

AN ANTE-BELLUM WAY OF LIFE

By Susan Peerless



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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By Susan Peerless

CHAPTER I

The worst thing about this hospital was the smell and the flies. That and the pain. Oh, it wasn't really a hospital as you would think of it; it was a C.S.A. field hospital, somewhere in Virginia. I had a gut wound from an exploding Yankee mortar round. So I was dying. I was only 18 and I was dying. With a massive abdominal wound in 1864, in a field hospital, they gave you heavy doses of tincture of opium for the pain and put you off to one side for you to get on with the business of dying. I was horribly thirsty and didn't even bother to move my lips to scare off the flies. Then I was falling. I only remember a tilted image of some kind of colored structure and green shrubs rushing up to meet me. My thought was that death is rather scary and confusing.

Then I woke up. That was the biggest surprise. I woke up alive! There was a fairly young woman with a black band around her head leaning over me. I know it was definitely a woman because she had a pair of beautiful bare breasts. I thought, 'The Confederate Army has naked women in their hospital tents?'

"You're awake?"

'Now that was a very good question.' I thought about it as I wondered about my complete lack of pain. The flies and the background noise of moans and groans was gone too. I looked around the woman at the ceiling which was now a mirror rather than the stained gray of the hospital tent.

"Can you understand me?"

"Yes, Ma'am." I was busy studying my image in the mirror. I was covered by a surprisingly clean sheet but could see no sign of bandages.

"I'm called Bee. What's your name?"

"Tod. Private Tod Flecher. Have I died?"

"It would appear not. Is 'private' a rank?"

"Yes, I'm in the Army of the Confederacy."

"The Confederacy?"

"Yes, Ma'am. The Confederate States of America."

"What year is it?"

"You are singularly uninformed, Ma'am. It's 1864."

"Ah. I must inform you that you are no longer in 1864."

"No longer IN 1864? Where ... er ... when else could I be in?"

“You're now in 2394. A bit more than 500 years into your future.”

“God! Who won?”

“Won what?”

“The war, Ma'am. Who won the war?”

“I'm not certain. Oh yes, you were fighting the United States of America?”

“Of course.”

“Well I guess they did. At least they lasted a few hundred years more.”

“Then, if I am not alive, I died in vain.”

“Perhaps in a sense. But you're still alive here.”

Bee explained a lot of things to me, a number of which I understood. What it boiled down to was that I couldn't possibly be happy in the present world so I would have to go to a `reservation'. She explained that these weren't normally only for Indians like I thought.

The problem was that they hadn't started one for Americans from the Southern part of the country in the 19th Century, although there was a small one for Northerners. I was the first Southerner to arrive. Whatever brought people here was irregular in where it got them. There was a large early 19th Century Chinese colony. I rejected this, as well as being stuck in one for Northerners. In that case, she explained, they would start a reservation for Southerners and I would be the first person in it.

“I think that I'll be lonely.”

“Not really. We start these reservations with androids. That is, until there's enough real people.”

“Androids?”

“Like golems.”

“I don't know what they are either.”

“They never really existed. All right, let's just say artificial persons. They look and act like people, but are just constructs.”

“Oh.”

“We have endless things that you would think magic.”

“Like what cured me?”

“Right! That was done in less than a day. You're now better than new. You've heard of the early Babylonians?”

“I guess so.”

“Would cannons and man carrying balloons seem like magic to them?”

“I guess so.”

“Well just imagine how much more we have 500 years in your future.”

“Better cannons and balloons?”

She sighed. "Sort of. You understand?"

"I guess so."

She laughed. "You're not sure of anything and I can't blame you. Look, you were dying, right?"

"I guess so."

"That record is stuck."

"A stuck record?"

"After your time? Sorry. Anyway, our tests here show you to be a submissive."

"What's that?"

"You are happier submitting to the orders and direction of others. You don't like to be in charge. You prefer to be passive."

"I do?"

"Now. I'm a dominant. I take charge, give orders and dislike submitting myself to others."

"But, you're a woman."

"Here and now, that has little to do with anything. I often take out an adorable, submissive male who loves being passive with me."

"Good God!"

"Now you, in the context of the new reservation would be happier as a slave, or a woman."

