

# THE COMEBACK

*By Laurel Galen*



ILLUSTRATED BY CHAS

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A 'HER TV' NOVEL

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# THE COMEBACK

By Laurel Galen

## Chapter 1

**Lisa Marlowe** was very unhappy. She knew she had been terrible. She was also aware that the supporting dancers knew it, the stage manager knew it, and worst of all, the audience knew it.

Not for the first time she had gone on drunk, and she showed it. Her voice was hoarse on her vocal numbers, and her timing had been off on her dance routines. They were routines that, at her best, had been just that: routine in their excellence.

She had only one more number to do, and she had to lacerate herself mentally to go out on that stage and perform. She felt more like going into a dark corner and throwing up than she did like going back on that stage. There she would face the pitying looks of the chorines who supported her and the contempt of the stagehands who had to use soft lights to improve her appearance and boost the wattage on the amplifier to raise the level of her hoarse voice.

She felt like faking a sudden illness to give her an excuse not to go on. But somehow she managed to gather herself together. A decade of stardom and innate talent helped her move out from the wings on cue and go into the final song and dance number of her contract at the big hotel.

Somehow, with the help of the strong hands of her male dancing partners, she made it through the first half of the number. She then came up to the microphone for what had always been her big finish. Because she knew that this might be the last time she would ever again be in front of an audience, she managed to stay in tune, keep in tempo with the orchestra, and belt out the last few lines of the song... One which had been identified with her since the peak of fame during her movie career.

With the help of the brass, she finished with an approximation of her former golden tones.

Taking her bows, she staggered slightly as she came back twice. Only twice! When she had at one time been accustomed to ten or more curtain calls. The applause from the disappointed audience were humiliating.

As the curtain closed, she walked unsteadily offstage, studiously ignored by the boys and girls of the chorus. The stage manager, Bill Barrows, barely able to conceal his contempt, icily said, "Your bags have been packed and are waiting at the hotel's private entrance."

That was the final indignity! The hotel was kicking her out of her luxury suite, since her contract was now over and so was their responsibility to cater to her.

Humiliated, she walked to her dressing room. There was no one there, not even the woman who had helped her with her costumes and makeup. In her anger and humiliation, she changed as quickly as she could. Carrying her costume and makeup case, she walked to the entrance, where she found that her car, a late model Cadillac convertible, had been brought up. One of the stagehands had loaded her suitcases and garment bags of costumes.

There was not even anyone to say good-bye.

Opening the door, she laid the costume bag and makeup kit on the back seat and seated herself behind the wheel. There was a cold breeze blowing off the nearby lake, so she brought down the convertible's top and fastened the lugs.

She sat there for a while, dizzy and distraught, until she finally started the car and drove away from the hotel. Despite the late hour, the streets of the City of Lake Tahoe were crowded with traffic. She had several near misses before she turned into a less crowded street. She drove much more slowly until she came to a bar she was looking for. Circling the block, she entered a narrow alley which led to the parking lot behind the bar. Due to the late hour, the parking lot was almost deserted. She sat for a while, deciding whether she should drop into the bar or drive home. The thought of going to her empty house, which had been unused during her contract with the hotel and its luxury suite, depressed her. She opted for the bar, where the bartender-owner had always been friendly.

In her haste to get to the bar and a drink, she left the car unlocked. Entering the bar through a rear entrance, she made her way to a quiet booth, away from the few late customers who were still there.

It took a few moments before Chauncey, the owner, was at her side.

"What'll it be, Miss Marlowe? The usual?"

"Yes, and make it a double!" she replied.

Chauncey could tell from experience that she was fairly far gone. He hesitated, but she was a regular, and he didn't want to antagonize her. He came back quickly with a double vodka.

He returned to the bar to take care of his other customers.

She sat for a while, gazing at the drink, then downed it quickly with a few swallows.

## Chapter 2

**Catching Chauncey's eye**, she signaled for a repeat.

Unwillingly, he brought here another double. He said, "I'm sorry, Miss Marlowe, but I won't be able to get you any more."

"Whadda' ya mean, no more?" she said, trying to focus her eyes on his face, which seemed to her to have gone somewhat crossed.

"I'm sorry, but I think you'd had enough before you even arrived here. I can't be responsible for giving you any more."

She blinked at him and prepared to argue. Even in her condition, however, she could tell he would not give in to any argument, so she held her peace. She drained the drink and fumbled in her purse for some bills, which she left on the table.

As she got up, Chauncey could see from her unsteadiness that she had had too much. He said, "Would you like me to call a cab to take you home?"

