark material, measuring perhaps 2 meters by 1 meter on the nearest vertical face that it presented. It appeared to extend back at least 3 meters and was apparently supported by the large metal frame in which it stood. Melanie was reminded of the strange black monolith in the film 2001. Pivoted about its middle and lain on its back that was what the objects in the gallery looked like. On the right-hand pillar of each supporting frame was a computer terminal, also blank.

Gesturing to the first block in the room Dr. Perry spoke with all the pride of a parent for a gifted child.

"Gentlemen, this is the result of our researches. We call it Plasti-glass, although it's neither plastic nor glass. Please feel free to touch it..."

Melanie joined the Edward and Max in approaching the block. She timidly touched the surface, then tapped on it with her knuckle. It was smooth and cool to the touch like glass and yet it didn't feel quite as hard, as if a fingernail or a sharp object might scratch its surface.

"Now if you'd stand back a little..." continued Perry, "...I'll show you how we use it."

Perry hit some keys on the computer terminal attached to the frame of the block they had been examining. The monitor screen sprang to life, displaying green characters on a dark background. Perry typed a series of commands and the block began to come alive. A light appeared at its furthest end; unseen motors hummed and the whole structure began to rotate about its horizontal axis. Within moments the slab was standing upright before them. As the light, now at the top of the edifice, grew in intensity the visitors were able to appreciate the significance of what lay before them.

The slab was translucent, like a huge crystal, and trapped at its core was a woman. She seemed to float in its center like a prehistoric insect cast in amber. She wore no shackles or fastenings yet she hung quite symmetrically, her legs parted and her arms a little away from her sides. Set in the Plasti-glass with her were a number of tubes and wires. Her nose and mouth were covered by a small mask from which some pipe work traveled towards the back of the slab. Catheters were in place between her legs and a large number of fine wires terminated in electrodes distributed across her body. A slightly thicker cable was attached to a small terminal on each of her upper thighs. Throughout the block ran a matrix of fine, metallic looking, pipes.

Most shocking of all, the woman was completely hairless. Both her head and body were unnaturally smooth, giving her a waxy, unreal appearance. Melanie clenched her hands and licked her dry lips as she struggled to comprehend what was before her. The warmth of arousal she had fought against earlier was now replaced in her abdomen by the chill of fear. If this was real, and not some hideous practical joke, then it went well beyond sexual perversion and into the realms of criminal insanity. She took some comfort from noticing that even Max seemed surprised and was giving the terrible spectacle his full attention. Clearing her throat Melanie managed

to speak for the first time since they had arrived at HRL.

“Is she...alive?” she stuttered.

“Oh yes! Very much so.” replied Perry enthusiastically, “And she’s in excellent health”.

Perry typed some more on the computer console and the characteristic trace of a heart-beat appeared on its screen.

“All vital signs are monitored from the control room we passed through. We record pulse, blood-pressure, brain activity, the lot. The devices you see attached to her thighs enable us to sample blood gases, electrolytes, sugars – everything that you’d monitor in an ICU facility.”

Edward Steele was still unruffled and had a more basic question for the scientist.

“Can she move?” he asked bluntly.

“Not much!” replied Perry with a smile. “She can move her eyes but that’s about all.”

“So how can she breathe?” asked Max, breaking his brooding silence.

“An excellent question...” said Perry. “Jim, you’re the expert here, would you like to explain?”

The younger man looked taken aback at being invited to speak and colored a little. He cleared his throat.

“Our early experiments showed us that you could achieve respiration without expansion of the thorax as long as a positive pressure was provided and an enriched oxygen content. The downward travel of the diaphragm and compression of the viscera allow sufficient inspired volume to give gaseous exchange. In practice a little thoracic expansion is achieved due to the compressibility of the breast tissue...”

“What Jim is saying...” cut in Dr. Perry, “...is that we force air into her lungs so she doesn’t have to worry about breathing.”

“Can she blink?” asked Edward watching the woman’s unwavering gaze.

“Another good question...” nodded Perry. “The eyes were an area that gave us great problems initially. Unfortunately the cornea requires exposure to the air to remain properly oxygenated – that’s why some contact lenses have vents in them. What we’ve done is to protect each eye with a plastic bubble which is ventilated with fresh air. As this air is filtered to remove dust particles, we decided that the blink response was unnecessary. Thus the eyelids are fixed open using an acrylate-based adhesive. On the subject of the senses I should point out that she can hear us. There are miniature headphones in her ears and a microphone in the control console.”