"You come here with your shameless breasts uncovered and tell me that I should be a common nigger slave? That I'd be happy that way? Are you sure this isn't a ward for possessed people, crazy ones?"

"No Tod, it isn't. And I guess it would be too much to expect you to understand. I'm going to send you somewhere and there you will have to play a part. Like in a play or drama. It's just that there will no people there to watch. You will be only with androids. If you ever doubt this just ask, 'Tell me about yourself.' An android will have to answer you with exact information about itself, where it was made and so forth. Do you understand?"

"Yes. Tell me about yourself."

"Very astute of you, but I'm not an android. All right?"

"I don't really know. This may all be nonsense. Can I get up?"

"Of course."

I got up and found that I was nude.

Bee indicated a chair with a pile of clothes. She turned around, but I was sure that this was for my benefit rather than hers.

As I put on the pants and shirt that I found there, I noticed that the very materials of the walls, the light, everything was so different that I couldn't grasp anything, could-

n't even describe it. I began to understand her comment about ancient peoples. I sat in the chair, which was sort of silvery and which didn't even look like it had been made by humans. Maybe it hadn't.

Bee turned around. "Finished?"

"Yeah. Now what?"

"I describe the part you're to play, you complain vehemently and I finally convince you."

"How do you know the last part is true?"

"Because, I'm an experienced dominant, a dominatrix."

"Oh. What's the part?"

"That of a young, wealthy person whose father owns a great plantation."

"Sounds fine. What's wrong with that?"

"Absolutely nothing's wrong with it. Your name will be Camilla."

"Camilla."

"Yes. You'll be 16 years old and a real ..."

"Wait a minute. Camilla is definitely a girl's name."

"Naturally. You'll be ..."

"I'm to play the part of a girl?"

"You're to live the part of a beautiful young lady. Isn't it exciting?"

"Exciting? Horrifying would be a better way to state it. I'm afraid that I couldn't play the part very well. I hardly look like a young lady."

"That's not important. Remember that only androids will be present and they will react correctly. There's no problem there. You must keep in mind that no one will see you. This is just a trial run. If, in a couple of weeks, you find that I'm wrong, well then you can do something else. You're going to have to comply with the rules here you know."

"Strange rules?"

"They would seem so to you. How would the rules of your society appear to a Roman?"

"There's that. How is this to be done?"

"I take you to the plantation in a flying vehicle."

"Flying ..."

"Don't worry, you won't even notice. It's completely closed."

"The plantation is real?"

"Completely."

"It seems silly but, if I have no choice, let's go."

"Perfect. Come with me."

We went down a hall into a huge room. The things there, the people and the not people, the things being done, were just a kaleidoscope of confusion.

I swear that I even saw a bunch of black spittoons with lots of legs walking on their sides.

I was relieved to climb into a small round shed with no windows. Then the door closed and I could feel the shed move upwards. I just sat there being miserable.

Bee left me alone and just sat near me with an attitude of readiness.

We stopped and the door opened.

CHAPTER II

I left the shed and almost cried out.

The scene was so beautiful. It was like my beloved South before the horrors of war befell her. The sun was warm, slaves toiled in a nearby field, and a great mansion with twelve stately columns could be seen behind huge trees draped with Spanish moss. A double carriage road of sparkling white gravel looped before the great house to reach to the river landing and to vanish through formal English gardens and hedges towards the post road and rolling open fields of cotton. Somewhere beyond the summer kitchen and a screen of trees there were the white washed slave quarters, tobacco drying sheds, mill, and the utility buildings. Everywhere there was the scent of rich river loam and fragrant blooms...

Nothing like this remained on Sherman's route of march to the sea. Just blackened pillars and toppled chimneys...

I wept! I knelt and placed my head against the sweet smelling ground. I wept!

"It's well done, isn't it?" Bee asked.

I looked up and ran my sleeve across my eyes.

"It is not the real South?"

"No, Tod. That has all been gone for a half a millennium."

"It looks, feels, sounds, smells real. But you just found out a half hour ago that I'm from the South. This would take years to do. How did you do it?"

She smiled at me. "It took a little more than a week to do. Our first conversation took place almost two weeks ago."

"But, how could ... I never noticed that ..."

"No Tod, that's the idea. You don't notice when it happens."