"Don't need no cab!" she mumbled. "Got my car outside."

Chauncey was about to remonstrate with her, but just then one of his other customers called him for a refill. He shrugged and left to tend to him.

Lisa got up, steadied herself for a moment, then carefully walked through the back door.

In the dark, she was unable to see her car for a moment. Finally, she spotted it and walked unsteadily to the door. She fumbled with the key for a moment. Finding the door unlocked, she opened it and sat down behind the wheel. As she placed her key in the ignition, she suddenly felt a hand over her face. There was a cloth covering her nose and mouth; when she tried to scream, her cries were muffled. She tried to breathe, but the fumes of the impregnated cloth entered her lungs. As she struggled for breath, she felt as if she were spiraling down into a dark well. Her struggles became weaker, then stopped as everything went black.

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*Elizabeth Marowitz had begun life in a very low economic stratum. Her father, Sam Marowitz, an immigrant from Eastern Europe, was a waiter in a low-class restaurant in New York's lower east side. He worked hard, and Lisa had never lacked for food or clothing, but she had never had much more during the time she was growing up.*

*She had early had ambitions for eventually entering the field of entertainment. When the opportunity came as a teenager to get free dancing lessons at a neighborhood school, she entered the class and advanced very rapidly. She not only had natural talent, but she was willing to work hard. She came to the notice of the teacher, who had connections with an agent. The agent was one of the first individuals who exploited her talent. He got her auditions for Broadway musicals and television shows, where her beauty, talent, and willingness to work hard got her into various choruses which were backgrounds for a variety of star performers. The agent took advantage of her ignorance of financial matters and took more than the standard percentage of her earnings.*

*After a while, when choreographers became aware of the fact that she had a stand-out talent, she was given more prominent showcases on stage and television appearances, although not yet to the point where her name was prominently displayed in cast credits.*

*Unsatisfied, she changed her name to Lisa Marlowe and began to petition her agent to get her solo work. The agent, a lazy individual, didn't overwork himself to accommodate her, but after she had continued to press him, had found her an opening at a sleazy dive in Ossining, New York, called The Oasis. It was a few miles north of New York City.*

*Her opening there had been a minor success, leading to a succession of increasingly classier venues until she had had her big break as an opening act for a big star in Las Vegas.*

*This had been her breakthrough, since her reviews had overshadowed those of the nominal star of the show. From that point on, she had headed straight to the top, with supporting roles in films which led to starring roles in both musicals and dramas. Her beauty and talent eventually led to an Academy Award nomination.*

*This had been the high point in her career. Unfortunately, she had let her success go to her head and permitted herself to be surrounded by a retinue of sycophants and fair-weather friends who had used her and abused her in personal and financial ways. Her disillusionment had led her to a path of drink and drugs, which had eventually taken its toll on her body, voice, and general ability. Two brief and unfortunate marriages had not contributed much to her self-image and well-being.*

*Her unreliability had led to her losing roles in films and personal appearances, and she had only gotten the last one in Lake Tahoe because it had been contracted a long time ago; the casino owners couldn't get out of it.*

*Thus she had been reduced to a point in her life where she seemed to have no future in show business.*

*This was the condition she was in when she had made her way to the bar that night.*

### Chapter 3

**Lisa was in a mine;** a deep, dark mine. She heard a pump throbbing in the distance. The throbbing became louder and louder until it seemed to penetrate her skull.

Suddenly she realized that the throbbing was in her skull.... She had the mother of all headaches! What a hangover, one of the worst she had ever had.

Eyes still closed, she tried to bring her hand up to hold her throbbing head.

She couldn't move her hand! She tried her other hand, and she couldn't move that one either. She struggled for a while and discovered that they were both tied down. She tried moving her feet and learned that both of them were tied down as well.

Despite the throbbing in her head, she opened her eyes. There was a dim light to her right.

She tried moving her head, which caused her to feel as if it had been hit by a hammer. She was able to see that the light came from a Coleman lantern on a small table. All she could see was that the table was against a dimly-lit, very plain wall. Groaning with the pain caused by the effort, she turned her head to the other side, where she was barely able to make out another wall with a small dresser against it.

She closed her eyes again, which eased the pain slightly.

*"Where am I?" she thought. "And what's happened to me?"*

She thought back over the past day. She remembered the fiasco of her last appearance at the hotel's casino stage. Next getting into her car to drive to the bar... Then having a few drinks and getting up to leave after Chauncey's refusal to give her more.

She remembered getting into the car and reaching to put the keys into the ignition, and then... The hand and cloth over her face! The sinking into oblivion!