“So you’ve done it.” murmured Edward appreciatively. “Absolute immobility...total dependency...”

“We’d like to think so,” said Perry. “...the plasti-glass sets hard, rigidly enclosing the body. The mouthpiece we’ve designed immobilizes the tongue, avoiding the danger of it being bitten or swallowed. Each subject is carefully prepared before encasement. We administer a thallium compound to induce permanent hair loss, and the body surface is disinfected. We use high dose antibiotics to clear bacterial growths from the digestive tract. Once encased, the subject is supplied only with sterilized water and nutrients. Muscle tone is maintained by electrical stimulation. With these precautions we believe that we can maintain the body in optimum physical health indefinitely ...”

Part 2

As Dr. Perry pontificated, something terrible was taking shape in the back of Melanie’s mind. Something so awful that she could not yet put it into words. The primitive instinct to survive made her begin to look towards the gallery door that they had all come through. It was still open and Melanie began to measure the her distance from it and to assess her chances of getting past Jim and Max, both of whom stood between her and the control room. Then there was the elevator to consider – it had needed a special key to descend to this level. Would it also require a key to travel back up?

Dr. Perry was still talking, and clearly liked the sound of his own voice.

“Perhaps the single most important property of plasti-glass...” he continued pompously “...it that it is hygroscopic. As the patient sweats the plasti-glass absorbs the moisture, which then diffuses out across the block and evaporates from it’s surface, removing heat in the process. We assist with a number of ventilated channels through the material and the low ambient temperature that we maintain within the facility.

Edward was listening intently to Dr. Perry’s discourse. The mention of the subject’s perfect physical health prompted a question from him.

“What about her mental state?”

“Naturally the technique does cause considerable mental stress.” replied Perry glibly. “The longest encasement we’ve had with a subject who was subsequently released was one month. That was with one of the young ladies you met upstairs. It was our final trial before we began full scale commercial operation and the girl showed significant emotional trauma as one might expect.”

“And life expectancy?”

“Theoretically, many decades...” replied Perry. “There are a number of factors we think will offset the emotional stress, and may even extend the natural life span. The subjects receive no UV light and have no exposure to pathogens. They receive perfectly balanced nutrition, with their body weight kept constant. We are also planning to use growth-hormone and melatonin supplementation as the years go by.”

“So how long has this one been in there?” Asked Max.

“Let me show you...” replied Dr. Perry, turning again to the computer console. He typed some more and then turned to his audience.

“Please look at the screen behind you.” he instructed.

As Melanie, Steele and Max turned to look away from the girl in the slab, the dark panel on the wall opposite came to life. It was a very large display screen, showing letters and numbers picked out in red LEDs against a black background. Melanie’s stomach churned as she read the data:

2 YEARS 7 MONTHS 3 WEEKS 5 DAYS 10 HOURS 28 MINUTES

Melanie felt sour bile rise up in the back of her throat and for a moment thought she might vomit. It couldn't be true - could it? No-one could survive 2 years of such treatment. And yet Dr. Perry appeared quite serious about the claim, and Edward was nodding in appreciation.

With a theatrical flourish Perry typed a further string of commands on the console and the remaining five plasti-glass slabs in the gallery began to illuminate and rotate.

"Now let me introduce you to the rest of our little group." he said, clearly enjoying himself.

Within moments Melanie and the others were looking at a row of six young woman embedded in plasti-glass. The screens on the left-hand wall of the gallery showed that the women were in order of incarceration. The first that they'd seen, nearest the door, was the earliest to be entombed while the sixth had been suffering for only 3 months.

Edward and Max walked between the woman admiring the view and clearly impressed. As they browsed they threw further questions to Dr. Perry. Melanie was horrified to notice that , if she looked closely, she could see the eyes of the trapped women moving to follow their spectators. Somehow this confirmation that there were real live girls in this ghastly tomb was more frightening than a trace on a computer screen. Like the men, Melanie was struck by how similar the captives all looked. It was amazing how important hair proved to be in characterizing a woman. Without it, one slim, naked young woman looked very much like another. Edward raised this point.

"Why are they all bald?" he asked.