"I feel like I have no control over what happens to me."

"In a way, no. But in other ways, yes. Remember that by law we must try to make you happy."

"By making me play the part of a girl. That makes no sense."

"It will. Now go to the main house. Someone will meet you there. She's an android."

“I will not see you again?”

“Of course you will. Many times.”

“Oh. Well, good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

She got into the round shed and it slid away up into the air, shimmered and disappeared.

I turned back toward the house and began to place one foot in front of the other. My reluctant progress could hardly be called walking. I went in through the great front door into a vestibule that was mostly polished mahogany.

A smiling Negro house slave dressed in a simple well cared for homespun gown approached me.

“Welcome, Missy Camilla. I am Toka. Can I show you your room? She looked like a perfectly normal house slave.”

“Tell me about yourself.”

She straightened, lost the slave girl look and spoke.

“I was constructed in 2389, in subassembly unit 14. I am a specialized model, style 277KB, sub style female human, made for use only by the Extemporalate Department. My use outside of the reservations is prohibited by law. My assignments have been as follows, in order of temporal precedence, a member of the nobility in 16th Century England, a court dancer in the Mogul Empire of Southern India, a ...”

“That's enough. Take me to my room.”

“Yes, Missy. You will love it. It has been redecorated and has the loveliest chintz curtains.”

“Sounds fine.”

The room was as I expected, light and airy, and furnished with delicate Empire styled furniture. There was a ruffled vanity with a number of enameled boxes, daintily decorated porcelain jars and a set of silver brushes, whale bone carved combs with silver backing, and a matching silver back hand mirror from Austria with an inlaid painting of the royal family.

Toka bustled about as if she was trying to look like a platoon of maids. I sat on the vanity bench.

“Toka, hold still for a moment.”

“Yes, Missy.”

“Do I look like a young woman to you?”

“No Missy, but I know what you are. A young lady of sixteen. I was told to help you and not to pay attention to your present looks.”

“I see. And you talk too well for a real house slave, but no matter. How are you to help me?”

“In every way. For instance with your hair.”

“My hair?” I pulled at my nondescript, two inch long brown hair which had last been cut by a friend using a broken Yankee saber from the battlefield.

“Yes, Missy. If I brush it, it will grow longer.”

“That's nonsense. You can brush hair until the cows come home and it won't affect it's growth.”

“May I show you, Missy?”

“I've got nothing better to do.”

She gently turned me to face the vanity mirror, took up the big silver brush and went at it. She hummed a primitive, rhythmic tune that I didn't know.

Where'd you get the name `Toka'. It's not a Christian name.”

“My mother gave it to me.”

These people did trip up on some details. Slaves born in my time were always given Christian names, often with the family name of the breeder to designate established bloodlines.

Toka's strokes became longer and smoother, the brush sometimes hitting me lightly on the shoulder as it pulled off the end of my hair. In the vanity mirror I could see her smiling at the results of her work, the shine of my long ... My heart almost stopped. The mass of glistening brown hair was well past my shoulders!

“Toka?”

“Yes, Missy. She continued to happily brush my hair.”

“How did you do that?”

“The hair? As I said, brushing can make it longer. Isn't it beautiful?”

“Yes. That's what's wrong. Is it long enough now?”

“Almost.”

When she declared it finished, I had hair down to the middle of my back and first felt the smooth pull of really long hair. I moved my head around experimentally, swinging my hair to the front of my right shoulder to examine it. It flowed like brown fire between my fingers, and for a moment my mind remembered my mother's lovely long brown hair before it turned stark white and she died from the Plague of `59.

“You have beautiful hair now,” Toka chortled happily as I released the beautiful flow of hair.

“You're just full of little tricks, aren't you?” I sighed, trying to shift my mind away from the long past to the sudden future.

“When are you going to dress, Missy? Mrs. Gribbs, is all afire to start your education.”

“I suspect that you've already got something in mind.” I was taking this surprisingly calmly as I considered what my `education' might consist of... My father had sent me to the common school, but there was no money to send me on. So, I could do

sums, read enough to get by, recite from the Bible by memory from time to time, and manage to write letters back home for my buddies...

“Oh yes.” She went to a door and opened it revealing a `closet' the size of a small ballroom. “Here's a simple morning dress.”