She had been kidnapped. She screamed but stopped immediately when the scream penetrated her head like a dagger.

She heard a sound. She strained her head forward from its position on a thin pillow and saw that a door was opening in the wall opposite the foot of the cot upon which she was lying.

When the door was fully opened, a figure entered the room. In the dim light, she was barely able to make out that it was a male, wearing dark clothes and a hood over his head. Although the clothes were baggy, as if to disguise his overall size and appearance, it was nevertheless clear that he was of slight build.

"Who are you... and what do you want?" she whispered. The throbbing in her head increased with her fear. She struggled again, to no avail. Her hands and feet were bound firmly, although not so tightly that circulation was cut off.

The figure approached the cot. Even in the dim light, she could see that he held one hand behind his back.

In a calm, soft voice, the man said, "Don't be afraid. Nobody is going to hurt you."

The hood over his face, with eye and mouth-holes cut into it, did nothing to calm her fears.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" she repeated, a bit more firmly.

"That will come in good time, and you'll know everything you need to know," the figure said in the same calm voice.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"My head is killing me," she replied.

"I thought it might be," he said. "All that booze, followed by the chloroform, will do it to you."

"Chloroform?" she cried. "You were the one in the car. You did this to me! What do you want?"

"Take it easy," he said. "I told you already that you'll know everything soon."

He took his hand from behind his back. Lisa could see that it held a glass with some milky liquid.

With one hand he lifted up her head. "Drink this," he said. "It'll make you feel better."

Suspicious of the contents of the glass, Lisa clamped her lips together firmly. She shook her head, again causing waves of pain to course through it.

The man laughed and asked, "Do you think we brought you here to poison you?" He lifted the hood enough to uncover his mouth and showed her that he was taking a sip of the liquid in the glass.

He again lifted her head and brought the glass to her lips. Rather than have the liquid flow over her mouth and chin, she took a small sip.

She had taken enough hangover remedies in the past year to recognize the taste. She swallowed the remainder of the liquid, and the man gently laid her head back on the pillow.

“I’ll see you in a while, when you’re feeling better,” he said. He went over to the Coleman lantern, turned the light down more, and left through the door, leaving Lisa in the semi-darkness.

As soon as he had left, she struggled against her bonds again as fruitlessly as before. Giving up, she lay there, trying to determine what had happened to her. She knew that she had been kidnapped... What did the kidnappers have in mind? Rape, ransom... murder?

Somehow she divined that screaming would serve no purpose. From the primitive appearance of her room, she assumed that she was located in an isolated area. And, although the individual she had briefly seen did not seem to be menacing, the fact that he wore a hood made her feel that any screaming on her part would be met with uncomfortable countermeasures.

After a while, the medication started to work, and the clamor in her head began slowly to abate.

She pondered her situation. She remembered her folly in having inadvertently left the car door unlocked. Would it have made any difference? She had no idea where she was or how she had gotten here. How far was it from the bar? How long had she been out? She realized that she could be anywhere from a few blocks to a hundred miles away, depending upon how long she had been unconscious and what means of transport had been used to bring her here.

She closed her eyes. Despite her desperate situation, she fell asleep.

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Without knowing how much time had passed, Lisa awoke. She felt much better; her head now had a dull feeling rather than the violent throb she had experienced earlier.

She wanted, needed, a drink. She had been drinking so much for so long that she felt she would be ill shortly unless she had one.

She called out. There was no reply. She called out a little louder.

This time, as she strained her head forward, she was rewarded by seeing the door open again. The same individual came through it. She tried to speak calmly.

“How long are you going to keep me like this?” she asked.

“It depends.”

“Depends on what?”

“It depends on how cooperative you’re going to be.”

After years of being catered to, she was unused to being dictated to. By this point, however, Lisa was becoming quite cramped. While her bonds were not very tight, they had held her in one position for quite some time. Her body, unaccustomed to lack of freedom of movement, was becoming strained. Besides, she felt the need of relieving



herself. All in all, she was more than willing to be “cooperative,” whatever that would entail.

Gritting her teeth, she said, “I’ll cooperate.”

The hooded figure said, “Okay then, here’s what we’re going to do: I’m going to untie you. You can sit up, and then we can talk a little more about what you can and what you can’t do.”

Suiting actions to words, he untied the bonds at her feet and her hands.

Her body was stiff from having been held in one position for such a length of time. Being careful to remain behind her, he helped her to a sitting position on the edge of the cot.

As he stepped away from her, she rubbed her hands to restore circulation. She was slightly dizzy, partly from having been horizontal for so long, and partly as a hangover from the liquor and the anesthetic which had been used on her.