Dr. Perry let Jim answer this question.

"We found that with encapsulation in a solid material, hair was very troublesome..." he told them. "With nowhere to go it tends to in grow and cause irritation of the skin. The simplest thing was to remove it permanently. In many ways we've had to

address the same problems as apply to the care of long-term coma patients.”

“What about pressure sores?” asked Edward, who had more than a little medical knowledge of his own.

“The subjects are rotated on an hourly basis throughout the day,” replied Jim, who had by now overcome his shyness. “The time spent upright, as you see them now, is balanced by periods lying face uppermost and face down.”

As the group circulated between the monoliths and their female cargoes, Melanie took the opportunity to work her way closer to the door. Eventually she was standing near to first captive and none of the men were between her and the control room. As the conversation slackened Melanie took the risk of posing perhaps the most obvious question.

“Dr. Perry...” she said tremulously, “...who are they?”

“I was wondering who would ask that.” he said, instantly having the attention of the group. “To be honest I only know the identity of the lady by the door. The others we refer to only by codenames. They are ladies brought to us by clients who are willing to pay, very substantially, for their permanent storage. Our security department vets the client to make sure they are sound and creditworthy and that they have a legitimate interest in the young woman concerned. Our security people also handle the details of the subject’s disappearance to make sure that neither the client nor HRL fall under any suspicion in the event that there is an investigation. In practice the police seldom investigate the disappearance of adults, so a few false leads is all that’s required.”

Melanie wanted to ask more, particularly about what constituted a ‘legitimate interest’, but the knot of dread in the pit of her stomach told her that she might already know. She glanced over her shoulder, trying to screw up her courage to make a run for the lift.

Edward’s next question made her pause and listen.

“Why do you know about the woman by the door?” he asked Dr. Perry.

“She used to work here...” replied Perry. “...in fact she was the inspiration for the whole project. We were asked to come up with a way to subject her to long-term bondage, while maintaining her physical health. It was an interesting choice of subject because I understand she was quite severely claustrophobic. She was the Director’s secretary and the word was that they had some kind of falling out...”.

With this, all Melanie’s nameless fears coalesced into an icy ball of terror in her guts and she turned to run for the door. As she did so she found her way barred by another of the white-coated technicians. She stopped dead, staring at the strange device he held in his hand, looking to her like a cross between a gun and a TV remote control. She heard Dr. Perry’s smarmy voice behind her.

“You’re not leaving us are you Miss Jones. We had hoped you’d stay with us for a little longer...”

The strange device emitted a high pitched squeal and ejected two small projectiles, each trailing a fine wire. The tiny darts embedded themselves in the fabric of Melanie’s jacket. She experienced a searing flash of pain and then blacked out.

Melanie awoke from a troubled sleep. She had been dreaming that she was back at Edward’s house in that horrible metal box. Only this time, instead of just dumping her outside, his staff had buried her in the grounds. Somehow the mud had gotten into the casket and filled her mouth. She woke just as, in the nightmare, she had been trying to clear her mouth to scream. As she lay on her back looking upwards Melanie was relieved that it had only been a dream, though her mouth really was uncomfortably dry. The ceiling above her head was in darkness and instinctively she tried to turn her head to look at her bedside clock. Puzzlement grew in her still drowsy mind as her head refused to move. She tried to prop herself on her right elbow, but her arm also remained fixed in position. Panic supplanted puzzlement and she was instantly awake, desperately trying to rise, to move in any direction and to scream for help.

She stopped abruptly, frozen with terror, as she realised that her mouth was indeed filled. Something round and hard and foreign was occupying her mouth, pinning her

tongue down to her lower jaw. Suddenly all the images came flooding back to her – the laboratory, those terrible slabs and the women trapped in them. Fighting for self-control she tried to move each of her hands and feet in turn. Nothing would move. Every attempt at movement met the same absolute resistance. As she focused on the sensations of different parts of her body she realised that her groin ached and that something large and unyielding had been inserted into her rectum. Clutching at straws she tried to think of any explanation other than the mind-shredding one that confronted her. Perhaps she'd been given a drug which had paralysed her muscles?? That would mean she was not restrained but just unable to move anything. Perhaps if she closed her eyes and opened them again it would all go away??