She pulled out a long dress that looked anything but simple, what with tassels, ribbons and sashes all over it.

“I think not.”

“Missy, you can't meet your duenna and parents in those strange men's clothes. Please!”

“For a slave, you seem to try to be in charge a lot.”

“No, Missy, I try not to. But, I'm responsible to your parents for your appearance. If you will only take my advice until you are better able to decide for yourself. In any case, if you show up like that, your father will probably have me beaten.”

“Have you beaten? But that wouldn't be fair!”

“Missy, you expect fairness for slaves?”

She had me there. I had heard stories about rich boys having slaves as `whipping boys' to be punished in their masters' place. Why not girls? Of course, my father had a much better route to the seat of the problem, and had no time for abusing the few slaves we did have, they were far too valuable for such peculiarities...

I passively let her strip my clothes off until I stood there in all my hairy, masculine glory.

She didn't bat an eye.

“Missy, I have a cream here that will improve things considerably with your face, arms and legs.”

“A beauty cream on me!” I scoffed. “Slop it on for all the good it'll do.”

I chuckled as she carefully swabbed my face with a perfumed mess out of a pink, porcelain jar.

She rubbed it over my arms and legs, carefully avoiding my prominent prick and balls. Then she took a towel and carefully wiped it off again. With all this ceremony, it would soon be too late to use a morning dress!

Then I stared at the mirror and reached up to finger my face. All my rapidly growing bristle was gone leaving a white-pink shine with the faintest of fuzz. A quick check of my arms and legs showed the same!

“Toka! What was that stuff?”

“A beauty cream. Works very well doesn't it? I understand that it comes from Candrell's Pharmacy in town. You may want to recommend it to your lady friends.”

I just stood there frozen with surprise, while she applied more over my chest, abdomen, shoulders and back.

“It's almost gone. But, I understand that one application is permanent. There now, don't you look nice!”

“Toka, did Bee give you that stuff?”

“Bee? Who is Bee? All of these are your things and were bought for you by your parents. Here is your button camisole.”

The crisp white cotton, lace trimmed, under shirt was complete with a row of buttons about the waist, from which hung simple pink garter snaps. Toka then put me into a pair of white cotton stockings using the pink garters to hold them up. I then stepped into a pair of ankle length split crotch white cotton drawers with tiers of ruffled lace all down the legs. My shoes were high and closed with little round buttons. Toka wielded a button hook deftly to close them.

Then she proceeded to stick me into a corset.

“Toka, if this is morning wear ... Let's leave the corset off for now.”

“If you don't use it, your dress won't fit.”

She continued to struggle to get me properly installed in this complex garment. After sticking a couple of wads of cotton in each cup for bust forms, she began to tighten the innumerable cords down the back.

“I could never get into all this myself!”

“Of course not, Missy. A lady couldn't possibly dress or undress without help. That's why you have me.”

My musings on this subject were cut off by having the corset pulled so tight that all possibility of breathing was cut off too!

“Toka! I (gasp) ... breath ... (gasp) ... please!”

“Missy, if you try to breathe with your stomach, of course you can't. Ladies breathe from their bosom.”

I breathed with ‘my bosom’ and found that it was possible but barely. Now I know why ladies swoon so easily. The slightest interference with normal respiration and ‘puff’, out they go!

Toka gave a couple more tugs as if to check that there wasn't the slightest possibility of me breathing normally, then tied the cords in back.

I began to realize that I could only be released from this device if someone else did it for me, for I certainly couldn't undo the knots in back myself!

Toka then brought another camisole type garment which she called a ‘corset cover’ and pronounced it essential to proper feminine decorum.

I didn't have breath enough to argue. Then came the petticoats, each of which must have taken the yield from an acre of cotton land to make!

“Toka,” I gasped. “Why three?”

“Missy, there are many reasons. They hold the skirt of your dress out in such a pretty display.”

“Give me one and an ugly dress. That way everyone will feel better.”

“Also the wide skirt accents the small delicateness of your figure above the waist.”

“I'm not particularly delicate in that area.”

“All the more reason for three. Besides any young lady of breeding wouldn't be seen dead without at least three. After all, I'm not asking you to wear a hoop skirt yet.”