When she tried to move her feet, she suddenly discovered that there was a chain around one of her ankles. The chain links were comparatively small, only a quarter-inch wide, but after a few feet they were connected to a heavier chain. This larger one attached to a ring embedded near the floor in one of the walls of the room. The links around her ankle led through a plastic tube, so that the metal was not in direct contact with her skin.

The links were connected with a small lock, which held the chain snugly against her ankle. There was obviously no way she could slip her foot out of it!

She looked up at her captor, who stood several feet away.

He stood there, hooded, enigmatic, watching her as she fully realized her predicament.

“What do you want from me?” she asked again.

“Believe it or not, nothing!” was the reply.

“Then why have you brought me here?” she asked.

“You’ll find out soon enough. How are you feeling? Is your head better?”

Lisa considered the question. “I still have a slight headache, but it’s not like it was before.”

The man said “Good” and walked toward the door.

“Wait!” she cried.

He stopped and turned around.

“What is it?” he asked in an impatient tone.

Embarrassed, she replied, “I’ve got to... you know... go.”

“Look under the bed,” he said and departed through the door.

She looked and found an old-fashioned chamber pot with a lid. In her youth, she had read about them, but she had never seen one, much less used one.

She sat down on the cot in anger and despair. She looked about her. The room was small and primitively furnished. Aside from the cot, there was an old dresser with a cracked mirror against one wall, a couple of straight-backed wooden chairs, a small table, and a potbellied stove with a flue leading to the ceiling. The stove was the only source of heat that she could see, but it was apparently effective; the temperature in the room was fairly comfortable. The only source of light was the Coleman lantern sitting on the dresser. There were no windows.

At one wall was the door through which her captor had disappeared. On the opposite wall was another door.

Looking furtively at the first door, she decided to investigate the second one. The chain on her leg was barely long enough to permit her to reach that door. She opened it and found it was a closet. Entering it, she was able, by the dim light from the lantern, to see that it had racks which held her costumes taken from the casino upon her departure. The suitcases were on the floor. The closet was frigid! Apparently, with the door closed, the heat from the stove had not penetrated into its depths. It must be on an outside wall, she thought, possibly as a built-on to this miserable building!

She wondered again what the weather was like outside and how they had gotten there.

She was becoming more uncomfortable by the minute. She finally picked up the chamber pot, took it into the closet, and closed the door. She had never used one before, so it wasn't the most comfortable thing for her, especially in that cold, dark closet. She finally finished and covered it, deciding to leave it there for whoever was going to empty it.

She reflected that in all the films she had ever seen or been in, natural functions never seemed to play a part in any of the situations.

She realized that she was hungry. She picked up the chain so that she would not be dragging it with her foot, and approached the door which her captor had been using. She knocked on it and backed away, not knowing how he would respond.

A moment later, he opened it. "What is it?"

"I'm hungry."

"I'll have some food for you in about fifteen minutes."

"I'd like to wash up a little first. I feel filthy and I just... you know!"

"All right," he replied. He went back through the door, closing it behind him.

While the door had been opened, Lisa had been able to glimpse a portion of the room behind it. She was able to see that it was more brightly lit, and there were a few more comfortable-looking chairs. She still did not know whether her kidnapper had anyone with him.

A few moments later, the door opened again and the man entered, carrying a basin and a small towel and some soap. He laid them down on the dresser and said, "Here, use this." He left again.

She went over to the dresser. To her surprise, the water was warm. She soaped her arms and face, then she rinsed and wiped them. She found that she felt much better.

She sat down on one of the chairs. A few moments later, the man entered the room. He was carrying a bowl covered by a plate, as well as a fork. He left and returned again, this time with a steaming mug of coffee.

She uncovered the bowl and found that it contained a salad, quite a portion of it.

As he was about to leave again, she said, "Is there any dressing?" He ignored her and left the room.

She tasted the coffee; it was just the way she liked it, hot and black. Hungrily, she started on the salad. She missed salad dressing, but the vegetables were cold and crisp, and she finished it in no time. About fifteen minutes later, he returned. "You want more?"

When she nodded, he picked up the bowl and left. He returned with it about one quarter full. This time he also brought along shakers of salt and pepper. He left again without a word.

Salt and pepper were not dressing, but philosophically she considered it better than nothing. She finished the second portion and wondered, "*What next?*"

When the hooded man returned for the empty bowl, she asked, "What time is it?"

"Six P.M." he replied.

Lisa was shocked! How long had she been out? Again, her fears and dismay flooded back. Where was she? Who were her captors, and what were their plans for her?