Melanie felt her eyelids snag as they began to close but were then prevented from doing so. In an instant she knew it was true. She was not paralysed. Her muscles were functioning, but her entire body was in total restraint. As the full horror of her situation struck her she began to heave desperately against her bondage, screaming Edward's name into her mouthpiece. After a few minutes she was exhausted by her futile struggles. She tried to gasp for air as a dreadful smothering heat engulfed her and perspiration sprang from her body. Each tortured breath she attempted was met by the immovable mass of the plastiglass confining her chest and opposing any attempt at expansion. As the monitoring equipment detected the rising lactic acid in her bloodstream it forced rapid shallow breaths into her lungs, each of which sent a stab of pain down into her abdomen as her internal organs were squeezed by her diaphragm.

Too exhausted to scream she now began to sob and plead for help, the restraint of her tongue reducing her efforts to meaningless noises. Surely Edward wouldn't leave her like this; she had meant something to him – hadn't she? Perhaps this was just a warning – a few hours constraint to persuade her to resume their relationship. If so, she would do whatever he asked – she'd go to live with him if that's what he wanted. Anything to be released from this private hell that she was now trapped in.

At that moment there was a jolt and Melanie felt her world begin to rotate. She was being moved to the upright position! This could only mean one thing – Edward had come to let her out! As the slab reached the vertical she was aware of a light above her head flickering on. Once her eyes adjusted to the strange distortions of the

plastiglass block, Melanie found herself looking at Dr. Perry and Edward Steele. Both were smiling at her. With sudden modesty Melanie realised that she must be naked like the other women she had seen. She flushed with shame and another wave of sweat broke from her pores. Dr. Perry spoke first.

“Welcome back my dear.” he said with mock sincerity. “The computer let us know you were awake and I see you’ve already tested the strength of your confinement. That’s quite natural, but let me assure you that there is absolutely no possibility of escape. Plastiglass is incredibly strong and, as you’ve found, you will be unable to make even the slightest movement. Now I think Mr. Steele wanted to say something to you.”

Edward stepped forward, a cruel smile on his lips.

“I want you to understand one thing Melanie - when I start a relationship with a woman, I decide when it ends. No woman has ever left me and none ever will. And now I’m afraid that our involvement is going to last a little longer than you had hoped - in fact I hope you appreciate the level of my commitment to you. I’m going to be paying for your care for the rest of your life. Of course if you outlive me - which is quite likely - my company will continue to fund your storage here, so you need have no worries on that score.”

Perry once again took over the taunting of the captive.

“I realise that these developments must come as a considerable shock to you but I would ask you not to distress yourself too much. The sooner you come to terms with your situation the happier you will be. Judging by their brain activity most of our ladies find the first six months or so to be the most difficult. What you must understand is that you will be spending the rest of your life here with us, just as you are now. You will never again move, or speak, or eat, drink, or see anything beyond the inside of this chamber. On the plus side you are going to be enjoying the most extreme bondage that money can buy, and I understand from Mr. Steele that you took considerable pleasure in being restrained. “

Even through her terror Melanie flushed again at the thought of the two men

discussing her sexual tastes.

“Now to more mundane matters...” continued Perry “...you will receive water and nutrients twice a day, injected directly into your stomach via the tubes in your mouthpiece. Your bowel will be washed out once per day and your urine and menstrual blood will drain as they form. You will also be subject to muscle stimulation at frequent intervals.. Of all these processes you will probably be aware of only the muscle stimulation and the colonic cleansing, which will cause a sensation of pressure in your abdomen. The chamber is usually in darkness, but from time to time each day lighting will be provided to help maintain your eyesight. Likewise you will occasionally hear white-noise played into your earphones to counter the effects of continual silence.”

Perry’s manner now switched again from grave to mocking.

“Before we go I must congratulate you on your delightful body.” he said leeringly. “All of my staff who worked to prepare you were quite enraptured. We could all appreciate why Mr. Steele was unwilling to lose you. Now, we always encourage our clients to keep in touch with loved ones who they have placed in storage at our facility and so we have arranged for Mr. Steele to visit you exactly a year from today. As that does rather leave you with some time on your hands...” both men smirked openly at Perry’s cruel jibe, “...we will give you something to look at.”