“Hoop skirt?” Then I considered the sweeping bell shaped bottoms of the women I had seen, and I now knew how that form was shaped.

“Essential to afternoon and evening wear.”

She tied on the requisite three petticoats while I stood there getting heavier and weaker.

“What am I getting into?”

Toka came from the closet lugging a mass of cloth.

“This dress for one thing.”

She packed me and all my other garments into that 'simple morning dress'. It buttoned up the back with about twenty thousand tiny buttons. The long sleeves ended in a cuff of frothy lace and buttoned shut with tiny, hard to find buttons. The dress was of a serviceable brown color with a high lace collar, a great white sash to tie behind and numerous little white bows on critical spots. It had a waterfall of lace on the bodice. It was by far, the most startling thing I had ever worn in my life!

A young black boy, about eight year's old, dressed in a pale blue servant's uniform entered the room carrying a wooden tray with an iron kettle stove and an iron bowl filled with scented water entered the room to place it on a metal frame by my vanity. Without a word, he smiled, bowed and left.

“Missy, now we must do your hair.”

“Hair?”

“Yes Missy, to curl your hair.” Toka picked up a French curling iron with wooden handles from the top of the hot stove to test the end against the wood. She sprinkled water from the iron bowl on a sparkling white woolen towel. And then, with a grim little smile she touched the end of the iron to the damp towel sending up a curl of steam. “Just right.”

The mass of my hair was carefully arrayed into a pillow like crown. Then, the lower half of my hair soon was done in long, tight cascading curls about the side of my face by my ears and around to the back of my neck.

Satisfied with my hair Toka put a cream colored bonnet on me which tied in a big bow beneath my chin.

I just stood there, feeling like a highly useless ornament .

“Toka, what do I do?”

“Pardon, Missy.”

“What do I do? You know what I mean. Do I iron, or cook or polish things. What do I do?”

“But, Missy, you don't have to work! There are servants to do all those things.”

“Fine! But what do I do?”

“Why you are to be educated by your duenna and governess, Mrs. Gribbs. You prepare yourself to be a wife and mother. You learn the social graces, needlework, to be well read, music and many other things. And, of course, you will be taught the basics of homemaking. How else will you be able to know if a house servant is properly trained? Oh you'll be busy enough.”

“Oh. But, now I ...” Now this was an aspect that I had not accounted for.

“Yes. The Lord has given me a test worthy of Our faith,” a tall, rather gaunt, white faced matron announced from within the shadows of a hood like bonnet. She was dressed in a rather stark black taffeta gown trimmed with fine Flemish lace as she floated through my bedroom door looking to all the world like a great black bell! “Young ladies arise and curtsy towards their elders, Mistress Camile, dearest.”

Automatically I arose to survey the woman and grant her a polite gentleman's bow; but, seeing Toka's look of submissive fear and deep curtsy, I swallowed my pride and followed suit as best as I could.

“It is surprising how backward a sixteen year old child can be, if left unattended like a weed in the rustic woods,” she observed with cold disdain, reminding me of my Aunt Martha, who found fault with the angels. She picked up a little book from my writing desk and handed it to me. “You can read?”

“A little, Mrs. Gribbs,” I responded with a little half curtsy, seeing Toka's signal. It appears a girl curtsies about as much as a private salutes... Uncertainly, I opened the little book.

“Here. This is a good place to start. Young ladies, wishing to cultivate their minds often read it.”

I opened the little volume and read, *The Spectator in Miniature*. It appeared to be book of moralistic essays, published in London in 1841. Not exactly my usual fare.

“And my work is to read this?”

“You should find it illuminating. There's a little summer house near the lily pond which is ideal for warm afternoons.” She managed an amused little smile. “Today, we shall let your little mind to rest.

“But, tomorrow we shall start your formal training as a lady of quality. French and Spanish. Music. Elocution and Recitation. Home management,” she paused in self satisfaction over my dismay at the idea of becoming a child again, “And, of course, the basic disciplined etiquette and refined manners of our sex... Do we understand each other?”

“I will try,” I responded with another curtsy to a wave of her hand in dismissal. It may appear that I had struck my colors too quickly before this machine; but, as a poor

male, I was way out in front of my own picket lines, well in the line of fire of anyone set on making me look foolish in skirts. Once I knew the rules, I could fight the battle...