"How long have I been here?" she pleaded.

"Two days," was the reply.

With no hope for an answer, she asked again, "What do you want from me?" Then she burst into tears.

The man stood impassively by until her sobs abated. He said calmly, "We'll tell you tomorrow." Then he left the room.

Lisa went to the Coleman lantern and turned it up. With the brighter light she examined the room more closely, as much as the chain on her ankle permitted.

Her first impressions had been correct. The room was small, bare of decoration on the walls, and with only the few miserable pieces of furniture.

Lisa went to the cot and lay down on it.

She gave herself up to regrets. She had been proud of her career, which had featured a rapid rise, then a precipitate fall. She blamed everyone but herself for the latter, but she realized that, had she not let herself get into her drunken, neglectful condition, she would not now be finding herself in her current predicament.

She comforted herself with the thought that there had been no overt danger signals. She had seen only one of the kidnappers, and he had seemed quite neutral. There had been no threats, no violence toward her except, of course, for the brutal initial seizure of her in her car. She expected that they would soon make known to her

whatever their demands were... probably an exorbitant ransom, based on her former prominence and fame. At least one thing comforted her: any demands within reason could be met, since she had accumulated during her career plenty of assets from profitable contracts and careful investments.

They had taken her wristwatch, so she had no idea of the time; the windowless room gave no clue as to the time of day.

Her captor had told her, when she asked him, that it was around six P.M. But for all she could tell, it could be any time at all. She was bored. There was nothing to read, no television or radio.

She wondered whether anyone had missed her. She owned a large house in Lake Tahoe City, but she had closed it down and dismissed her servant when she had taken the contract at the casino, which had been scheduled to last for three weeks. She had also fired Marge Canfield, her longtime agent, when she had told Lisa that she was unable to get her any future work in any field. So there was nobody who would notice she wasn't around!

What would happen to her?

## Chapter 4

**There began** a routine. The hooded man would bring her food. She would ask the time, he would give it to her, and she would know whether she was having breakfast, lunch or dinner.

The meals were notable for their Spartan quality. There was enough so that she was not hungry, but there wasn't much variety, and there was a minimum of fat and starch. She knew she was losing weight, and soon enough some of her recent puffiness began to diminish. Bored, she began a program of exercise to keep up her strength. A couple of times her captor came in while she was doing her exercises, but maintained his non-communicativeness; she assumed he had no objections. He used these opportunities to retrieve her chamber pot, which he took out and returned empty and clean.

The next time the hooded man entered the room with food, she asked him if she could change clothes.

This routine persisted for several days, until one time she said, "Where's my watch? I'm tired of asking you for the time every time I see you."

He reached into his pocket and, without a word, handed it to her.

She was astonished. The watch was a jeweled Rolex and worth many thousands of dollars. She was simultaneously heartened and frightened. Heartened because her captors had so far not evidenced any inclination to harm her; yet frightened, because it could mean that they didn't care and would retrieve the watch after having disposed of her.

After several days of this routine, she was emboldened to ask if she could change her clothes, which were becoming somewhat grungy.

She had had several changes of clothing and underwear in her suitcases which had been transferred to the closet while she had been out.

Her captor stared at her for a while, hands on hips, while he made up his mind.

“All right,” he said.

“How can I take my things off while I have this chain on my leg?” she asked.

He took a key out of his shirt pocket. Lisa noted from which pocket he had taken it, for future reference. He unlocked the small lock about three feet from her ankle which held together the two lengths of chain, the small-linked one and the heavier one. She would now be able to take off her lower garments and slip them over the short length of chain; she could replace them by reversing the process. It would be awkward but doable.

He then stood there, waiting.

She glared at him and said, “Well?”

“Call me when you’re done,” he said and left the room.

For the first time free of the chain, she entered the closet and selected a change of clothes, including fresh underwear, a blouse, and a pair of slacks. She also retrieved her cosmetics case from the closet. After washing herself as well as she could from the basin, she applied some fresh makeup.

She was still a prisoner, but she felt cleaner and a lot better emotionally.

Freshening up boosted her confidence enough so that the next time he entered she confronted him more aggressively.

“What’s happening?” she demanded. “What do you expect to get? How many of you are there? When are you going to let me out of this stinking room?”

“Shut up!” he told her. “We’ll let you know when we’re good and ready.”

Crestfallen at his abrupt tone, she sat down on the cot and lowered her head into her hands. She began to cry.

Her captor watched her impassively, then left the room. Shortly afterward, he returned with a battery driven CD player and several CDs. He placed them on the dresser against the wall.