Dr. Perry typed something on the control console of Melanie’s slab and the screen on the wall opposite her sprang into life. Through the blur of the crystal, and her own tears, Melanie read,

0 YEARS 0 MONTHS 0 WEEKS 0 DAYS 6 HOURS 37 MINUTES

As she watched the 37 turned into 38.

POSTSCRIPT

The elevator doors opened and Dr. Perry stepped into the control room. Accompanying him was David Sherman, the Chief Executive of HRL. On seeing their

boss of bosses all of the technical staff jumped to their feet.

“Please, please...” said Sherman, spreading his hands in a placatory gesture. “sit down, relax...this is very much an informal visit.” The flush on the cheeks of both Perry and Sherman suggested that they had enjoyed an excellent lunch.

“Today, as you know, is Dr. Perry’s last day with us.” Sherman paused for the polite applause that followed. “We’ve just been upstairs doing the formalities and I certainly don’t intend to repeat the speeches we’ve both just sat through.”

There was a murmur of laughter around the small room. One of Dave Sherman’s many skills was being able to connect with his audience and the control room staff were quickly put at their ease.

“I just wanted to come down here with Dr. Perry to join with you, the folks who worked with him the most, to say the goodbyes that matter the most. I don’t need remind you what his innovation and skill has allowed us to achieve here at HRL. Twenty years ago the concept of long-term human storage hardly existed as a science. Beyond the hospital bed or the prison cell there was no way of keeping the human body alive yet in suspension. With your able assistance Dr. Perry has invented a new technology and a new paradigm in long-term care.”

The applause was both spontaneous and heartfelt as Dr. Perry’s team expressed their very real respect for their mentor.

“Now I’d like to invite Dr. Perry to join me on a last tour of the storage facility.”

Once the chamber doors were opened the two men began to walk slowly through the galleries.

“You know you’d always be welcome if you wanted to come back and visit some time...” said Sherman after a few moments, “...you must feel quite attached to our ladies after all these years.”

“Thank you, that’s most kind. But, you know, I think I want to remember them just as they are today, perfect and beautiful.”

"It's strange to think that most of these galleries didn't exist when you first started - there was just the single chamber. Do you have any special favorites among the girls?"

"Well, I've always had a special regard for number one, your predecessor's former secretary. It's coming up to seventeen years she's been down her."

As they spoke they headed toward the first gallery where the woman in question was stored.

"But even more than her..." continued Dr. Perry, "I have to admit a soft spot for number seven."

The two men stopped in front of the seventh slab which, like all the others, was now illuminated.

"Why this one?" asked Sherman.

"I don't know really. I can remember the day she was brought in; so frightened and innocent, so lovely. It was one of the few times I actually felt sorry for what we had to do. I think her name was Melanie..."

"How long is it?" asked Sherman glancing over his shoulder to the data panel. "Fourteen years give or take..."

"She's kept wonderfully well, hardly different to the day we encapsulated her," said Perry admiringly. "The really amazing thing about her...she's stayed responsive for all these years. Most of them are catatonic after four or five years but her EEG is still near normal. You can still see her eyes follow you when you walk by..."

"Incredible..." breathed Sherman appreciatively. "Do you think she still has hopes of release?"

"I hope not, for her sake." said Perry. "Her sponsor died a couple of years back...sudden coronary."

"Are we still getting paid?" asked Sherman, a trifle less light-heartedly.

“Oh yes, no problems there. He’d set up a covenant when he first had her stored.”

“Say something to her...” suggested Dave Sherman, now smiling again.

Dr. Perry looked a little taken aback.

“We have a very strict policy about not interacting with our guests once they’re established here...” he said, trying not to sound too pious, “...the lack of human contact is part of the experience.”

“Well I think we can make an exception on your last day...go ahead speak to her.”

Dr. Perry typed the necessary commands on the console, secretly delighted at being able to indulge himself. When the microphone in the console was live he cleared his throat.

“Melanie, I know you can hear me. I’m Dr. Perry. You met me the day you were brought here. You will also have seen me working in the chamber from time to time. I’d like you to move your eyes up and down if you understand.”

To the fascination of the watching men, Melanie’s eyes moved unmistakably.

“I’m afraid this is my last day here, so you won’t be seeing me again.”

Once more the eyes rolled.

“I have some bad news for you about the gentleman who brought you here. Alas, he died recently. You may also wish to know that you were declared legally dead some years ago.”

The eyes stared fixedly ahead.

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