I went downstairs and out the front door, followed by a dutifully silent young house slave girl dressed in light blue homespun. No doubt our household color. Compared to her, I frankly felt like a walking ribbon shop! What wasn't swing loose all over the place, like my skirts and hair, was clamped tight, like my corset, the ribbon holding on my bonnet and the wide sash around my waist. I had to breathe in little birdlike breaths.

I sat in the white painted freshness of the summer house, arranged my skirts around me and opened the book at random. The title that appeared before my eyes was quite apropos, *'Eulogy on Needlework'*. I quote the first paragraph or so.

What a delightful entertainment must it be to the fair sex, whom their native modesty and the tenderness of men toward them, exempt from public business, to pass their hours in imitation fruits and flowers, and transplanting all the beauties of nature into their own dress, or raising new creation in their closets and apartments. How pleasing is the amusement of walking among the shades and groves planted by themselves, in surveying heroes slain by their needle, or little Cupids which they have brought into the world without pain! This is, methinks, the most proper way wherein a lady can show a fine genius, and I cannot forbear wishing, that several writers of that sex had chosen to apply themselves rather to tapestry than to rhyme. ...

I raised my head to mentally examine what I had read. This was obviously a man writing. It indicated what was expected of proper young ladies. Their activities should be limited to ladylike ones, whatever as long as it was not serious work!

Here I've been imitating a young lady for a couple of hours and already I was chaffing beneath the restrictions applied to such!

I took a shallow breath (Deep ones were impossible in this corset!) and decided that, even if I must learn a bit of these womanly pastimes, I will never abandon deeper pursuits.

There was the noise of horses' hooves and the sound of wheels upon the brick of the drive. I watch a beautiful carriage, pulled by four perfectly matched grays, stop in front of the mansion. It carried a stately gentleman in a maroon suit and dove-gray weskit, and a woman in her forties. She was a striking lady, dressed in a light blue dress with full hoops, a white bonnet and matching parasol. While two slaves folded down the running rail steps the gentleman helped her to alight.

She turned and spotted me in the nearby summer house. She came towards me. Under her gaze my silent black companion curtsied and awaited instruction with bowed head. "Oh, my dearest Camilla. Did you miss your dear mother?"

"A bit. Where were you?" I replied with a half curtsy while I remained noncommittal; although I suspected that nothing that I said would be allowed to change the progression of the *'play'*.

“Father went to the slave auctions. I had a bit of shopping,” she smiled with the pleasures of her day. “What are you reading, dearest? *The Spectator*? I read it before, many years ago. You look so lovely in that bonnet.”

“Thank you, Mama.”

“Your father is feeling gruff and went directly to his study. He did not earn as much as he thought he would with the sale of Ruffus and Elmer. The war rumors, I suspect.”

“I am sorry to hear that Mama.” I could see the grooms coming for the carriage. “Oh, could I be taken for a ride in the carriage? I do need the air.”

“But, of course, sweetheart. Persal, Miss Camilla would like to be driven around the estate. And mind you, slowly!”

“Yes, Ma'am,” the slave coachman answered with a polite bow.

Persal handed me up into the splendid coach while I held, managed and arranged my skirts. It seemed that most of my moving moments were taken up by skirt management!

“Here my dear, use my parasol. Your completion is so very delicate.”

“Thank you, Mama,” I agreed as my ever present black girl took her seat on the footman seat behind me.

Persal drove the carriage at a sedate pace.

We moved down the entrance lane and onto a road that dipped down into the farm lands below the main house. The field slaves dressed in rough gunny bowed and doffed their ragged hats as I passed. I began to appreciate what a pretty sight I must make in all my finery in my grand carriage. But with a flash I realized that their lives were far less restrictive than mine!

I didn't have to do physical labor but my activities, dress and even movements were controlled in one way or another for 24 hours of each day. I couldn't even breathe freely! They were slaves and freer than I!

Were there no compensations for the restrictive life of a woman? I suppose that one could work up pleasure in being beautiful, but there must be more! We passed by a pond cool in the shade of great oaks.

“Persal, I would stop here.”

“Yes, Missy.”

He pulled over and stopped.