“Come here!” he said, motioning her to come to the dresser.

After a few more sobs, she dried her eyes on a corner of a sheet and approached the dresser.

He showed her how to operate it and handed her the CD’s. She looked at them with surprise. There were five of them... all soundtracks from her films! They listed songs and dances which she and her costars had performed, many of the melodies of which had become hits with the public.

He slipped one of the discs into the player and said, “Okay, dance!”

She glared at him. “Are you crazy?” she demanded. “Or do you think I am! You’ve kidnapped me and now you expect me to entertain you?”

He shrugged. "Dance, or no food!"

Helpless, she sat down on the edge of the cot, sobbing in her rage and humiliation.

"I won't do it, I wont!"

He turned off the CD player and, without a word, passed through the door.

Lisa threw herself down full-length on the cot and cried until she had no more tears. Sitting up again, she took another frustrated look at the miserable room and tried to make plans for escape.

Impossible!

Not only was she chained to the floor, but, even if she were able to get through the room's door, she had no knowledge of how many others there were in the outer room or where she was in relation to the rest of the world! This cabin could be, for all she knew, in the heart of town or a million miles from nowhere.

Judging from the fact that the room was heated by the primitive wood-burning stove and that the light was furnished by a Coleman lantern, the chances were that it was the latter. If it were located either in town or close to town, there would be electricity.

Lying down once more, she fell into a fitful sleep.

## Chapter 5

**When she awoke**, she looked at her watch and realized she was hungry. It had been at least five hours since she had last eaten, but she was determined not to give in.

As before, she was bored with nothing to do but wait around for something to happen.

Dragging the chain after her, she went to the CD player and inserted one of the discs. She turned it on, and music from one of her hit films, "Paradise in the Pacific," flooded the room. Small as it was, and although battery driven, the player apparently had a powerful amplifier and speakers. The music was loud and clear.

She was angry and hungry, but as the music played she began to be carried away by the memory of better times, when she had been at the peak of stardom. The music reminded her also of the time when she was also at the peak of her singing and dancing ability. How she regretted having slipped to her present status! On reflection, she had nobody to blame but herself, although she had had plenty of enthusiastic company during her fall. Her home in Hollywood had been the scene of many dissipated nights, with wild parties featuring booze and dope. Many had been the time when she had showed up for work at the studio the next day hung-over and bleary-eyed.

Her youth and makeup had covered her lapses, until the time came when not even the best efforts of her publicist, makeup man, or manager could cover up for her.

Now, as she listened to the music from one of her hit films, she slowly began to sway to the hypnotic music of the hula number. It had been one of her own personal favorites. At first, she barely moved; then, as she began to be carried away, she recre-

ated the dance routine from the film, or as much as the chain on her ankle would allow. Suddenly, as she turned, she saw her nemesis standing inside the door, watching her!

She stopped and, tossing her head defiantly, returned to her cot and sat down.

“Why did you stop?” he asked.

“I’ll be damned if I’m going to entertain you!” she snapped.

He thought for a while and said, “I’m going to show you something.”

Approaching her, he whipped out a piece of black cloth from his pocket. Before she had a chance to protest, he covered her eyes with it as a blindfold.

Not knowing what this foretold, she sat rigidly, her hands clamped tightly on the edge of the cot.

She felt him fumbling about her ankle and heard a key grating in the lock. He grasped her wrist and pulled her up to a standing position.

“Come with me,” he said, “and don’t try any tricks.”

From the direction he was taking her, she realized that they were going through the door. She stumbled along, aware of the fact that the chain was no longer attached to her ankle. After traversing a distance she estimated as being about 25 feet, she stopped and was suddenly aware of a blast of frigid air. He pulled her forward, and she heard a door slam behind her.

Holding her wrist in a firm grip with one hand, with the other he removed the blindfold. When she opened her eyes, she immediately closed them again, blinded by the glare.

Shielding her eyes with her loose hand, she slowly opened them a little. She was standing in front of the door, facing a small clearing. Snow was piled up in drifts, with snow-covered trees enclosing the area. The glare of the sun on the snow was blinding after the blindfold and the dim light of the room in which she had been incarcerated.

Off to one side she saw a snowmobile, partially covered with snow, attached to a small trailer on skids also covered with snow. She realized that this had been the manner in which she had been brought here while she had been unconscious, and she also realized that if she were to escape, the snowmobile would have to be the means of doing so. There was no way that she would be able to make her way through the snowdrifts surrounding the cabin without it.

As if reading her mind, he said, “If you think you can get away from here, forget it! We’re in the middle of nowhere, you can’t get through the snow, and if you tried, you’d get lost immediately. Even if you know how to operate the snowmobile, one of the parts has been removed, so it won’t run.”

He continued, “Now that you’ve seen where you are, I think you understand that you can’t get away so you won’t be so stupid as to try. If you promise not to attempt any funny stuff, I don’t see any reason why we have to keep you chained up any more. Any questions?”

Relieved at the thought of not having the chain on her ankle any longer, she was happy to agree, but she did have questions.

“Who are you? What do you want, and how much longer are you going to keep me here?”

“All that is our business. All you’ve got to do is what you’re told and you’ll be okay”

She took another opportunity to look around and noticed that there were no phone or power lines leading to the cabin, which was the obvious reason for the primitive heating and lighting.

She also saw a small shed off to the side. It was quite nondescript, so there was no indication of its contents.

Before she could look around any more, he took out the blindfold and once again placed it over her eyes. He dragged her back into the cabin, across the forbidden room, and into the one where she had been kept captive, after which he removed the blindfold. She assumed that the reason was that he didn’t want her to know how many confederates he had in the kidnapping.

Once back in the room of her captivity, he removed the chain from the wall and told her that it would no longer be needed.

“You see you can’t get away, so you might as well be as comfortable as possible. We’re not unreasonable.”

*“Unless kidnapping isn’t unreasonable!”* Lisa thought to herself.

After he left the room, she lay down on the bed and gave the matter considerable thought.

*“Why didn’t he want me to see what’s in the other room?”* she thought. *“Either he’s got some communications equipment or one of his partners there.”*

After a while, boredom set in again. Now unhampered by the chain, she walked around the confines of the room, eventually ending up in front of the CD player.

She was hungry, and remembering what her captor had told her, she began to dance. At first, her movements were tentative, but as she got into the swing of it, she tried to remember the routine from the film. With the first strains of the music, her captor once again came through the door. After closing it, he stood in front of it watching her. Remembering her previous defiance, at first she almost decided to stop. However, she was hungry and, deciding to ignore his presence, danced on. The routine was coming back to her; although she was clumsy at first (the film had been made seven years earlier) and because of the extra flab she had put on in the interim, it was some time before she really got into it. By the time the tune ended, she was winded and puffing.

She stopped, glared at him, and said, “Satisfied?”

Without a sound, he went into the other room and shortly returned with a tray of food and a hot drink. He set it down on the table and left her alone.



As soon as he was out of the room, Lisa leapt to the table and hungrily wolfed down the food, which consisted of a bowl of consommé, a plate of tuna salad, and a cup of tea.

“I’m not going to put on any weight on this diet,” she grumbled to herself.

She was resigned to the fact that her captors, while they had so far shown her no harm, were serious. She realized that unless she danced for her supper, there would be no supper. She decided, at least for the present, to go along.

And so it went... She lost track of the days as she went through cycles of dancing and eating, while her enigmatic, hooded captor impassively watched.

It did not fail to attract her notice that she was working more easily as time went by, and she was getting into better physical condition. When she looked into the small, cracked mirror on the wall, she could see that some of the puffiness in her face, which had been brought on by her drinking, was slowly disappearing. As a matter of fact, she was actually feeling much better in general. The combination of diet and exercise was slowly transforming her back to what she had been at the start of her career.

With nothing else to do, she began singing again to the music of the CDs. Her voice, which had become hoarse from excessive smoking and drinking, started to come back. As she experimented with the limits, the quality improved in tone as well as volume.

One day, after having finished a session and bored out of her skull, she roamed the confines of the small chamber like a caged tiger. Passing the door, as she occasionally did, she tried the knob. Every other time she had found it locked. This time it turned in her hand!

Fearfully, she turned it slowly, careful not to make any noise. The door swung open under her pressure. She craned her neck around the edge of the door and looked into the adjoining room for the first time.

It was similar in size and primitiveness to hers. Carefully and as quietly as she could, she entered the room. There he was, asleep on a cot against the far wall... and he was not wearing the hood! She stood there on trembling legs. What should she do? She looked around to see whether there were any weapons, but none were in sight.

Just then, it occurred to her in a shock, *“Where are his confederates? There are no others!!!”*

Breathlessly, she looked around some more. There were no means of communication: no telephone, radio, or anything else!

She tiptoed over to the cot and saw his face for the first time. He looked quite young, perhaps a year or two older than herself, and quite vulnerable in his sleep. For sleeping he had discarded the bulky clothes he had always worn in her presence, and he appeared to be quite slim, although not by any means skinny.