I rose and tried to step down but I needed both my hands to manage my skirts and couldn't support myself in order to search out the step with my foot.

Persal rushed around and supported me on one side as my girl took the other as I daintily found the step with my shoe tip and got down. It struck me that my complex clothing not only was very beautiful, but also greatly increased my dependence on others. I walked along the bank of the pond feeling prettily bored. I suppose that I could

go back to the carriage and get my book; but after my first dose of it's philosophy, I decided that I wasn't too interested.

“Now there is a pretty sight.”

It was a man's voice from behind me.

I turned and framed him with my bonnet rim.

He was young and handsome. He wore a neat Militia Captain's uniform and, what he obviously hoped was, an engaging smile. The uniform was of the West Point gray gabardine twill that would soon bear the emblems of the Confederacy. But, I tried not to think about that. If Bee, and her people planned to recreate the War Between The States, for my benefit, I'd just as soon that she forget the idea...

“You must be Miss Camilla.”

“Yes. I fear that we have not been properly introduced, sir,” I announced with my best ‘lady of quality’ voice. I had heard that phrase often enough.

“I am Captain James Griddly of the Georgia Militia.”

“Obviously the uniform is not that of a Hussar or Cossak.”

“You are cool to me? But why?”

“I have told you, sir,” I managed. “Tell me about yourself.”

He stood straight and expressionless. “I was constructed in 2386, in main plant 2. I am a specialized model ...”

“That's enough, Captain Griddly, was it?”

“Griddly, Miss. I am sorry that I accosted you here. But, I was taken by the beauty of the scene, of you, so ethereal and lovely against the misty softness of the lily pond, that I...”

“But you know my name.” It dawned on me that I was being wooed by an android, a machine. *‘How amusing,’* Well I was bored, *‘so let's see how he does!’*

“You are well known in the area, the lovely Miss Camilla of Falcon Hold. It could be no one else.”

“Now that I can believe,” I countered with a knowing laugh. “But, I am hardly beautiful. Look, I have a rough hewn, craggy face and big hands and arms. I am almost as tall as you are. How can you call me beautiful.”

“I would like to be permitted a chance to get to know you better.”

“To fondle my cock and balls?”

He smiled at me.

“May I walk with you along the pond bank?”

I could see how it works. If I do or say something outrageous, it is ignored. I could probably strip naked (Except I would need help to get out of this outfit!), cover myself with mud, and he would continue to fawn over me! It was nice to know that I could do no wrong! I decided to continue to play the game. “Very well, Captain. I extended my limp hand. You may escort me.”

“I am honored, Miss.”

“How goes the war, Captain?”

“I've heard that we are preparing. It is clear that the new northern president will not respect Our Rights. It is said that he has invited various rag tag northern militia, such as the Minnesota 1st Regiment, to the Inauguration Parade. I have heard it on good report that they plan to march in farmer's overalls, lumbering boots; and, if you will forgive me for saying it, Miss Camilla, long johns,” he smiled with that certain superior cold cavalier confidence I had seen before Gettysburg. “But, why should a beautiful woman concern herself with such matters. It will be a quick glorious war...”

‘Quick and glorious war? I had already had my fill of those ‘rag tag’ boys from Minnesota at Gettysburg. God knows, they had enough of us... Lordy, how strange it was to know of all the dead, while hearing such simplistic slogans. The last that I had heard in the real world was that ole devil, Sherman was pressing us hard north of Atlanta. Columbia, South Carolina was in flames. In fact, I did not even know if this imaginary world still had the War in the future. Would it turn out a trifle better?’

“I am certainly pleased to hear that, Captain. What are the plans for the Yankee upstarts?”

“Well Miss Camilla, they hardly confide such with me; but, I have heard that he plans to allow the U.S. to continue but under a military governor until they can elect a less militant government. Their constitution will have to be changed also.”

“I can well imagine. Are you on leave, Captain?”

“For a few days. Miss Camilla, there is a ball at the Spherson Plantation Saturday next. If you are not otherwise engaged, I would be pleased to be your escort to such.”

‘How strange. I could attend a ball and be the only human present. A grand ball staged by machines, just for me! Could all this be but the wanderings of a feverish, dying mind in a field hospital?’