As she stood above him, trying to decide what to do, he opened his eyes!

Startled by her appearance above him, he struggled as quickly as he could to a sitting position.

“How did you get in here?” he demanded.

He realized that he was not wearing his hood and felt around for it on the cot. He picked it up, but realizing the absurdity of putting it back on at this point after she had already seen his face, he laid it back down.

“How did you get in here?” he demanded again, angrily.

“The door wasn’t locked,” she replied.

“Now you’re in real trouble,” he declared.

Lisa couldn’t help herself. She laughed, perhaps a little hysterically.

“I’m in real trouble?” she mocked his tone of voice. “You chloroformed me, kid-napped me, brought me to this godforsaken place, chained me, and starved me... And now I’m in real trouble?”

Her voice rose as she continued. “You bring me here, you make me dance, you won’t tell me what you want from me, you won’t tell me how long you’re going to keep me here, and you tell me I’m in real trouble?” She was becoming quite shrill at this point, so he rose and grasped her wrists. He twisted her around and sat her on his cot and hissed at her, “Be quiet! Nobody has hurt you, yet!”

“I’m still waiting to hear from my associates, and until that time, you’ll behave yourself and do what you’re told, understand?”

The quiet menace of his voice penetrated her near-hysteria. She calmed down but was unable to control a few sobs which escaped her.

“Okay,” he continued, “now that you’ve seen me, there’s nothing that I can do about that, but it doesn’t really matter. When we’re done with you, you’ll never see me again anyway. Just to see that it doesn’t happen again, I’ll just have to chain you again.”

Lisa was alarmed. She clasped her arms about him and cried, “Oh no! Please don’t do that! I’ll do whatever you want!”

He looked down at her tearstained face and relented. “All right,” he said, “but don’t try anything again.”

He led her back to the other room. He was about to lock the door again but realized that, as she had already seen the room and its contents (or lack thereof) as well as his face, there was really no point to it.

“Listen to me,” he said. “I’m going to leave this door unlocked. There’s no reason now to keep you locked up in here. You can’t get away anyway. So as long as you behave yourself, you can come in here. But you’d better knock first, get me?” Lisa nodded agreement and he left the room.

She sat at her table and thought over this new development. What would it mean with regard to her eventual freedom? She was still a prisoner, and there was still no way she could escape, what with the high banks of snow outside... even if she knew which way to go. At least she knew what her captor looked like, even if she had no idea who the others might be, or what kind of people they were. At least this one had offered her no physical harm.

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After the next meal, he came in to remove the few dishes. Lisa decided that she had nothing to lose, so she asked, "What's your name?"

Startled for a moment, he stopped to consider her request. "Why do you want to know?"

"Because I'm tired of saying, 'Hey, you!'"

Apparently he didn't think it would do any harm for her to know, so he replied, "It's Louis. Louis... Gordon."

She couldn't tell whether he was actually giving her his real name or just blowing her off, but she decided to accept it at face value. "How long are you going to keep me here?"

"As long as necessary."

Really curious, she demanded, "How much are you asking for me? And whom have you contacted?"

Louis was annoyed at her questioning and let her know it in no uncertain terms. "Be quiet!" he told her sternly.

Lisa, unabashed, asked, "How do you get in touch with your confederates?"

More annoyed, he grabbed her by the arm and dragged her to her closet. For a moment, she was afraid that, in his angry state, he would lock her into it. He said, "Put on your coat!"

She put on her coat, a heavy and expensive black mouton one, and followed him to the front door of the cabin. He had put on a heavy coat of his own by this time.

"Here, put these on!" he said and handed her two objects. After a look at the shapes, she exclaimed, "Are you crazy... tennis in the snow?"

"These aren't tennis rackets, lady, they're snowshoes! Put them on!"

"Are you serious?" she cried, "I've never worn anything like these!"

"It's time you learned. Put them on!"

He showed her how to apply the straps and donned a pair himself.

Clumsily, almost tripping over herself, she made her way through the door to the snow-banked exterior. Once outside, she noticed that he had apparently flattened down a sort of path from the doorway leading into the woods. She drew a deep breath of the cold but fresh and invigorating air.

"Go ahead," he said, "follow the path."

With effort she picked up her feet, hampered by the contrivances, and proceeded slowly down the path, followed by Louis. As she became more familiar with the feel of the snowshoes, she found it easier to move, but it was a strain on her leg and ankle muscles. She continued reluctantly, with Louis inexorably behind her.

After a while, the unfamiliar and uncomfortable movement began to get to her and she slowed down.