“It may well be that I accept your kind invitation, Captain. If you would but call on me on the morrow, I expect I will be able to confirm your hopes.” We had circumnavigated the pond, crossing two tiny bridges at each end, and were back at my carriage.

He handed me back up to my seat.

As I occupied myself with skirt arrangement, he spoke, “I will pass at the glooming to hear of my luck from your own lips, fair lady.”

“How pleasantly poetic, Captain. We will speak then. You may go on Persal.”

I left the captain-imitating machine by it's horse (mechanical also?), turning it's cap in it's hands, looking hopeful.

On the way back to the ‘manse’ I mused over what had happened as I studied my sturdy hands folded on my amply covered lap. Under these circumstances, a more whimsical soul would cause havoc among these poor machines, but I could sense that playing jokes on machines would hardly remain satisfying for very long.

‘No. I would follow Bee's plan and play my part for a while longer. After all, I couldn't be embarrassed by what I was doing before machines! And it was a bit amusing.’

I picked up my book and glanced over the contents. I started on an article entitled, *The Picts and The British Ladies* because of the unlikely title. But, it turned out to be a harangue against women using make-up.

I lay the book down, deciding to `better my mind' by thinking. I had not come to any conclusion on what this strange woman, Bee, was really trying to accomplish, when the carriage pulled up in front of the house.

When I entered the house, my little black maid vanished towards the kitchens and my `mother', clucking over my `overheated' condition and telling me that I must not exert myself, let me know that dinner was ready. I was also told that it would be just a light repast of cold meats and breads. I glided into the dinning room. Full, floor-length skirts are wonderful for `gliding'. You just never feel right striding or even obviously walking in them. If you take small, smooth steps then, from another's point of view, you glide about without noticeable effort as, if your legs do not move the skirt, one cannot see if you are walking or not. Of course one walks, but the effect is there all the same. Childish? I guess so, but I had nothing better to do!

My `father' looked up at my dainty entrance. He had a small mustache and goatee which contrasted rather oddly with his perpetually reddish face, florid from long hours out in the sun.

“Ah my dear Camilla. And how has my favorite daughter been spending her time today?”

I sat at one side of the huge table.

“I have been reading, Daddy. I read some articles about how women should limit themselves to needlework and to never color their faces.”

“Good, good. A well read young lady should have no trouble captivating an eligible man with her witty conversation. But, do be careful that you don't tire your brain needlessly with too much reading.”

I could see that my weak sarcasm was not going to be noticed by my father. I also doubted that eligible men hold `witty conversation' as being a point of prime importance when judging woman-flesh!

“I certainly hope that I can impress Captain Griddly with the knowledge that I have gleaned from these literary masterpieces.”

That got mother's attention, as well as that of Mrs. Gribbs.

“Griddly? Captain Griddly? Where did you meet him, dear?” mother asked with growing concern as Mrs. Gribbs showed her obvious disapproval.

“Near the pond behind the hill. I was strolling there when he rode by on the public road. He has asked me to the ball on Saturday.”

“Rather forward of him I would say,” commented mother.

“Griddly, oh yes,” said father, “From a good family over in Macon. He is a close friend of the Spherson boy and is spending some leave time there. However, it was rather abrupt of him to ask without even having been formally presented to you.”

“I rather guess that he was smitten with my delicate charms.” I had no hope of `subtle' sarcasm being noticed. This was somewhat akin to talking to people in a book. They are going to say the same thing no matter what you do.

“Be that as it may,” huffed mother, “it was still very forward. Take care of yourself with this swain of yours, my dear.”

“Yes, Mama.”

After eating, I was sent to take a nap during the heat of the day. Toka helped me out of my outfit while I calculated that it had taken me almost two hours, both to get into it and to get out of it, and that I had been in it about three hours. It hardly seemed worth it!

“Toka, I know now what I will be spending a lot of my time doing.”

“Yes, Missy?”

“Getting dressed and undressed.”

“That is true, Missy. Do you enjoy it?”

I looked at her. “Toka, I was complaining, not bragging.”

“Yes, Missy.”

As soon as that corset was off, I took in great lungs full of air. I swear that the frilly curtains swayed in and out of the windows as I breathed! I was put into a ruffled sleeping gown and put into bed.

I went to sleep as soon as I closed my eyes.